

Herne Community Centre

Herne and Broomfield Parish Plan group published a plan in 2004. Most of the things highlighted in the Action Plan had been dealt with, but one major thing was outstanding - a community centre.

Enquiries were made by the group, to find pieces of land in a suitable position for a community centre but unfortunately none of the land owners would agree to sell.

As this was a high priority for residents, the Parish Plan group welcomed the suggestion that perhaps the owners of St Paul's Catholic Hall in St Martin's View, Herne, would be willing to sell, as the hall was in a rundown condition. A letter was sent and to everyone's delight a positive response was received. Meetings were then organised and negotiations started. The Parish Plan group had taken the project as far as they could and passed it over to the parish council.



The parish council continued negotiations and following discussions at parish council meetings, it was agreed to make an offer of £80,000 which was refused. The parish council agreed to increase the offer to £90,000 following an independent valuation on the land and this offer was accepted. The seller gave the three allotment holders notice to quit by February 2012 [*the parish council will soon be providing new allotments in Ford Road*].

The purchase was made a little more complicated by the requirement for an Overage Agreement; a contract binding the parish council to give the vendors a percentage of any sale price, if the land is sold on for anything other than community use. All discussions by the parish council regarding the hall had to be held in closed session due to the confidential nature of the purchase, but as soon as the purchase was completed residents were given the good news.

The parish council applied to Viridor (landfill tax credit) and was successfully awarded a grant of £20,000 towards the purchase of the hall, car park and surrounding land. The council has also recently been awarded a grant of £825 by KIACC (Manston) and another of £1,750 from KCC members fund, via County Cllr Alan Marsh, to improve access for disabled people. Their help is much appreciated.

The parish council realised the importance of consulting residents on the way forward and agreed to employ a consultant (Community Compass) to help with the consultation. Residents are being asked whether we should do nothing, extend, refurbish or rebuild. If the decision is to extend or replace the current hall, grants would be needed and correct handling of the consultation will be key to accessing funding. In October the parish council organised a Crafts, Cakes and Consultation day in the hall. The consultation questionnaire was available for residents to fill in and councillors attended to answer questions. In this edition of the Parish News is a copy of the questionnaire for every household to complete and return. Visits will be offered to local organisations to talk to them and get their views.

Since taking over the building, some much needed maintenance has been carried out, following this bookings have increased. It is currently booked every weekday evening and some weekends and people are being turned away as they cannot all be accommodated. There is still daytime availability.

A manager has been appointed to deal with the bookings and cleaning etc of the hall and the parish clerk ensures that everything is running smoothly.

The parish council is very grateful to the Parish Plan group for all their hard work.