

## **New Village Hall and Recreation Ground Project**

*Update for Parish Assembly 25 April 2018 by the Co-ordination Group*

In June of last year, the Recreation Ground Trust and the Village Hall Trust agreed to take part in a mediation process to find a compromise over the site for our new Village Hall. Mediation was initiated by the MoD and facilitated by UDC, who paid for the mediation. An agreement was struck between the two trusts that persuaded the MoD to allow us to retain their incredibly generous grant of nearly a quarter of a million pounds. The MoD also gave us more time.

This was the first of several meetings of a newly formed Co-ordination Group comprising the two trusts, the New Village Hall Group and the Parish Council. It was held under the chairmanship of an independent mediator who has continued to help overcome differences between the two trusts and keep the project on track.

One of the most important agreements we made was to stop looking back and instead to look forward, to work together to resolve differences as they arise and to take the project through to completion. A recap on what we have achieved:

**The site.** To overcome reservations about the original site for the new hall, the Recreation Ground Trust and the Parish Council agreed that it could be built on the site of the sports pavilion. That was one of the earlier possible sites, rejected at the time, but now accepted as a sensible compromise in order to move forward.

**A plan.** A detailed plan was drawn up setting out the process to take us to completion, including a legal agreement, defining the roles of each member of the Co-ordination Group, and a detailed timeline.

**Size and Value.** It was agreed that the two plots of land should be the same size, 334m<sup>2</sup>. This should enable us to deliver a new village hall which will be larger than the existing building, not least because it will not include the shop, which will stay where it is. With a similar value put on the two sites, we have been able to meet one of the Charity Commission's criteria that this should be a like-for-like agreement. The Charity Commission is the government agency that approves decisions taken by trusts.

**Legal agreement.** The most complicated and protracted part of the project has been agreeing the detail of the legal agreement between the trusts because their Objects – the rules about what they can and cannot do – are different. Solicitors for the two trusts have produced an agreement that all four parties are satisfied with and will preclude any future legal repercussions.

However, another issue, as yet unresolved, was whether the consent of the Charity Commission was needed before that agreement could be signed so we could progress the project. The importance of a signed legal agreement is that without it, we cannot make formal applications for new and substantial grants to large public and private organisations because they require evidence of land ownership and that all charity law requirements have been met.

For the same reason, the Village Hall Trust cannot yet appoint an architect or a building contractor because the trust needs the same guarantees, and also has to show it has all funding in place before work can start.

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An application was made to the Charity Commission in February. Although we have been told it has been assigned to an officer to deal with, and despite chasing by our solicitors, unfortunately we still await consent. Additional legal costs during these protracted negotiations have been generously provided by the Searle Trust. Meanwhile, we have pressed on wherever we can. So,

**Design.** An agreed design brief has been issued to several architects, all with experience of village hall projects. We will make a decision from a shortlist of three in the next four weeks. That design brief is based on the specification for the hall on the previous site, which in turn was developed out of the public consultation. The new village hall will be larger overall than the existing structure. There will be a separate meeting room – not a main hall with a partition – and full facilities for Pre-school. Drawings will be shown to the village as soon as the Co-ordination Group agrees that the architect has met the brief.

**Planning.** Architects, surveyors and our own team agree it is unlikely there will be any problems in securing planning approval. An application for planning permission will be made as soon as we have final drawings.

**Construction.** Realistically, the earliest that building can start will be towards the end of this year or the first quarter of 2019. As soon as we have final designs, we can begin selecting an appropriate construction company.

**Fundraising.** We have money in the bank or pledged of around £330,000, approximately half the anticipated cost. Our fundraising team maintains a list of potential grant-providers and is always on the hunt for new ones. To give you one example, we have had positive discussions with an EU rural community fund, which has indicated we might qualify for a grant of up to £80,000.

Meanwhile, *local* fundraising continues. The recent vintage fair and jumble sale raised £1,500 and Stansted Airport Community Fund awarded our project £2,000. The Village Hall Trust has just received £500 from the Karen Howarth Dance School, one of the hall's regular users – proceeds from recent shows. Thanks Karen and dancers. New local fundraising ideas will be launched as soon as legalities are in place and we have a design to show you.

**The Recreation Ground.** The new hall is part of a wider project to regenerate the Recreation Ground and increase its appeal to Debden and the wider community. Whilst the new hall is the priority, the pavilion will be replaced with a new one elsewhere on the Recreation Ground, possibly on the site of the original hall. The pavilion, which will be the responsibility of the RGT and the Parish Council, will be available for the use of football clubs, the tennis club and other sports groups. The shop will remain in situ and operational during construction. The existing hall will stay in use until the new one is operational. Finally,

**Yes, we can.** The Co-ordination Group is committed to seeing the project through to completion, and we will. As evidence of that, there will be a foundation stone-laying ceremony in November to coincide with the centenary of the ending of WW1, thus retaining the link with the original Memorial Hall and the donation of the land on which it was built.

It's been a long time coming, we've had differences and obstacles to overcome but the hall *will* happen. We rely on the continued efforts and goodwill of members of the two trusts, the NVHG, parish councillors, and our many supporters. Remember that all of us are volunteers. **And, of course, we continue to rely on you and on your support.**

