

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen. My name is James Roberts. I am a local resident, and I am chair of finance on the parish council. So, I am going to talk briefly and largely about money.

If we are to have a new hall it needs to be built for a known and fundable cost.

There are existing plans for a new hall, but these were not costed, and no building quotations were sought. Building and material cost inflation has been high, so those old plans for the new hall will require review at the least. It was designed to a high spec. and, while we want it to look good and be a valuable community asset, it's not to be a trophy building nor a white elephant. It could be that the plans need some revision as a consequence. Those plans must fit to a budget, with some contingency for the normal problems you get in construction, and the build itself will require rigorous project management.

Once built the hall needs to break even: parishioners will not want to fund losses from their council tax. Therefore, we will need an operational business plan before giving any green light to construction. It would be unfortunate, to say the least, to build a hall and then say we couldn't afford to run it. All plans have large assumptions and things do change, but uncertainty and risk should be minimised as much as is practical.

As has already been said we do have planning permission, but any changes will need to get approved by Wealden Council. As I know many of you have discovered the more one has to do with planning, the less one understands about planning decisions. So there is uncertainty there

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On to money. This is something that has changed a lot since the potential for a new hall was last discussed a couple of years ago when the lack of it was a serious reason for not pursuing the new hall project of the time. The Reading Room is essentially condemned for all practical purposes. It therefore makes sense to sell it. It has the benefit of planning permission for two modest dwellings, and we were quoted £350,000 for it a year or so ago. Let us assume the same value. It may be more. It may be less.

In addition:

1. The Council is holding specific new hall funds of £60,000.
2. We have also put aside a sinking fund over the years £100,000 for Reading Room repair. This would be money down a drain now, so could go towards a new hall.
3. Parish funds could find, say, £20,000.
4. And then there is something quite new called the Community Infrastructure Levy or 'CIL'. This is a charge made by Wealden to housebuilders on each new build dwelling. It is complicated but broadly the CIL is currently £200psm. The average dwelling might be 150sm=£30,000. We get as a parish some 15% of the CIL or roughly £4,500 per house. We have currently received £70,000 of CIL funds. There are numerous

applications out there for 30 plus houses, and probability is that something will get through whether we want it or not. 30 houses=£135,000.

Therefore overall, we have something like the potential to find £600,000 together with any future CIL monies before fundraising or consideration of public works loan board monies (up to 25 years at reasonable rates). It does look as if this is something that might be do-able. Lastly, we are a small group on this council and would dearly like to be able to co-opt anyone on who is keen to help. Please talk to any of the councillors here about that if you feel it is something you might do. It just takes a bit of enthusiasm. If this project progresses, we will also need volunteers with relevant skills to an undertaking of this size, whether as councillors or not.

Thank you for listening.