



Hall Development Update July 2016

For several years the trustees have been working to secure the hall's future. The challenges have concerned the current location, the high cost of rebuilding there and fund raising. For the reasons outlined below moving to another location is now preferred.

Three options for the hall have been explored.

1. Rebuild at the current site, the costs for which in 2011 were estimated at £1.1 million. Fund raising has reached £400k but funding bodies have not been as forthcoming as had been hoped.
2. Restore the existing hall at a cost of £650k. The hall, built in 1905, has structural issues and therefore a limited life. Restoration is not regarded as a viable option as no internal improvements are included in the £650k and the longevity of structural works cannot be assured.
3. Build a hall on Harrow Meadow. The land is owned by Eynsford Parish Council and the Hall trustees are in consultation with the Councillors. A possible design identifies the north-east side beyond the football pitch for a new hall and car parking.

A New Hall on the Current Site – Option 1

Although planning permission for redevelopment at the current site has been obtained, the building estimates in 2011 at £1.1 million were much greater than expected and considerably higher than for other halls built in Kent at that time. Construction work at the site, which is by the River Darent, is affected by the flood plain which necessitates piling and other mitigation measures. Further, the limited space for construction and for builders' access adds complexity and cost.

Nevertheless, a fund raising project was established, a business plan was prepared, a fund raising team was assembled, advice was obtained from Action with Communities in Rural England and a formal survey of the Eynsford community was conducted to establish new hall demand.

With the support of donors and fund raisers £400k was raised or committed. However, it became clear that the £1.1 million target would not be met. Grant applications were submitted to foundations but without success. Also, Lottery funding has not been available for Eynsford based on postcode criteria.

Restoration of the Current Hall – Option 2

The hall was built in 1905 and requires extensive structural repair and internal refurbishment. Essential work includes the replacement of the entire roof. Cracks in walls internally and externally confirm movement of the structure, which is being monitored. The floor has an undulating and sloping surface indicating the likely need for reconstruction of the slab. Replacement or repair of underground drainage channels will also be necessary.

The Hall trustees have taken professional advice on these issues and obtained a restoration cost estimate of £650k. This does not include provision for internal improvement. Further, the long term

effectiveness of structural works cannot be assured and the works would not deliver a hall that is economical to run, energy efficient and flexible in use. Essentially the structure could be made sound in the short term but internal facilities would not be enhanced.

A New Hall at Harrow Meadow – Option 3

While site options in the village are extremely limited, Harrow Meadow already has sports changing rooms and a football pitch and the potential at its north-east side to accommodate a community hall and car parking.

The advantages that Harrow Meadow offers are:

- the topography and tree lines which minimise intrusion impact,
- the scope for appropriate outdoor events alongside the hall in a rural setting,
- on-site car parking with access from Bower Lane.

Harrow Meadow is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt in which development is restricted. Exceptions to Green Belt policy have been granted for new village halls elsewhere based on a Very Special Circumstances case being made to the planning authority. The Village Hall trustees have taken planning advice and are looking to pursue Very Special Circumstances in a Harrow Meadow application. Consultation with the clubs that use Harrow Meadow is already taking place.

For the Harrow Meadow option to proceed it is essential that value is obtained from the current site. Outline planning permission will be sought therefore for residential development at the current site.

Next steps

Building a new hall at Harrow Meadow is the trustees' preferred option. There are significant challenges however. Gaining planning consent (a) to build a new hall on Harrow Meadow and (b) to build housing at the current site will require extensive submissions and approval by Sevenoaks District Council. For the current site the limitations caused by the flood plain have to be recognised. If both planning applications are granted and the current site can be sold, a Harrow Meadow hall can be pursued. Fund raising will be necessary.

Village Hall Community Survey 2011

The following are the headlines from the 2011 survey:

- almost all agreed that the village hall helps to make Eynsford a good place in which to live and that it strengthens the sense of community,
- the village hall is central to village life,
- nineteen out of twenty respondents believed that more activities at a new hall will make Eynsford an even better place in which to live.

In conclusion

The trustees are committed to providing a vibrant community with a hall that is suitable for 21st century users and activities.

Progress updates will be issued. Presentations can be arranged.

If you would like further information please get in touch. If you have skills to help the trustees at this significant time we should be pleased to hear from you.

Email info@eynsfordvh.com or send a message using the contact form on the hall's website www.eynsfordvh.com or contact the chair of trustees on 01322 861695.