CONSULTATION FOR NEW EYNSFORD VILLAGE HALL PROJECT
QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Q/1 Why is the new hall needed?

A/1 The existing hall, which has served the village for over 100 years, has reached the end of its useful life. A new hall would provide modern, accessible and sustainable facilities for community groups, sports clubs, youth organisations, cultural events and residents of all ages.

Before the decline in bookings caused by the condition of the existing hall, it was estimated to attract around 28,000 visits per year. Several organisations have already expressed interest in using the new facility, and experience from other new village halls shows increased demand following redevelopment.

Q/2 Why not refurbish the existing hall?

A/2 The structural surveys of the old hall carried out in 2006 and 2014 identified a number of significant structural defects. These included settlement of the floor slab and foundations, issues with the verticality of the external walls due to the weight of the roof and defective drains. In 2014 an engineer was engaged to advise on the work required to rectify these defects, and a local quantity surveyor provided a cost estimate of £522k including VAT for carrying out this work.

Due to the age and condition of other elements of the hall, and the need for new lighting and decorations, it would have been necessary to spend significantly more than this. The total cost was estimated at £670K in 2017 (about £934K in today's money). Even if these works were carried out it still would not address the out-of-date heating system. The electrical system would need renewing along with improving the insulation to comply with Building Regulations for a Major Refurbishment. Furthermore, the engineer engaged in 2014 had concluded that even if the repairs to rectify the structural defects were carried out the long-term integrity of the building could not be assured.

Q/3 Why Harrow Meadow?

A/3 The trustees originally obtained permission to rebuild on the existing site, but community feedback identified parking as a major concern. Harrow Meadow offered a central location, better parking, land already owned by the Parish Council and the possibility of using the proceeds from the sale of the existing site as a contribution towards the costs.

Q/4 Why do we need a loan when so much money has already been raised?

A/4 The vast majority of the project funding has already been secured, including £242K from donations and £131K from other community fundraising. The Public Works Loan is intended to fill the remaining gap of £250k and allow the release of other funding worth £260k that depends on the project being fully funded. Without it, the project cannot proceed.

Q/5 Why is a Public Works Loan required when you have Interest-free loans of £250k?

A/5 Without both the interest free loans from local residents and the Public Works Loan, EVH would not be assured of having sufficient funds at the outset of the project to pay the contractor during the construction period and therefore could not sign the construction contract. However, the interest-free loans will need to be repaid within a three year period,

likely from a mixture of community fundraising, additional grants or bank loans taken out by EVH, and are therefore not shown as a source of funding in the Consultation Document.

Q/6 Why not use commercial borrowing instead?

A/6 Commercial borrowing has been investigated but if taken out during the construction phase would be significantly more expensive.

Q/7 Why can't the trustees borrow the amount required, rather than the parish council?

A/7 Loans from the Public Works Loans Board are only available to local authorities, drainage boards and other specified public bodies. Furthermore, the trustees anticipate that a commercial loan of up to £150,000 will need to be taken out once the new hall is built in any event to enable the full repayment of the interest-free loans provided by local residents within the agreed three-year time frame. The net operating income from the hall is expected to be sufficient to service this level of debt; however, borrowing beyond this level would significantly increase financial risk.

Q/8 The £2.3m cost of the project seems very high. What does that cost comprise?

A/8 The £2.3m includes £385K costs incurred since 2022 (including £134K for excavation of the site and creation of the new football pitch, £70K for archaeological investigations mandated by the planning conditions and £73K for pre-construction services provided by the contractor responsible for construction of the hall). The estimated cost to complete the build is £1,916K, including £1,791K payable under the main construction contract, £44K for project management services and £38K for technical advisory and other consultancy services during the build.

Q/9 Is a breakdown of the £1,791K payable under the main construction contract available?

A/9

Element	Estimated future costs
	£
Substructure	185,507
Superstructure	603,324
Internal finishes	97,114
Fittings, furnishings and equipment	37,114
Services	
Mechanical installations	211,230
Electrical installations	201,173
Stage lighting & audio visual systems	62,760
Incoming electrics/water/data	65,239
Site works	44,081
Contractors preliminaries	248,578
Design fees & other costs	74,778
Directors adjustment	- 40,000
	1,790,897

Q/10 Does the total cost see the project fully completed, ie car park and landscaping done?

A/10 The final version of the car park will be completed under a separate contract once the village hall is finished. However, the basic granular sub base will be provided so that the car park is usable. The landscaping will be done by the village's Green Team which will minimise landscaping costs.

Q/11 What 'wish for items' have been included?

A/11 There is a suggestion that the current design includes a rising section of the stage. This has never been included in the scheme. The development committee have carefully looked through all the drawings and specifications and removed anything that could be fitted at a later date. We acknowledge that there were some items that were considered 'nice to have' however, having gone through a value engineering exercise in order to bring the build cost down, items have been removed.

Q/12 Why wasn't a Modular /prefabricated Timber System considered?

A/12 Modular frames systems are generally used where there is a repetition of spaces with walls on a regular grid with flat floors and roof structures. During the preliminary design stage, the committee visited at least six village halls in Kent and none were using a modular system. Each of the sites visited had a similar design to that of our hall: a main hall with a clear span of 8 to 10 metres with ancillary rooms around it, which required the structure to be formed with a steel portal frame.

Modular construction often includes part of the external wall construction to be of timber. Our consultant services engineer specifically required the internal materials in the wall construction to be dense blockwork to help with the thermal mass required for natural cooling in the summer months.

There is very little difference in the size of the foundations when modular construction is used verses traditional cavity wall. The width of the footing in both cases would be the same and the depth of the footing is dictated where the virgin ground is found. At Harrow Meadow, the virgin ground is about 1.2m below ground level. This is because the archaeologists excavated in the area of the new building to a depth of 1.0m below ground level.

Q/13 Where is the Traffic and Parking Assessment?

A/13 Our planning conditions did not require us to undertake an assessment.

Having a car park for 32 cars is better than the situation with the existing hall where for any hall event, all but a very small number of the cars are parked on the residential streets. We accept that there may be difficulties if a match fixture coincides with a hall booking; in such cases the parish council and the trustees will work together to find an acceptable solution.

Q/14 Have you asked local experts to help?

A/14 Our development committee has included a services engineer, a structural engineer, an architect and a construction planner, all providing their time for the good of the village. For the planning stage of the project, we engaged a local quantity surveyor. Our treasurer is a chartered accountant who has a background in construction.

Q/15 What alternative financial plans have been looked at?

A/15 Since the very start of the project, back in 2006, we have been submitting grant applications but with limited success. Some small grant applications were successful, raising a total of nearly £76,000, and we did secure a £260,000 "CIL" grant from Sevenoaks District Council for the Harrow Meadow project, out of funds raised from the Community Infrastructure Levy, but this is subject to obtaining all the other funding. Two years ago, we prepared an

application for a grant from the government's Community Ownership Fund. They even provided us with a mentor to help steer us through the submission. Unfortunately, the application process was suspended in the run-up to the July 2024 general election. Following the election, the new government withdrew this fund, which is why we need the Public Works Loan.

We have approached local businesses for donations with little success, however we're pleased to say one has agreed to take part in the resident's loan scheme.

We have looked at splitting the construction contract into a "shell and core" stage and a fit-out stage and delaying the fit-out stage to allow more time to raise funds. The committees' preference is not to go down this route due to the likely impact of inflation on the fit-out costs and the need to complete the hall so that it is available for use as soon as possible. The earlier we can start trading, the earlier we can generate a surplus to contribute to costs and interest. Furthermore, delaying the fit-out stage could potentially jeopardise the availability of the CIL grant.

Q/16 Have you considered redesigning or value engineering the building so as to reduce the building costs?

A/16 Value engineering was done prior to applying for planning permission. The geometry of the hall was simplified with a small reduction in floor area. Recently we have identified some savings while finalising the design with the contractor ahead of signing the main construction contract. We have not explored anything beyond this because significant cost savings would only be achieved by reducing the floor area of the facility and we would then be unable to meet the aspirations from the design survey to residents that was carried out in 2017. It should be noted that the gross internal floor area of the existing hall is around 480 m2 whilst that of the proposed hall is approximately 470 m2.

Redesigning the hall at this stage would also require us to reapply for planning permission and would delay the start of construction, exposing us to increases in costs due to inflation.

Q/17 What if the project runs over budget?

A/17 The current budget includes a limited contingency and has been developed with professional support as a two-stage design and build fixed price contract to minimise that risk.

Q/18 Who will own the building?

A/18 The land will remain in Parish Council ownership. The hall will be owned and operated by the Village Hall charity under a long-term lease. The car park will be managed by the Parish Council.

Q/19 What happens if the new hall doesn't generate enough income to cover its costs?

A/19 The trustees have prepared detailed financial forecasts based on historic hall income, improved facilities and evidence from similar halls. If income falls short of expectations, trustees would seek to reduce costs, increase income through additional marketing efforts and undertake further fundraising. At the existing hall the trustees successfully put on a number of events each year to assist with covering costs, so that is a possible fall-back position for the proposed hall should the need arise.

Q/20 Why should we pay for a facility we don't use?

A/20 Like parks, recreation grounds and other community facilities, not every resident will use the hall equally but our village would be less active and vibrant without it and we could start to lose other things over time. The village hall is a community resource available to all residents and supports the social, educational, sporting and cultural life of the parish. It is intended to serve future, as well as current, generations. The hall has always been a useful facility supporting the young and the old, amongst others, by providing a venue for activities to help fill their time and acting as a social hub. This has reduced loneliness and kept those residents occupied in a positive way, without the inconvenience and cost of travelling out of the parish, benefitting the whole community.

Q/21 Our council tax is already high. Why increase it?

A/21 The parish council is proposing to take out a 20 year Public Works Loan but this, together with the related interest, will need to be repaid by the end of that period and, based on the interest rates that were applicable on the date that the consultation was launched, the cost to the parish council will be £22,000 per year. The estimated increase in Council Tax required to allow the parish council to pay this is approximately £15-£45 per household per year depending on Council Tax band, equivalent to around £1.50-£4.50 per payment and around 1% of the total council tax bill. Throughout the term of the loan the additional payments will remain the same but in real terms the amount will reduce due to inflation. Based upon inflation over the last 20 years £45 will be worth less than £24 in real terms in the final year.

Q/22 Our Council Tax is high enough and I can't afford the increase

A/22 If you are on a low income, you can apply for Council Tax Reduction to help pay your Council Tax. And if you live on your own or are the only person over the age of 18 and the property is your sole or main residence a 25% discount is available.

Q/23 Has the decision regarding the Public Works Loan already been made?

A/23 No. The consultation is being undertaken so residents' views can be considered before the Parish Council decides whether to proceed with a loan application.