



NOTES OF THE PARISH MEETING
held in Hadlow Down Village Hall, Hadlow Down
at 7pm on Tuesday 22nd July 2025

Present: Councillors: Michael Lunn (ML) Chair (+WDC), Peter Weston (PW), Ben Floyd (BF), Stephen Lester (SL) and David Munday (DM).

In attendance: Vicki Rutt (Clerk) and 117 members of the public.

Apologies received: Cllr Alan Hobbs, Rod Williams, Bill Hunter, Jan, Dan Elson, Paul and Margaret Hamilton, Avril Verhagen, Jonatan Butcher, Henrietta Butcher, Sarah Allen, Steve Godfrey, Sophie Mackechnie and Jessica Banks.

1. Welcome from Cllr Lunn

Cllr Lunn welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked everyone for taking the time to attend this important meeting.

2. Rules of the Parish Meeting

The Clerk read out the following statement:

Thank you all for attending tonight's Parish Meeting. As mentioned by Cllr Lunn, this meeting is being recorded to ensure I capture everything accurately with the Q&As. This Parish Meeting does not come under the rules of the Parish Council's Standing Orders, but this is a meeting run by the Parish Council which is formed of 6 Cllrs, 5 of which are present tonight, who are volunteers so please remember this when you are speaking. As with all public meetings, please be respectful at all times, put your hand up when you wish to speak and let others finish before speaking.

There is a lot of information to give to you tonight and we hope it will be in a way that you will be able to absorb. There is a full Q&A session at the end of the presentation, as shown on the agenda.

In the event we are unable to answer a specific question, please be assured that I will capture your question, get the answer and respond fully after the meeting. A full Q&A crib sheet from tonight's meeting will be circulated in the next week.

3. Presentation from Cllr Michael Lunn

Cllr Lunn went through his presentation of 36 slides, to ensure all the information was provided before taking questions. **The full presentation is available on the Parish Council website and on the Parish Council Facebook page.**

4. Question and Answer Session

Cllr Weston facilitated the Q&A session

Q. Is the estimate of the cost, today's price or does it take into consideration how long the build process is going to take?

A. The costings have come from Hadlow Down Community Centre Committee [HDCCC] and they have confirmed the most recent figures are from costings received on the 17th July 2025 and yes, they are likely to increase. However, the costs and expenditure will be reviewed by the Parish Councils advisory committee at the appropriate time.

Q. The project has been costed at £2.3m, the VAT claim should be added onto the original price so it would likely be £2.7m and then you should add 10% inflation so figure will be more likely £3.3m

A. Sarah Prall answered on behalf of HDCCC – In regard to the £2.3m figure, there is a 10% contingency built into this figure already which was received last week and as the Committee is a CIO, they are able to claim VAT back as they go so, they will receive £460k back.

Q. Would like to correct Cllr Lunn on a point in the first slide, if a loan is taken out, this may not affect Council Tax, it will raise Council Tax so you need to remove the word 'may'. Question regarding the referendum, is the 20% turnout of the electoral roll?

A. The context was 'if the community agree it would increase the Parish precept, but the details are contained within the powerpoint for everyone to see. Yes, it is 20% of the electoral roll to make the Parish referendum valid.

Q. Hadlow Down Parish Council [HDPC] own the land that the current village hall sits on, if this asset goes, what do HDPC hold for the new Community Centre, as custodian trustee, it is a liability for the Council. Has the PC been asked for the funding by HDCCC?

A. It will be no different, to what we have today. HDPC still own the land and have the leasehold and HDPC will be a custodian trustee. HDCCC have not yet asked for the funds but in discussions with Wealden District Council [WDC], it is clear the money is needed as seed money and once received will go into a separate bank account with reporting to the Parish Advisory Committee.

Q. The HDCCC website says they will not ask the community for money for this project.

A. That is correct, as yet they have not asked for it, it is going to a referendum to be decided by the community. As a Parish Council we don't need to do this for anything under £500,000 but felt that this was a big decision and that the community should have the opportunity to have the say and direct the Parish Council. At this stage the Parish Council have agreed to nothing other than bring this information to your attention.

Q. With regard to the Public Works Loan Board [PWLB], there is no mention of the term of the loan?

A. The loan term is 50 years at a fixed rate.

Q. What happens to the money, if the HDCCC can't raise the money and what funds do they have in their account at the moment?

A. The PWLB loan would not be drawn down until the PC has a commitment from HDCCC that they have the rest of the funds.

Mandy Chapman, HDCCC responded that the reason fundraising has not started is they are having to wait for the new lease to be finalised as they need this in place in order to apply for grants.

Q. How much has been spent on the land and the planning application so far?

A. The exact figure on purchasing the lower playing field is not known tonight but will be placed in the minutes. *The land was purchased for £19k and £10k was taken from Public Works Loan Board. The planning application was made in the name of Hadlow Down Parish Council but was paid for when the land was purchased by HDCCC.*

Bob Lake responded on behalf of HDCCC stating that the money raised so far is in the region of £115k raised from small community events.

Q. Do you think you are going to raise the money from high net worth individual grants etc?

A. Mandy Chapman on behalf of HDCCC stated that regarding the fundraising list, they have left no stone unturned. The business plan on the HDCCC website shows the 6 case studies that they have reviewed to see how they have achieved raising the money and succeeded. Whilst it is acknowledged it is a harder environment now, HDCCC are confident will get the funds if applied for. HDCCC will not know unless they try. However, if the community back the proposals presented tonight, it will have significant bearing on the ability to leverage additional funding.

Q. Will the timings work in order to demonstrate £250k for the village hall?

A. WDC has said a valuation of the land will be enough, they just need to see that the PC have an asset worth on paper. As stated, several times in the presentation, no decision is being made tonight on the disposal of the current village hall, this is subject to an additional parish meeting, workshop and referendum.

Q. The presentation was brilliant so well done for all the hard work so far. There is a concern that a lot of match funding is needed, at the moment it seems like a bargain for the residents, however there is going to be a shortfall, does it fall to the residents if there is a further shortfall?

A. It is not match funding, it is a commitment from PC and wider community to WDC that we are backing the new community centre. The referendum will hopefully show the commitment but to be clear the Parish Council have capped the amount they would apply for a loan at £250k. WDC has indicated that decisions on grants will be made quickly as they want to invest in Wealden facilities before the combined authority.

Bob Lake, on behalf of HDCCC reassured the resident that construction will not start until **ALL** the money is secured and a separate bank account would be established reporting to the Advisory Committee

Q. What are we being asked to commit to? £250k? Where does this end?

A. As stated earlier, the commitment by residents has been capped by the Parish Council at £250k. Any further shortfall will be down to HDCCC to secure the funds. The Advisory Committee which reports to the Parish Council will be overseeing and scrutinising costs at the appropriate time.

Q. The Village Hall has been valued at £250k, you can't sell this until the Community Centre has been built so you will need to get another loan of £250k in order to give to HDCCC?

A. WDC has explained that the PC can enter into an agreement with a developer that they can have the land subject to the community centre being built, referendum process following and site planning obtained. A conditional agreement can be made.

Q. Congratulations on a good presentation and there seems to be clear thinking so far on a very complication situation. Value of this site, what is changing?

A. First point is to engage with the community, which will be the referendum to see whether the community agree to offset the current Village Hall for the new Community Centre.

Q. If the current design is looking pricey, has there been any thought to changing the design to make it cheaper?

A. Sarah Prall responded on behalf of HDCCC stating that yes this has been looked at and will be constantly reviewed.

Jules Sherwood, who is not a Hadlow Down resident, but a professional fundraiser of 25 years was in attendance and explained his professional opinion is that HDCCC has the ability to raise the funds. He is confident it can be done, funders are keen to grant money, but they look favourably to those who have match funding/seed money, and they can see the benefit the project will have on the community.

Q. What stopped the PC purchasing land around the current hall?

A. Being careful not to breach confidentiality, the land offered around the current village hall was 2 and half times the cost of the land at the playing field and was rejected by the Parish Council due to cost.

Q. At the end of this, we get a village asset which has cost the village £250k. The referendum will decide whether we want a new Community Centre or update the existing Village Hall. Is there a plan for the current village hall to be updated if not happening?

A. The referendum questions have not been agreed yet but likely to be along the lines of does the community agree to the village hall being offset toward the community centre and whether a loan should be taken out for £250k. So, in effect two questions with clear yes / no answers.

Sally Blyfield responded on behalf of the Village Hall Committee that there is no plan for the village hall as yet as they are waiting to see what happens. They are focusing on ongoing maintenance and fixing defects.

A resident did not have a question but expressed his thanks to the Parish Council for doing all this hard work as volunteers. There was applause from those present in agreement.

Q. I understand the 49/51% split and the minimum of 20% turnout but have you looked at what happens if this is not achieved?

A. If we don't get 20% turnout, it will not be enough for a PWLB application as we can't show local support. If the referendum result is close, then this will require further debate. The Parish Council are deciding this issue in a closed session at the August PC meeting.

Q. What is 20% of the electorate?

A. Figures were not known at the time of the meeting. *The Clerk can now confirm that as of the June 2025, the electoral roll is at 631 so a 20% turnout would be 126 residents.*

Q. The referendum information is going in the Parish Magazine, should letters not be going out to all the households?

A. The Parish Council did discuss but there no money was budgeted for this as it was not known. The Parish Council are confident that residents will know through signage around the village, the PC websites and noticeboards, social media and word of mouth. The PC will not be doing house to house campaigning but that is not to say that groups, either support or opposing, will be doing so.

Q. What are the benefits for the new Community Centre to the village? What can it do that the current village hall can't?

A. The design and layout of the new community centre has gone through many iterations, and the community had their say on what facilities and elements they would prefer. Mandy Chapman handed the resident a brochure, which is available on the HDCCC website.

A resident did not have a question but felt that the current village hall, whilst has been a great facility over the years, is now no longer fit for purpose and the new community centre is going to give back to a lot of young children which the village hall can't do.

Q. The VAT needs to be looked at as it has been double counted.

A. Mandy Chapman responded on behalf of HDCCC saying this will be double checked.

Q. Can the PC please explain the role of custodian trustees?

A. A custodian trustee is a trustee with the limited role of holding the legal title to trust property, while the managing trustees are responsible for the day-to-day management and decision-making of the trust. Essentially, the custodian trustee acts as a custodian of the trust's assets, such as land or investments, but does not participate in the administration or management of the trust.

Q. As a trustee of this village hall, if the trust falls away, it is believed it comes back to the PC. It will be same for the new Community Centre so if the project gets underway and the committee folds, or you find yourselves 10% short, are the PC aware of this?

A. Yes that is correct, both the current Village Hall and the new Community Centre could fall back to the PC at any time and the PC would be liable. The PC are fully aware of the risk.

Q. If the referendum says no, this will not stop the project will it, HDCCC will just not get the £500k?

A. Mandy Chapman responded stating that after 14 years on this project, her personal opinion is if the referendum shows no support from the community and therefore no seed money, she would not be willing to spend further time on this project with no community support. She said that she cannot speak on behalf of the whole committee, but several people present on the committee, agreed with her

statement. If that happened, the extant planning permission would be in place for someone else to pick up the baton another time.

Fiona Shafer, on behalf of the Playing Field Committee stated that it needs to remember the focus is on the community and how this will benefit the future for the village.

*Following a comment after the meeting from a resident, advice has been sought by the Clerk and the event in September 2025 will now be referred to as a **Parish Poll** and not a referendum.*

Since the meeting, the £460k VAT reclaim has been questioned. This has been further explained by HDCC:

- Phase 1 is confirmed at a gross cost of £2.760 million (£2.3 million plus VAT of £460,000 which we intend to reclaim.) This means the net cost to HDCC for Phase 1 will be £2.3 million.
- We are preparing to fundraise a total of £2.760 million for Phase 1 which includes the VAT.
- As Mandy correctly noted, it is possible to claim back VAT across multiple fiscal years. Our point at the meeting was that, should Phase 1 costs increase, we could reclaim the additional VAT and reinvest that capital back into Phase 1, rather than looking to raise extra funds.
- Any escalation in Phase 1 costs that are funded through VAT recovery will naturally reduce the amount of VAT available to reinvest in Phase 2, impacting how much remains to be raised and therefore reclaimed later.

The meeting closed at 20:30