

Case Study: New Rawson Hall, Bolney, West Sussex



Bolney is a village and civil parish in the Mid Sussex district of West Sussex. It lies 11 miles north of Brighton.

The parish has a land area of 3654 acres, with an approximate population of 1,366 (2011 Census). Nearby towns include Burgess Hill to the southeast and Haywards Heath to the east.

Background

In 2001, it became evident that the much-loved Rawson Hall, built in 1881, was no longer adequately serving the village. Concerns around damp, the lack of parking and limited capacity – with no room to expand - led the village hall Chairman to approach Action in rural Sussex's Village Halls Advisor to discuss the future options.

A recommendation was put forward to the Committee to carry out an objective appraisal of their options, including consideration of rebuilding on Bachelor's Field, the recreation ground owned by Mid Sussex District Council. This site would provide them with a central location, good parking and be accessible to elderly residents. It was concluded that a new building, preferably on this field was the only real option.

In 2014, the original building was sold and construction commenced on the Bachelor's Field site and on the 2nd May 2015, the new £1.2 million hall was opened.



Original Rawson Building, donated to the village in 1924, by the Rawson Family

The New Rawson Hall



Through the hard work of the Rawson Committee, other volunteers and the guidance of AirS Village Halls Advisor, the new building has been hailed a great success and now hosts the following facilities

- Large Hall
- Small Hall
- Community Café
- Sport changing rooms
- Office

Benefits to the community

This project has brought multiple economic and social benefits to the area and indeed Mid Sussex.

- Redevelopment of the former site has supported jobs in the building industry and provided affordable housing
- It has secured the future of the pre-schooling and childcare provided by Bolney under Fives
- Sports teams, young people and the health of the community will benefit from grants from Mid Sussex DC and Sport England Inspired Facilities, for new changing facilities and a hall suitable for indoor sports
- With fundraising and grants from funders such as *Garfield Weston Foundation*, the hall is suitable for a wide range of community activities including a Community Café. Therefore helping to reduce isolation for older people and maintaining a supportive, cohesive community
- The hall is home to numerous groups and clubs, including the Bolney Youth Club, Bolney Players, The History Society, the Bolney Horticultural Society, to name just a few.

Obstacles and learnings

This project was not without its challenges and the Rawson Committee successfully tackled them head-on.



- Selling a freehold site to rebuild on leasehold required the formal approval of the village at a public meeting
- A high profile campaign against the project was launched by a group of neighbours which as Charity Trustees, the Rawson Committee had obligations to resolve
- Architectural costs and planning fees meant that initial funds raised were rapidly used up. This resulted in fundraising activity ceasing until the gap in funds was clearly achievable
- Uncertainly surrounding fundraising, owing to the scale of the project. The timing of grants was crucial - Substantial grants were lost due to funders working to different deadlines
- Due to the recession, a developer pulled out just before exchange of contracts which would have delivered the new hall before the old one was demolished
- Convincing Mid Sussex District Council, Bolney Parish Council and West Sussex County Council to put their weight and funding behind it at the same time was crucial
- Finding temporary homes for thriving groups while the new hall was built

To contact Rawson Hall, please visit www.rawsonhallbolney.org

For more information about Action in rural Sussex, please visit www.ruralsussex.org.uk

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