

SEDLESCOMBE NEW VILLAGE HALL

The search for a site

1975-2001



SEARCH FOR A SITE

The search for a site for the new Sedlescombe village hall has not been easy . It has been long, difficult and very often frustrating.

OLD VILLAGE HALL



The old hall has served the community well since it was opened in 1920, but by the end of the 1980s, it was generally agreed in the Village that the old hall was becoming less suitable for modern use and that we should try to build a new hall.

1975 ATTEMPT

There had been a previous attempt in 1975 when land in Brede Lane was offered to the Parish Council for £5,000 as a possible site for a new hall. However, it would have been necessary to share the site with a new telephone exchange. Negotiations eventually broke down and Streetlands was constructed on the site. Toilets and the kitchen at the old hall were, instead, modernised, the extra bit was added to the main hall and two new committee rooms built on.

LOOKING AT AVAILABLE SITES

In 1988, the village Youth Club was thriving under the leadership of PC Bryan Graves and needed more space. This caused the subject of a new hall to be reconsidered. The following year, a Working Group made up of representatives from the Parish Council and the Village Hall Management Committee was set up with a remit to assemble sufficient facts to enable a decision to be made regarding the future of Sedlescombe Village Hall. David Hollis was in the chair.

In January 1990, a list of eight possible sites in the Village was drawn up. Christine Swan of the Sussex Association of Local Councils and Village Halls Adviser for the Sussex Rural Community Council came to a meeting here and advised that we should be able to build a new hall in about two years with five as an absolute maximum. However, there was no way she could have been aware of the problems that we would encounter.

Half of the sites were immediately discarded as unsuitable. Three were privately owned and not available for purchase. These were the Coach & Horses site, now called Pollards after conversion into flats by Dennis Thomas. Sedlescombe Service Station that already had planning permission for housing, now called Eaton Walk after development by Dennis Thomas. And Red Barn Field. The fourth idea was to extend the Primary School but the land had been used for classrooms.

This left four sites to be investigated further. The west end of the Sportsfield owned by the Parish Council but leased to the Sports Association. The land next to the tennis courts, charitable land with the Parish Council as sole trustee. Part of the Brede Lane car park owned by Rother District Council and the land between the Queen's Head and the Doctors' surgery owned by Whitbread Fremlin. During the next ten years, other sites would also be considered as was rebuilding on the existing site.

THE TENNIS COURTS SITE

A public meeting in May 1990 endorsed the idea of a new hall. At that time, the favoured site was next to the tennis courts and an architect was engaged to draw up plans. Outline planning permission was granted in April 1993. However, the site was not ideal and the problem of securing a 5 metre access soon became a major sticking point. It also resulted in the Parish Council's right of access to this area for any vehicles being challenged.

With legal wranglings over the right of access continuing, the Brede Lane Car Park site was looked at and an application to build a new hall on part of it was submitted in 1991. A small site had been earmarked by Rother District Council for a new hall when the car park was constructed in 1985. However, the School could not support the loss of so many car parking spaces and people living in Gammons Way mounted a campaign against the new building. With the Planning Officer recommending his committee to refuse the application, the Parish Council withdrew the application.

BEHIND THE QUEEN'S HEAD

Several approaches were made to Whitbread Fremlins asking if they would consider selling land at the rear of the public house adjoining the Brede Lane Car park. Despite requests from many people including our MP, the District Planning Officer and personal contact made with Whitbread's Chairman, Whitbread refused to sell. Although compulsory purchase of the land was considered, Rother District Council advised that success was unlikely.

ATTEMPTED PURCHASE OF LAND BEHIND VILLAGE HALL

By now we had reached 1995 and the Village Hall Management Committee attempted to purchase additional land to the rear of the hall so that a larger hall could be built on the site. This attempt was thwarted when a neighbour said he would match any offer for the land made by the Committee.

REDEVELOPMENT ON SITE OF OLD HALL

Although outline planning permission had been granted in 1990 to demolish the old hall and build a new two-storey house and garage, in desperation, the Committee decided in 1995 to apply for permission to demolish the hall and build a new hall on the same site. It would not have been significantly larger than the existing hall, would have to be 1.5 metres lower than wanted and, importantly, no new car parking could be provided in this scheme. However, planning permission was obtained.

SITE IN BREDE LANE BETWEEN STREET FARM AND BLACKLANDS

However, many residents were unhappy about the prospect of rebuilding on the old site. It was found that officers of the District Council had been giving the siting of a new hall in Sedlescombe some thought and had even drawn up illustrative plans. One such plan showed a hall built in Brede Lane on land

between Street Farm and Blacklands. Negotiations with the owner of the land were unsuccessful.

SITE IN THE STREET BETWEEN TITHE BARN AND RIVERBRIDGE COTTAGES

Another site where the owner did not wish to sell was the land between what was The Tithe Barn (now Kester House) and Riverbridge Cottages.

SEDLESCOMBE SPORTSFIELD

Attention now turned in earnest to the Sportsfield. It had been one of the first sites to be considered by the Working Group in 1990 but Rother's Planning Officer had, at that time, advised that the Sportsfield was less acceptable as a site for a new hall than others in the Village. The leaseholder, Sedlescombe Sports Association, had been concerned about encroachment onto the cricket field. By 1996, Rother Planners appeared to be ready to consider the Sportsfield as a possible site for a new hall despite it being outside the village envelope.



This site was complicated. It was leased to the Sports Association and the Pestalozzi Children's Village Trust had put various covenants on the land when it was originally sold to the Parish Council. This meant that many decisions involved the

Village Hall Management Committee, the Parish Council, the Sports Association and the Pestalozzi Children's Village Trust. These negotiations continued for three years, becoming ever more complicated. During this time, Pestalozzi suggested Swiss Hall could be turned into a good village hall and put forward a price of £100,000. It was decided that it was too far from the Village centre.

In 1997/1998 planning permission was obtained for a joint project with the Sports Association to build a community centre on a very restricted site where the present sports pavilion stands. The site was even more restricted because the District Council insisted that various trees had to be retained along the roadside. Parking was a real problem involving negotiations with the Pestalozzi Trust to

use the verge of their road as a parking area. The cost of a lease on the verge, purchase of a small strip of land and compensation for loss of amenity for The Lodge amounted to £45,000. New covenants were also to be attached that would have increased costs still further.

APPLICATION FOR LOTTERY FUNDING

By this time, Ted Cornford had moved into the Village and had become involved in the project. In May 1998, he and Kaye Crittall drew up business plan and submission for £283,000 funding for the project to the National Lottery Charities Board. A few months later, there was disappointment as the application was rejected because of technicalities regarding the constitution of the Village Hall Charity. Despite being told that this decision was final, Ted refused to take no for an answer and reiterated that the constitution was due to be amended when the project was completed. Eventually the NLCB agreed to pass the application to the next stage. In April 1999, almost a year after applying, amid much rejoicing, the £283,000 lottery award was made for a new community centre at the Sportsfield.

PURCHASE OF RED BARN FIELD

While the lottery application was progressing, a “FOR SALE BY AUCTION” sign went up at Red Barn Field and, at very short notice, the Parish Council decided to bid for it as a possible site for a new hall if negotiations could not be satisfactorily completed at the Sportsfield. Just before Christmas in 1998, Parish Councillors Valerie Wright and Pat Martin together with the Clerk attended the Auction in Maidstone. At the end of the day, the Parish Council had bought the Field.



CONSIDERATION OF RED BARN FIELD AS A SITE FOR THE NEW HALL

Despite the lottery funding, the costs for the project at the Sportsfield were escalating and there was a serious shortfall in funding. It soon became clear that as an alternative there was space at Red Barn Field for a large hall with plenty of space for car parking. The Parish Council agreed to offer the freehold of the land required for the hall to the Village Hall Charity for £1,000 and to lease the car parking area at a peppercorn rent.

However, sensitive negotiations had to be carried out with the Lottery Board to ensure that the lottery award was not jeopardised by the change of site. The Sports Association also had to be considered as they were now left with a decaying pavilion when they had expected to have it incorporated into the new community centre. Also, there was no certainty that planning permission for Red Barn Field would be forthcoming as it was just outside the “village envelope”.

AGREEMENTS

Brave decisions had to be taken and although the Lottery Board changed some of their requirements which increased the cost of the building, approvals were eventually obtained. Planning permission followed in September 2000.

THE START OF BUILDING

Applications for other funding were also successful. Ron Sunderland had become involved with the building’s design and took over negotiations with WAS Architects. Westridge Construction Ltd. were chosen to build the hall and, on 20 November in the Millennium year, work on the building commenced. Building continued during a winter of exceptionally prolonged and heavy rainfall.



COMPLETION

Although at one time it looked as though it might be necessary for the Parish Council to raise a loan to cover a shortfall, the successful sale of the old hall, the generosity of local people and fundraising run by Pauline and Reg Glew, meant that the hall could be handed over to the Trustees at the end of August 2001 with some money in the kitty. It had also been possible to build an extra committee

room and re-instate some of the expenditure that had had to be removed at the start of the project to save money.

CONGRATULATIONS

The Village Hall Trustees can be proud of their magnificent achievement that has involved many people in hours and hours of work and heartache. However, one man must be singled out for special mention and our thanks. Ted Cornford retired to Sedlescombe with his wife Bertha in the mid-1990s looking for nothing more challenging than watercolour painting. He soon found himself embroiled in a half a million pound project that, in my opinion, would not have got off the ground without his dedication and commitment.



WELL DONE!!

Sedlescombe Village Hall is arguably the best hall for many miles around and we hope that its users will treat it with respect and that the many opportunities that it presents will be realised. Well done Sedlescombe!!

Following is a list (in no particular order) of some of the people who have been involved, to a greater or lesser extent, in finding a site for our new hall. There are, of course, other people who have given time and effort to this cause and we thank them all.

Michael Drury	Chairman, Sedlescombe Parish Council, 1974-9
Sheila Betts	Chairman, Sedlescombe Parish Council, 1990-3 & 1995-8
Derek Davis	Chairman, Sedlescombe Parish Council, 1993-5
Valerie Wright	Chairman, Sedlescombe Parish Council, 1998 to date
Pauline Raymond	Clerk, Sedlescombe Parish Council, 1975 to date
Malcolm Ing	Sedlescombe Parish Councillor
John Giles	Sedlescombe Parish Councillor
Pat Martin	Sedlescombe Parish Councillor
Kaye Crittall	Sedlescombe Parish Councillor
David Fisher	Sedlescombe Parish Councillor
Colin Pritchard	Chair, Village Hall Management Committee
David Hollis	Village Hall Management Committee
David Blanford	Village Hall Management Committee
Jock Robertson	Village Hall Management Committee
Ted Cornford	Village Hall Management Committee
Ron Sunderland	Village Hall Management Committee
Frank Williams	Rother District Council Planning Officer
Dave Crittall	Chairman, Sedlescombe Sports Association
Sarah Mitchell	Secretary, Sedlescombe Sports Association
Maurice Phillips	Pestalozzi Children's Village Trust
Christine Swan	Sussex Rural Community Council
Other Village Hall Trustees and Parish Councillors	

Photographs by Pauline Raymond, Valerie Wright & John Cook

Printed & published by Sedlescombe Parish Council
September 2001

Note added 2011

*Congratulations to Sedlescombe Village Hall and its Management
Committee for ten wonderful years of service to the community.*