

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT for y/e 31st DECEMBER 2016

The year has been dominated, for the Trustees, by consideration on the future of the hall. It became apparent that the only viable option, if the village is to have a hall that all can enjoy, would be to build a new hall in Harrow Meadow. It is owned by Eynsford Parish Council who have indicated that they would be prepared to grant a long lease on the land. The matter is complicated by the fact the Harrow Meadow is in the Green Belt and thus there are planning limitations on development of the site. Exceptions to Green Belt policy however have been granted for village halls elsewhere based on applications showing what are known as 'Very Special Circumstances' to the planners, in this case Sevenoaks District Council.

The site offers a number of advantages including suitable topography and tree lines to minimise the visual impact of a hall, increased scope for new outdoor events, including improving the playing field, and on site car parking which would alleviate some of the current problems experienced along the High Street.

However in order for the Harrow Meadow option to proceed, it will be necessary to sell the current site for residential development.

Architects have been instructed to look at the options for both sites and the Trustees are working hard to gather the information which will be necessary to accompany any planning application. It is hoped that formal planning applications for both sites will be made towards the end of the summer 2017. In the next few months, updates will be issued to residents via Trident, posters and social media, and presentations will be arranged so that residents can comment on design proposals. A survey of current users and residents will also be carried out to find out what facilities people would like to see in a new hall.

If planning cannot be obtained, it is difficult to see a future for a village hall in Eynsford.

In the meantime the hall is being used by a similar number of users as last year, with over 800 lets over the year. It is very much the social centre of the village.

The hall lottery continues to be popular with over £16,000 being raised for the hall in total.

The generosity of residents in time and money is gratifying – a number of people have organised fund raising events for much needed income and the Trustees are indebted to them. A survey of the village in 2011 showed that the hall is central to village life and helped to make Eynsford a good place in which to live.

Along with my thanks to the Trustees for their hard work over the last twelve months, I should also like to thank Shula Fitzgerald for looking after the hall, and Helen Owen for dealing so efficiently with all the bookings.

The Trustees are committed to providing a vibrant community with a hall suitable for the 21st century with a design that will allow more users to enjoy greater facilities than those currently on offer.