

HVCA Open Committee Meeting Minutes

Friday 20th February 2026

Present:

Rachel Prowse (secretary), Jackie Ireland (treasurer and bookings clerk), Julie Lovett

Apologies: Mel Cunningham, Linda Mundy

Also in attendance: Chair and other members of the Parish Council and approximately a dozen others

Welcome

Rachel welcomed everyone to tonight's meeting - one of two open committee meetings held each year - and outlined the Agenda

Site and Playground Development Update

The RoSPA report flagged the need for repair or replacement of most of the playground equipment. Subsequently, the insurance company said the equipment must be removed or repaired and they would not provide cover for public liability insurance. The decision was taken to dispose of the equipment, renovate the site and install a new playground. Three specialist companies (Playscape, Kompan and HAGS) were invited to visit and quote (all experts, installing playgrounds across the county). Initial estimates were around £80k. All three submitted designs and following further visits, HAGS has been chosen: their designs are now available to view.

£20k has been raised towards the cost: £10k from Chris Covey (who has requested the donation be used to fund a swing set in memory of his father); £10k from the Parish Council; £500 from Horseheath Lodge. A contribution from Village Hall funds may be available (£0-5k - to be decided, given other competing VH requirements).

A previous Lottery grant application was rejected and following advice (from neighbouring villages which have made similar applications), a second application was submitted in mid-December for £60k, stating a total project cost of £80k; no response to date but expected soon.

There is the option to begin improving the site - currently an eyesore about which complaints have been received - using monies already donated. In response to questions about the previous site clearance (and cost of same) the treasurer confirmed that funds had been used to remove the equipment and that the concrete slab had been left in situ intentionally and would remain for future use. There is still 'matting' to be cleared. Three quotes have been obtained for 'making good' whilst awaiting funding for the playground / site as

a whole - £4k, £5.5k, £6k - but the playground companies have advised against any such work as they would inevitably disturb this.

A preferred option may be to use the funding already obtained to begin groundworks (HAGS would level and seed the site) and install the swing set. If the lottery application is unsuccessful, the project could then be scaled down; HAGS has produced an alternative £45k design which could be adopted.

Concerns were raised by villagers about a possible conflict of interest in accepting donations from Chris Covey given the biodigester plans; a query about S106 provision for local communities was addressed by a member of the PC. VH treasurer confirmed the historic support from Mr Covey (senior) for the village hall. There was no further discussion on this beyond statement that the two matters did not need to be conflated. The safety fencing currently in place has been provided without charge (sourced by Alan) and will remain throughout the work at considerable cost saving - thanks to Colin Perry.

The design being considered divides the area previously used as the playground: the part nearest the Hall having new play equipment, the end adjacent to the road developed as community space with a gazebo and picnic benches. The plans are not yet on the village website: tonight's meeting was intended to assess options / ideas and invite input from interested parties before posting a final plan.

Responding to concerns that advice was obtained from commercial playground suppliers rather than an independent source, VH treasurer explained the playground had deteriorated over a number of years, the Committee discovered no insurance cover was in place and that, based on the RoSPA report, no such cover could be obtained. The insurance company required written confirmation that the playground had been demolished and cleared before providing cover. As stated previously, three companies were consulted and options considered for both larger and smaller scale plans and costings; repair vs replacement was considered but the equipment was in an advanced state of deterioration and did not meet current safety requirements.

Responding to a query re grant sources other than the Lottery, PC chairman referred to the experience of Weston Colville which showed the significant amount of work required when applying for smaller sums; Horseheath would be better to focus efforts on Lottery application. VH committee members have explored other grant providers which can be pursued if the Lottery is not forthcoming. And Lottery application can be revisited if the larger application is rejected and the project scaled down. VH secretary confirmed that the current

£60k Lottery grant application is the first stage; presumably further details of plans, quotes, suppliers will be requested.

The redevelopment plans were shown and playground apparatus, gazebo, picnic benches and costings discussed. No planning permission is required for the gazebo proposed. The design and layout of the garden and play areas were further clarified; it's not possible to give a precise cost breakdown until final design decisions are made but playground equipment costs likely to be circa £45k (5 items). The decision not to include a zip-wire was questioned and explained: regular and onerous maintenance required (Horseheath and other nearby villages have been advised that zip-wires cannot meet safety and accessibility requirements without regular, long-term maintenance).

Discussion moved to whether or not a PC-VH playground committee had been formed. Consensus that the playground was a VH issue but that PC was supportive in practice and funding.

Site clearance has been started by the gardener already working for the VH. Neighbours have been contacted / meetings arranged to discuss: boundary issues / responsibility / clearance of trees and stumps / fencing. Quotes have been obtained for boundary work.

There were requests from villagers for: copies of the RoSPA report; larger scale copy of proposed playground plan (this will be made available once plan confirmed). Asked whether the old equipment had been sold, VH and PC confirmed disposal as disintegrating / unsafe / no value.

In sum, there are two options: wait until finance is raised for large scale plan with full set of playground equipment or, as favoured by VH committee, begin putting in some equipment. HAGS are happy to proceed on latter basis and this could be funded by monies already held. So e.g. swings and slide could be purchased now with further pieces added as funds raised - a phased approach but with HAGS levelling and seeding the whole site at start.

Some concerns were voiced about funding a gazebo, seats etc rather than fully replacing the playground; one or two expressed strong preference for funding to be directed towards playground equipment. VH treasurer reported Brownies specific request for a gazebo and other requests for places to sit in garden. Once again the zip-wire - previously the most popular piece of equipment - was discussed. VH Sec suggested that zip-wires are most likely

maintained by local authorities rather than on private land as in Horseheath; reiteration of maintenance burden and expert advice to avoid.

The disintegrating herb garden was mentioned: this will be removed. VH treasurer proposed that Stuart Miller should donate and build a new herb bed; he kindly agreed. Memorial benches will be sited on the concrete area, with planters - to be maintained by VH gardener.

Floor Renovation

Three quotes have been obtained for renovation of the VH floor: £3.8k, £3.6k, £2.8k. The last - from a specialist flooring company which has worked on the hall previously - has been accepted. The work will be carried out during the Easter holidays so no bookings will be lost. The floor will be sanded and re-varnished; all companies said there would be shadowing / stains still visible as there has been no renovation for a long time but they will do the best they can. A recommendation that John Greenwood should be consulted, given his previous experience with the floor, will be followed up. Reassurance also given that the floor would not be stained; VH treasurer pointed out that a small area in the corner of the Hall has been treated and could be inspected.

In the context of both the playground and the Hall floor renovation, there was a question about forming working parties as happened in past years - to carry out the work required at much lower cost. VH treasurer reiterated the insurance barrier to this nowadays: public liability is not covered and it is no longer possible from a health and safety perspective. There was further debate about seeking volunteers and hiring the necessary equipment; the committee pointed out the lack of interest in the village in volunteering. The effectiveness or otherwise of going door-to-door to sell tickets or seek volunteers was discussed. The lack of response to, or refusal of, offers of help made by people in the village was pointed out and the committee will look into this issue.

Hall Hire Overview

A variety of groups hire the hall for Pilates, FitSteps, Yoga, Brownies and Scouts; it is used as a Polling Station, for Special Education classes, for private parties, weddings and wakes and dog first-aid. Despite this, the Hall is barely breaking even: income in 2024-25 was £6.4k.

Although the cost of hire is quite low, raising the rate is not considered a viable option if the hall is to remain competitive - particularly as other local halls are cheaper / more appealing. So fundraising events are very important if the Village Hall is to continue as a community resource.

The price of drinks from the bar - relative to the pub, the cricket club etc - was discussed, with one villager pointing out that lower prices would encourage people to use the bar more / stay and chat. Whilst there was some support for this, others disagreed. The option to source drinks at lower cost (e.g. from Sainsbury's) was suggested and will be followed up.

Future of 100 Club

Membership has declined steadily over recent years and the Committee considers it no longer sustainable particularly as the cricket club has started a new 100 Club. PC chair explained that the CC should not compete with the VH; the constituency for the CC 100 Club is with other cricketers in the area and there may be villagers who would participate in both.

There was surprise at the fall in membership. One villager suggested that simply putting a note in The Venture was not sufficient; it was necessary to approach villagers directly as in past years when committee members went door-to-door to sign up members. Currently, 100 Club forms are inserted in The Venture; a couple of villagers suggested those delivering it could knock on doors and encourage signing up to the raffle and social club. It was pointed out that the membership fee has remained the same for 20 or so years and this should be looked at.

Future of the Village Hall

The committee comprises 5 volunteers who meet regularly to plan fundraising events. The same - limited number of - people are involved in and attend these events time and again. This raises the question: is there sufficient interest in maintaining the Village Hall as a space for the community to come together?

Further ways to 'market' VH events and fundraising were suggested: collecting email addresses from those attending; putting forms on the bar during events. VH Sec pointed out that most of those attending events have already signed up to the 100 Club; there are few new attendees. PC chair reiterated the need to look at advertising across the new village website, What's On, The Venture, posters, noticeboard etc. Closer collaboration with the pub should also be explored - they have reported little / no contact from the VH and would like to be more involved.

The PC chair thanked the VH committee for arranging the evening and for their hard work on the playground redevelopment.

