

HALLING FIRE STATION – PUBLIC MEETING

4th September 2013

I will begin by telling you how the purchase of the fire station would be funded if we decide to go ahead with it and go on to set out my vision for its community use.

Before I start it is important that you understand where I am coming from. I speak as the parish councillor who led the discussions with the Kent Fire & Rescue Service and Redrow Homes as the situation regarding the funding developed. I do not and cannot speak on behalf of the parish council as no decision has yet been made on whether to proceed with the purchase.

The purchase price of the Halling Fire Station building and site is set at £100000. The entire £100000 will be provided by Redrow through Medway Council as part of the financial contribution they have to make to the community as a legal requirement when undertaking a major development. This figure is allocated as part of the total Section 106 agreement between Redrow & Medway and its purpose is specifically stated as an amount to allow HPC to purchase the old fire station – we cannot use this money for any other purpose. If the purchase does not go ahead, the £100000 will return to Medway Council and it is highly unlikely that any of it will be used to directly benefit our village, and KFRS would be free to sell the site for development and keep the entire proceeds. Halling Parish Council will contribute nothing towards the purchase price but of course there will be some legal fees, as there are with any property purchase.

If the parish council wants or needs, for any reason, to dispose of the site in future, the only condition attached to it is that the PC keeps the first £100000 of the sale price but gives 50% of anything over and above that, to Kent Fire & Rescue Service. So, if the site sells for up to and including £100000, the cash **ALL** goes to HPC. If it sells for £200000, HPC gets £150000, the Fire Service £50000. These figures are purely for the purpose of explaining the legal financial obligations of the purchase and Greenleaf Estate Agents have actually given us a verbal estimate of £230,000 should the site be sold for development. I will repeat the figures at the end of my presentation so that everyone is completely clear about the initial financial implications.

So, is the fact that we are being gifted a major asset the main driving force behind my wanting to go ahead with the scheme? Well, yes and no in the sense that we couldn't do it at all if we had to find the purchase price. So here are some of the reasons why the old Fire Station will be an asset to the entire community.

Our first concern was the need to secure the access through the grounds to the Rec which couldn't be maintained without those gates. Then we come to the building. The old Fire Station could be the only community facility in Halling owned by the people of Halling, run by the people of Halling and for the people of Halling. I foresee a huge community use for it by a wide number of different groups in all age ranges. Its location next to the recreation ground would make it ideal for providing changing rooms for example. I know that there are some fantastic ideas for future uses being discussed at great length on

FaceBook already and this sort of community involvement would be vital to the success if we were to go ahead. I would like to see a small catering outlet operating there and interest has already been expressed. It would be ideal for functions such as kids' parties allowing them to be Fire Station themed, or maybe wedding receptions; we could even get hold of an old fire engine to transport the happy couple to and from the church!

Meeting accommodation will be available for groups and societies and it would even accommodate public meetings like this one. With the help of the Fire Service, we could set up a small museum of memories of Halling Fire Station

I would recommend to the parish council that a management sub-committee be set up to deal with the day to day operation of the building and I would recommend that there be community representation on it.

The building would also house the Halling Parish Council Office and meetings which would give an immediate annual saving in excess of £2500. The PC currently operates out of a single office in the community centre, which just about houses two people along with all the office equipment.

The population of Halling Parish will increase by more than 35% when all the Redrow homes are occupied so it is likely that parish council business will increase and more space will be needed. The saving from renting the room at the community centre and from not having to hire rooms for meetings of more than 4 people will contribute to the running of the new building.

As well as these immediate savings, other income streams could bring in funds to support the maintenance and running of the building such as allocated parking bays at the rear of the building for neighbours – something which I have discussed with some of them and there is certainly an appetite for this.

On the subject of maintenance and running costs, it has been suggested that we should have a full structural survey carried out along with other checks and surveys, but the aim has always been to do this with minimal expense, so let's look at the worst case scenario. Let's say we do go ahead with the purchase of the building. Now we know that KFRS look after their buildings because they have to keep them operational, and this one has had a new gas boiler heating system installed in recent years, double glazing fitted throughout, new front doors ironically, and an ongoing programme of redecoration. It shouldn't be in an unfit state, but were we to discover that it was unfit for use or it was condemned in its current state, then we would probably be having another meeting just like this, but it wouldn't be to discuss what we do with the site, it would be to discuss future village improvement projects on which we could spend the £100,000 plus that we suddenly have, even after sale costs, which represents about five times the normal annual budget of the PC.

As I said at the outset, these are my views as a parish councillor and Halling resident, they are not yet those of the parish council, but I very much hope that they will be.

A test of this overall suggestion is what the average man in the street might think, so try to put yourselves in this position. Let's assume you like Ferraris and out of the blue somebody offered you one for £20000 which you knew you could break to spares which would eBay for at least £40000. Let's say you don't have £20000 but I heard of your quandary and said I'd give you the cash because I'm nice like that. This did however come with a warning from me to you that you should consider that a Ferrari costs a little bit more to run than your average car and you could discover that you can't really justify keeping it. However, if you take it apart and eBay the spares then you can keep the £20000 I gave you as a gift, and we'll share any profit – I know I wouldn't say no if I were given such an opportunity!!

In closing, I repeat that this £100000 is not our money and is only for us as a village for this one specific purpose and would represent the total purchase price of a site worth at least double that, and we must remember that the village would keep this £100000 plus half the profit which could itself be in excess of £50000 the site was subsequently sold on.

Ladies and gentlemen, I hope that the great majority of you will be excited about this, and have the same opinion that I have – We should not look a gift horse in the mouth – I think it's a no brainer.

Thank you