

**Meppershall Village Hall  
Minutes of Annual General Meeting  
Sunday 20<sup>th</sup> September 2015, 6pm**

**Trustees Present:** Steve Ansell, Graham Walker, David Birch, Graham Jones, Jeff Hurst,

**Secretary:** Melanie Fergus

Around 24 members attended some joining and some leaving during the meeting.

**Minutes**

The Minutes of the last AGM on 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

**Chairman's Report**

The Chairman went through his report, as follows:

*This has been another trying year in respect of the development and new Village Hall project, with Bloors pulling out at the 11th hour when we believed that the deal was almost complete but as my wife always says these things are for a reason and I am pleased to say that Croudace have taken over the development.*

*The village hall continues to be an important part of Meppershall life, the hall is used for an incredible amount of time during every week, and again this year we have had to turn down many groups from occasional hirings to regular weekly hirings because we don't have the space, and the reason everybody is here on a Sunday is because this is the only available evening.*

*The Village Hall committee members took on the Village Fair and created a sub-committee, this was to raise funds to maintain the Village Hall. the committee has grown and could soon become its own entity.*

*The Village Fair committee decided to give some of their profits towards the Meppershall firework Display. This I am hoping, on the 7th of November 2015 will be the best fireworks we have ever put on.*

*The village hall doesn't run itself, there are a group of volunteers working behind the scenes just to keep things ticking along, I am very fortunate as the chairman to have the support of this group of active volunteers*

*Louise Hutson, Booking secretary. This role involves keys, booking forms, booking times, money.*

*Mel Fergus, Secretary keeping us in order, taking minutes.*

*These volunteers are not trustees.*

*The trustees are:*

*David Foskett who is a great source of knowledge knowing and understanding how the council's work and what resources are available to us. David is also our liaison between the village hall and the Parish Council.*

*Graham Walker who deals with maintenance, leaking toilets, broken light, missing handles, in fact almost anything that goes wrong. We had a break-in this year, the first in my time as Chairman. Graham reported it to me so I came down, he then fixed repaired and organised everything to make it good and this was on a Sunday, no disruption no cancellations he just fixed it. Graham also runs the social club,*

*Jeff Hurst has been a trustee for many years and is Involved with the players, and over the years because of all the effort Jeff has put into building the stage and all associated equipment, lighting, wiring this has made the hall more hireable for all other users, as well as enabling some great productions.*

*Graham Jones, by day a Lawyer by night a Village Hall trustee, he deals with any legal items as a volunteer, he also is involved with the pre-school, they are another major user and so a major contributor to the village hall. Graham has also given up countless hours of his time reading contracts and agreements for the new village hall. He isn't our Lawyer he just volunteers to offer his legal expertise.*

*David Birch, by day an Accountant by night a Village Hall trustee. David deals with contracts for all the utilities, negotiating and then chasing for the money, he also produces the accounts, and deals with all the banking arrangements for the Village Hall. David has also been the driving force behind the new Village Hall development. David has spent so many hours on this project, making sure we get the right deal for our land, dealing with lawyers, land agents, developers, and anybody else who needed time and attention, so by saying that David is a Village Hall trustee by night is incorrect, he has spent many days on this as well.*

*They always say a good manager surrounds themselves with good people, so I would like to thank them for all their support, time, dedication that they have put in during the time I have been Chairman but especially during the last year.*

## **Treasurer's Report**

The Treasurer David Birch went through the financial report for the year to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015 explaining the sources of income and details of outgoings, with cash available of £14k to meet emergencies and payments before income is received.

There were a few questions from the floor;

- What percentage of the income is from Playgroup?  
Response: About 50% of the regular hiring excluding the Social Club.
- Confirmation that the social club was the most significant user.  
Response: Yes, alongside Playgroup and the Players. For completeness, a summary of regular income expected for 2015-16 is set out below as an addendum to these minutes.

The report approval was proposed by Richard and seconded by Louise Hutson.

## **Limited company**

It was confirmed that the conversion of the existing Charity to the Limited Company formed and registered with the Charity Commissioners had not proceeded and was planned to be completed by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016.

## **Plans for new development and temporary and new village hall**

These were displayed on the walls before and during the meeting.

### **New Village Hall and Development - Progress update**

Currently in the final phase of negotiating terms and contracts, the final vote by the PC in respect of a sale of the PC land and providing the facilities envisaged in the whole scheme which will be taken at the Parish Council meeting tomorrow (21<sup>st</sup> September 2015).

It was asked if the Village Hall Trustees would be voting with the answer “yes” to a sale of land and new Village Hall construction. It was confirmed that subject to finalising the contract terms and safeguards envisaged, then the Village Hall Trustees were in favour of selling the existing land and constructing a new Village Hall in accordance with the plans on display, acknowledging that the final design may need amendment to meet the requirements of the Planning Authorities.

*Question – Wasn't the new village hall originally going to be available before the old one was knocked down? Bloors original plan.*

Response – this was the Bloors intention but there were never any detailed plans of how this was going to be feasible i.e. to construct the new Village Hall and access the land required at the rear whilst ensuring continued use was safe for users. There would undoubtedly be a period when no village hall would be available.

Croudace will not take any similar Safety risks and therefore them providing a temporary village hall is the only way forward. They will pay any additional hiring costs for the temporary village hall if the building of the new Village Hall runs over schedule. The heating and general running costs would be down to the village hall. A contribution to the hiring of £22,000 (fixed cost) from the village hall has been agreed to be funded out of the sale proceeds of the land.

#### *Concern*

There was concern that the temporary village hall would not be able to accommodate the requirements of the Players.

Response - It was confirmed by Jeff Hurst (Players Representative) that the players would be using it for rehearsals and there would be an option to hold productions there too or if appropriate at another local venue.

**Snooker tables** – the new hall does not have any specific snooker room planned,

Response - A room will be available next to the social club with a folding wall so this could be considered for snooker table use, but only if a group of people were willing to champion, organise and support this both in the short and medium term. There is no space in the temporary village hall for a snooker table, so storage would be a requirement pending the construction of the new hall being completed.

This issue was ongoing with concern that the argument against two snooker tables was very one-sided. However, it was reiterated that if a group put forward a viable proposal it would be seriously and favourably considered.

One member suggested that perhaps the snooker table could be stored under the floor and some sort of mechanism put in place to lift it when required. NB: This is a very

expensive option, and not viable within the cash constraints under which the Trustees are operating.

*Question – what will happen to the snooker tables if they are not needed?*

Response - It will cost upwards of £1,200+ vat to move and reset up the snooker tables. If not to be moved to the new hall they could go somewhere else for continuing use, and a workable proposal would be welcomed.

*Question – was a feasibility study ever carried out to see if access to the existing village hall could stay open throughout the building of the new village hall?*

Response - It was confirmed there would be no feasible opportunity for this as the safety issues, infrastructure and access road construction could not accommodate heavy vehicles, building works and allow users to continue to safely use the existing village hall.

*How is the temporary village hall going to be constructed?*

Response - Croudace have this in hand, and the intention is that it will be a short build plan. The temporary hall will come in sections and should be quick to build, however, it would not be surprising if the existing village hall needs to close for a period of around 2 weeks or so whilst equipment is moved etc.

## **Parking**

There were questions and concern about parking.

Response - An agreement has been made that as soon as vehicle access is put in to the temporary village hall Croudace will construct a temporary car park for around 12 cars (similar to the existing space) but neither they nor the Village Hall Trustees have control over how people actually park. Users and visitors will need to use the High Street and other areas in the meantime, and in addition to the parking provided.

It was felt that this arrangement should not inconvenience Pre-School too much and discussions will be had with them to minimise inconvenience and ensure practicalities are dealt with as much as possible.

The Village Hall and Croudace expect to discuss with the planning department and Highways Authority any need for temporary traffic control to ensure the High Street through traffic and parking runs as smoothly as possible.

## *Concerns*

There was concern over the need for additional parking in the evenings – when the same principles as set out above would apply.

There was additional concern that if people were parking in other areas this may cause health & safety issues.

Response - It was reiterated that people would have to be flexible and considerate to residents to cope with the short-term inconvenience.

## *Concern*

One member asked what would happen if there was an accident? Surely the Village Hall Trustees would need to take responsibility?

Response - The parking by users is not the responsibility of the Village Hall trustees any more than it is now, and people must take responsibility for their own circumstances, safety and that of their passengers including children.

It was confirmed that the temporary parking space was expected to be similar in broad terms to that currently available. The intentions of the Village Hall Trustees are to do the best to solve the problems but don't know what the planning or Highways Authorities will allow or require. There may be a need for a crossing patrol (e.g. one or more lollipop persons etc). The Village Hall Trustees will be expecting to make sure that parking and road safety will be a high priority and important in any discussions.

*What if the temporary village hall plan is not accepted by the Planning Authorities?*

Response – The Village Hall Trustees would have to consider again how best to proceed in the interests of the Charity and user groups, hirers, social club etc.

*Question – where will be the emergency access?*

Response - There will be removable bollards at the Crackle Hill entrance NB: The Village Hall Trustees have explored the potential to provide a temporary vehicle access to the temporary village Hall and parking on the adjacent PC land, but this is not possible. Once constructed emergency access will be off the new Access Road.

*What about the dray deliveries?*

Response - The Social Club would have to make arrangements and a system will need to be put in place. The Village Hall Trustees would be working with Graham Walker and the Social Club to make access and deliveries as easy as possible.

*Nothing seems to be set in concrete - what if traffic light controls are put in place, what will residents do? What about 30 tonne trucks, who has been consulted?*

Response - There have been informal discussions, as is usual. When the planning application and Highways Authority review what is needed it will all become part of a future local consultation. The Village Hall Trustees cannot determine what is to be provided as this is driven by the planning and highways authorities.

*What do you mean by local?*

Response - Everyone would be invited to contribute their views and opinions via public meetings and discussion. There will also be a letter to residents in accordance with the Planning Authorities usual procedures.

*If the Parish Council objects to the scheme, what will happen, will it go ahead anyway?*

The Parish Council land is key to the new Village Hall construction and without it the scheme for the construction of a new Village Hall would not go ahead.

*Why was this particular building scheme chosen? Would smaller schemes and numbers of houses not have been more appropriate?*

Response - The Village Hall Trustees are not able to dictate nor determine the actions of the local planning departments.

In 2011 the Foster family's farmland was brought into the local development plan. Other sites were put forward but the planning inspector endorsed this site. Anyone with concerns should contact Central Beds Council at the appropriate time i.e. when the formal planning application is submitted and the consultation phases are undertaken.

Croudace will be holding another public exhibition with their updated layout plans.

*More concern was expressed over the size and weight of the lorries being used for deliveries – has this been considered in the planning?*

Response – It is expected that the Section 106 agreement will almost certainly state the allowed timing and type of deliveries, weight limitations etc. There will probably be a system such as number plate recognition and cameras to police this.

*Suggestion*

One attendee suggested a roundabout.

Response - It was confirmed the road layout will be fully considered by the Highways Authorities and anyone with concerns should contact them and suggest or recommend the best ways to control traffic.

*When the development starts, will the lorries have to use the A507 to access the village?*

Response - In the Village Hall Trustees view the Planning and Highways Department are unlikely to suggest or allow anything different.

*Concern*

A member stated that the road can already be dangerous; perhaps this would be a good opportunity to do something about it.

Response - It was reiterated that this will all form part of the Highways Authority assessment and recommendations as well as probably included within the Section 106 agreement.

*Question – Has the financial viability of the new village hall been assessed?*

Response - The Village Hall Trustees expect to generate additional income from introducing indoor bowls, hiring of the planned additional meeting rooms, ad-hoc event lettings etc. However, whilst the Village Hall Trustees do have to be concerned about maximising income, an equally important objective is to enable local people to socialise at the new Village Hall which in itself will generate revenue. Thus the Village Hall Trustees anticipate the new Village Hall will be able to cover its running costs.

## **Consultations**

Comment – the new and temporary village hall proposals have become an emotive subject. It would appear that the Village Hall Trustees have made decisions but have they actually consulted with the village to help make these decisions?

Response - It was confirmed that in January 2014 at the AGM a vote was taken with the results 23 for and only 2 against the plans and proposals which were discussed again at the 8<sup>th</sup> June 2014 meeting. There have been public meetings arranged by Bloors, and recently with Croudace, with every village hall committee meeting open to all to attend and discuss the plans and proposals. Representatives of the pre-school recently came along to a meeting.

Since 2011 there have been a number of consultations and questionnaires issued to users and village residents, all of which have concluded that the Village Hall Trustees should pursue the construction of a new Village Hall and negotiation of terms to do so.

The response to recent open meetings has been positive, with concerns noted regarding parking during the temporary village hall stage, and views noted about the housing development itself as it will bring many new people and traffic into the village.

#### *Concerns*

There was concern that villagers were not given enough notice of the September 2015 meetings and consultations so that a lot of people were not aware of what was going on. Apparently the house at the end of the track that will be affected by the new access had not received any information, however, Louise Hutson said she had been contacted by the residents via Facebook and replied giving required information. It was confirmed that as much effort as possible had gone into delivering notices of meetings to all houses and publicising those events in the village.

#### *Concern*

There was a comment that the village questionnaire was not very effective, seemed biased and did not look official.

Response - It was confirmed that this had never been the intention even if it was how it seemed. All responses had been evaluated and treated seriously and with respect. From the responses received those completing the questionnaire seemed to have fully understood what was being asked and able to express their views

*Question – If the village hall decided not to sell the land required, what would happen?*

Response - If the Village Hall Trustees don't sell the land, and thus provide an access to the farmland for housing development an alternative site would almost certainly be found and approved in the village as the Government targets and local requirements still need to be met and recent inspectorate decisions on appeals about planning applications in Shefford bear this out.

#### *Concern*

There was surprise at the number of houses being built which will cause a traffic issue accessing the High Street. Speed of traffic travelling through the village was an issue and the width of the road.

Response - It was confirmed that this would all be dealt with as part of the evaluations by the Planning and Highways Departments – see above.

*The meeting was asked if the Bovis estate had caused such a problem?*

Response - The consensus view was 'no'. The road will be looked at as part of the planning application as well as detailed consideration by the Highways Authority and recommendations put forward.

*One member asked if a car park for shop customers could be provided to avoid congestion.*

Response - Getting people to park sensibly was an ongoing problem and individuals should be prepared to park and walk if necessary to alleviate such problems.

*A member expressed concern that once the new houses were built this would open up the opportunity to build more.*

Response - The turning on the left onto the estate would mark the end of the new access road, after that it is just farmland and Polehanger Farm would need to sell first for any more development to take place on the adjacent land. That may of course happen but was not under the control of the Village Hall Trustees.

The sports area is legally protected so no roads could be built over that without the PC consent.

*A comment was made that there are parking and turning space problems at the bottom of Fildyke Road even though residents were promised there wouldn't be when the new houses down there were built.*

Response - Planning rules now state that builders have to provide more space to accommodate parking and traffic management.

*Question - future budgetary sums – when the new village hall is constructed, will it be able to afford the running costs if lettings losses are made?*

Response - The Village Hall Trustees have an expectation that within five years the costs will be covered but have a £50,000 contingency sum to cover this period.

*One member asked how many hours the committee had put into this project of their own time with little thanks – gratefully received!*

Response - The Village Hall Trustees have not kept records – without doubt the total time would be a scary number if it was possible to add it up.

*Question – will there be a rental cost increase?*

The Village Hall Trustees expect rental for regular users to stay similar to current levels with incremental revenue coming from new hirings and activities. However, as the social club should do much better with increasing numbers using the facilities theirs may need to be looked at and a fair level agreed.

The players too should have larger audiences and the Village Hall Trustees foresee more revenue coming in from new groups and more lettings and it is certainly a positive move for pre-school who will be able to operate for longer e.g. with after normal school hours activities. As the preschool/playgroup will have their own space the main hall can be used for additional lettings, further enhancing the potential for revenue generation.

*Question – If the new village hall is built and the social club fails who will pay?*

Response - The Village Hall Trustees assume that with the additional houses, new sports field, changing rooms, enhanced facilities, additional rooms for lettings, scope for events to be organised etc. there will be substantially increased numbers using the Social Club, so it has a good opportunity to seek and obtain increased revenues to meet its costs.

Member comment – the new Social Club and facilities together with outside space will be much more appealing to families and to the new residents than the existing set up.

*Question – what is happening to the MUGA?*

Response - It is staying where it is. It would have been too expensive to move and can be accommodated well within the overall site design.

*Question – is the Village Hall committee happy with the timescale for the new village hall proposed by Croudace?*

Response - The Village Hall Trustees consider it is reasonable but can only rely on the advice given by Robinson & Hall Chartered Surveyors who will be responsible for overseeing delivery to the Specification and on time. The weather may cause a delay but this cannot be predicted nor influenced.

*Question – when will the new village hall be built?*

Response - Croudace have important timescales built into the acquisition contract, and if they do not deliver the Trustees can invoke the performance bond and step in with funds provided by the insurance underwriters.

Member – the village hall committee should put pressure on Croudace to build the new village hall faster!

The Village Hall Trustees clarified that the planned two-year period is not all construction time, it is an overall timescale. The actual build time will be less than that.

*Question – where will the defibrillator be moved to?*

It will be moved to the shop either temporarily or permanently. The Village Hall Trustees are keen to have such facilities available at the new Village Hall.

## **Elections**

As no other nominations have come forward the current Trustees were re-elected.

Steve Ansell as Chairman

Dave Birch as Treasurer

Melanie Fergus as Secretary

Louise Hutson as Bookings Secretary

Graham Walker will continue in his role as Caretaker for the Village Hall.

The elected Trustees are Steve Ansell, Dave Birch, Graham Walker, Graham Jones and Jeff Hurst, with Dave Foskett representing the PC as a user.

## **Any Other Business**

*Can the (now) tatty flags come down?*

Response - yes!

*What will happen to the Summer Fayre and fireworks?*

Response - The Summer Fayre and fireworks will stay the same in 2016 and there is space in the new MVH and PC development to accommodate these in the future but 2017 may be a problem as this will be in the construction period for the new Village Hall and Sports Pitches.

**The meeting closed at 8pm.**

**Addendum:**

**MVH - Regular Users - 20 September 2015**

Pre School	£4,325	48%
Baby & Toddler	£468	5%
Parish Council	£510	6%
Krusader Martial Arts Inc		
Keep Fit	£854	10%
Brownies	£432	5%
Forresters	£40	0%
Players	£2,340	26%
Total	£8,969	100%
Social Club	£9,000	
Expected regular hirers income	<b>£17,969</b>	