

## HADLOW DOWN COMMUNITY CENTRE

### Minutes of Committee Meeting held on Friday, 7<sup>th</sup> March at Ailsa, Waghorns Lane, Hadlow Down (7.30 pm)

**PRESENT:** Bob Lake (BL), Sarah Prall (SP), Fiona Shafer (FS), Mandy Chapman (MC) John Thompson (JohnT – Zoom), Janet Tourell (JT - Zoom).

**1. Apologies:** None

**2. Minutes of previous meeting:**

These were agreed as a true record and duly signed.

**3. Matters arising:**

None

**4. Correspondence:**

None

**5. Treasurer's Report:**

Currently the CAF account stands at £1463.54 and with £310 cash in hand, the total is £14933.54 (an increase of £278.00 since 1 Jan 2023). Only income was £288 from the sale of Lottery tickets – JT reported that more was to be paid before the next draw to be held on 24<sup>th</sup> March.

However, we do have future commitments: i) £9500 to be paid to MJB Architecture for dealing with the various planning conditions. Appreciating our rather weak financial position, Mike Barber offered to charge an initial £5k and defer payment of the outstanding balance until we are in a healthier financial position; ii) dealing with the 'extant' planning matter – this may cost around £5k. Alternatively, if we were to submit a fresh application, the planning fees to be paid to Wealden planners would exceed £5k. Mike Barber suggested that we consider starting work on either the drainage or foundations; iii) unknown cost of proposal by the County Archaeologist that the area affected by the project should be subject to a programme of archaeological works. What might this entail and at what cost? It might be easier to consider laying the foundations for the end wall of the sports accommodation as this part of the site (very close to the rear and side of the existing pavilion) has already been levelled and excavated. Also this work would take place on land leased to the HDPFA and not on the lower site owned and managed by the PC. Such a proposal would need to be submitted to the HDPFA iv) costs of conducting the activity survey.

**6. Formation of Sub Group(s):**

BL – delighted to welcome MC as a committee member and also both Rob Prall and Peter Strevens who have offered to 'head-up' the Build & Design sub-group. Such an addition to our number is very encouraging and at a time when we need an injection of vigour and new ideas.

**7. Activity Survey:**

SP, MC and FS have agreed to 'lead' on this and currently SP is putting together both a draft commentary/explanation to go with the survey and a draft of the questions to be asked. FS is looking at the

issue of market research and the feasibility of engaging a company to undertake the survey. This will require the production of a tender brief so that the work can be out-sourced to an independent body that will demonstrate impartiality. This is relevant given some rather spurious doubts/claims expressed at the AGM such as the survey conducted in 2011 was not impartial and the findings interpreted in such a way that they could only be favourable to our project.

SP – such opinions have prompted us to consider the engagement of a third party to conduct and interpret the survey and its findings. She came across a survey conducted by Sampford Brett Village Hall (Somerset) that used Survey Monkey for minimal cost – analysing the survey feedback was conducted by a third party. Maybe this is the model that we should consider adopting.

A very small number of critics would like us to include a question such as ‘Do you want or see the need for a new village hall?’ They wish to overlook the fact that we have continuing mandate to provide a new hall, we have been granted planning consent and also, our remit is framed by a constitution that doesn’t require us to option s with regard to the existing hall. Such discussions have happened at two public meetings and clearly this is a matter for the Parish Council (as landowner) to address with the current Village Hall committee and parishioners. It seems that those who are most vocal and critical of what we are trying to achieve are not opposed to a new hall but more what might happen to the existing hall site if a new hall was to be relocated to the Playing Field.

BL pointed out that in 2018 when we had applied for planning permission, Wealden planners received 57 submissions of support and not one objection. In light of this ‘cast iron’ mandate, JThom asked if any actual evidence had been presented by our detractors to show that the 2011 survey had been biased. He was concerned that an entirely ‘online’ survey might deter some from responding and that ‘door- to-door’ distribution and collection might elicit a higher response. MC referred to concerns expressed at the AGM that this might compromise anonymity. BL suggested unmarked, identical envelopes and request that respondents place their completed forms in the envelope and seal it before collection. Once collected we wouldn’t know from which household the envelope came. Also we have to bear in mind the influx of new people to the parish during and since Covid. A ‘door-to- door’ survey would give us the opportunity to explain to them the project and what we are trying to achieve. Supplied with this information, people would be likely to complete the form. SP said that households could request multiple blank copies of the form if more family members wished to respond.

JThom wondered why a new survey was required. BL responded: - 1) a fresh survey will confirm what activities parishioners would like to see provided in the new hall 2) from a Business Plan perspective, it will give us a clearer understanding of likely income i.e. bookings income and hall usage levels 3) it will demonstrate to potential funders and grant providers the evidence of need for the hall and the diverse range of activities. JT asked if current users of the village hall are to be canvassed for their views e.g. Short Mat Bowls Club, Dance classes etc. SP – Yes, they will.

Taking much of what had been said previously, SP suggested that we should consider producing another newsletter to accompany the form. Not only would this provide us with an opportunity to increase the profile of the project but also demonstrate further our commitment to communicate with parishioners but keep them informed. Also it might be another means of trying to recruit more trustees, committee members and volunteers to get involved. With reference to completing the survey and any concerns about anonymity, they could complete it ‘online’. JT pointed out that a number of parishioners may not know where either the existing hall or playing field are. Finally SP advised that we should collect feedback from the school and taking on board MC’s point about anonymity, parents could choose to or not to answer a final question: ‘Do you live in the parish, age, address etc’?

**ACTION: SP – To circulate amended version of the survey to all for comment.** Once SP has received feedback from us all with regard to the draft survey, she will go to Survey Monkey and create an ‘online’ version and will request that we all go ‘online’ to try it out before our next meeting. As soon as this is done, we can arrange for the printing and distribution. MC asked what date we had in mind for the production of the newsletter? It was felt that this should be ready to accompany the survey either ‘online’ or by ‘door-to-doo’ circulation. Currently the survey is six pages long but much space is provided for adequate comment/qualification to any of the questions. Should we ask respondents if they wouldn’t mind sharing their comments? BL asked if these would

include both positive and negative feedback? Finally, he shared news that yesterday he had met with Elizabeth Thomson, who in the past conducted market research for the Royal Mail. Kindly, she has offered to act as a critical friend by looking at any draft survey and suggesting alterations etc. We need to make sure that we take her up on her offer.

Finally it was agreed that May should be the month in which we distribute the surveys and we need to focus on recruiting our volunteers to help distribute and collect them.

## 8. Draft letter to Parish Council (MC):

To some extent the letter to be sent to the Chair, fellow councillors and clerk reflects on much of what took place at the AGM and it reflects much of the content of our conversations since the event. It explains that the aims and objectives of our constitution are very clear and precludes us to answer questions about what might/will happen with regards to the current Village Hall. Indeed, we feel that it provides an opportunity for the PC set out unequivocally the current position and what the future options might be.

BL felt that that both the roof survey and full structural survey alluded to by the Chair of the VH Committee at the AGM should be made available for all interested parties to scrutinise. Surely this is something that the PC should be requesting?

We have been told that the roof will need to be replaced at the end of two years and after an initial estimate of £30k shared by Paul James, now he feels that it will be closer to £70k. How is this estimate arrived at, does it include lost revenue as a result of the hall closure, does it factor in the cost of temporary roof cover, how long will the work take? When will fund-raising start and where will the funding come from? If a proportion of the latter was to come from the Parish Council (CIL funding, from the precept reserve or Public Work Loans Board), it is to be expected that some parishioners may question proceeding with a new hall when an appreciable amount of public money will have been spent on the existing hall. Yet, it has long been accepted that the current hall is no longer 'fit for purpose' – lack of storage space, lack of parking, inadequate toilet and kitchen facilities, inadequately sized committee room etc. Presumably further funding will be required to rectify these deficiencies. Will it be a question of substantial extension/refurbishment or demolishing the existing hall and building a new one? Will new land need to be purchased? Will planning permission be granted? How long will it take to raise the required funding? All of us appreciate fully the challenge of securing financial support particularly to fund a feasibility study and the production of architect's drawings etc. So, on the face of it, what appears to be a straightforward matter of replacing the existing hall roof is a much more complex matter and as such, should be discussed sooner rather than later.

JThom pointed out the potential risk of ending up with no village hall at all (similar to Buxted)

## 9. Fund Raising Events:

JT – HDCC lottery to be drawn at the Spring Market on Sat 25<sup>th</sup> March. Our current Lottery form needs to be revamped.

**ACTION: JT and JThom to deal with this.**

Suggestions of 'doubling' cost of a number or encouraging buyers to buy more numbers was dismissed.

BL – suggested Quiz Evening, FS – reminded all of the very successful Bollywood fund-raiser organised by the HDPFA, JThom – garden party/BBQ and SP – smaller scale version of the Big Village Picnic at the Playing Field – mid afternoon onwards. BBQ, bar and karaoke.

FS – Cooking School (using professional chef) to provide lessons, shared Pop Up suppers with HDPFA, wreath making (Anna Holt).

JT – free dog-training classes.

#### **10. Any other business:**

- i) The current situation with regard to Buxted Village Hall was raised. It would appear that a recent attempt to resurrect the project has stalled. Buxted Players currently using Framfield Village Hall for its productions. Attracting organisations based in Buxted will add an important strategic dimension to our project particularly when applying to funding from the Big Lottery.

#### **Action: BL to talk with Buxted PC Vice-Chair John Rose**

- ii) Gift Aid – With regard to the Lottery and the accounts, BL asked JThom if the records can show those winners who have donated their winnings to HDCC. The answer was ‘no’ so we need to give this more thought as we can claim back 25% from HMRC on the ‘gifts’. We need to consider if we should distribute declaration forms to all who have bought or will buy lottery numbers.
- iii) Crowd funding – agreed to discuss further at a future meeting.
- iv) SP – suggested that we should raise our profile with a push towards more publicity around the village. She proposed the idea of stickers to be placed on the pavilion under-croft doors with the message of ‘Would you like to help us?’ These could be changed frequently. What other sites could we choose? FS suggested a fund-raising thermometer – maybe two, one outside the school and one at the PF.
- v) PC Parish Assembly, 13<sup>th</sup> March – SP, JT, BL will attend.

**DATE OF NEXT MEETING: 4<sup>th</sup> April at Chestnut Cottage, Wilderness Lane, 7.30 pm**