

BUSINESS PLAN

Friends of Meeching Hall

(CIO registration pending)

Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Background
3. Location and Local Community
4. Ownership under Community Access Purchase Scheme (CAPS)
5. Management Committee - Meet the Team
6. Community Engagement
7. Vision for the Business
8. Products, Facilities, Services and Events
9. Marketing Information
10. Operations and Management Model
11. Property and Refurbishment Work
12. Funding Strategy
13. Financial Projections
14. Key Risks and Mitigation Measures
15. Legal and Regulatory Compliance
16. Partners and Supporters
17. Contact Information

Glossary of Terms used

Newhaven Town Council - NTC
Friends of Meeching Hall - FOMH
Charitable Incorporated Organisation - CIO
Asset of Community Value - ACV



1. Executive summary

Friends of Meeching Hall (FOMH) is proud to present a compelling opportunity to acquire and transform Meeching Hall into a thriving, community owned business. Our plan is grounded in thoughtful financials, strong local support, and a proven model of community ownership that delivers both commercial and social returns.

THE CASE FOR COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Meeching Hall is the only building in Newhaven with a stage, and is the oldest civic building we have in the town. Newhaven has been experiencing rapid growth (with 1750 further housing units planned) and increasing demand for social infrastructure. With 150 years of history and a central location in walking distance to 3 carparks, Coaster bus and train station, Meeching Hall is uniquely positioned to serve as a focal point for residents to connect, attend activities & events and experience performing arts. Our nearest comparable towns Seaford and Lewes have 2 theatres and 2 theatres plus 4 performance spaces respectively. We only have Meeching Hall and Hillcrest (a hall without a stage/backstage) whilst Council Tax in Newhaven and Lewes is charged at the same rate.

KEY STRENGTHS OF OUR PROPOSAL

- Local backing: 100 members of FOMH and growing numbers on FaceBook.
- Flint Share Offer: People like the Flint as our symbol for the shares and 10 people have already pledged in advance of the Flints going public on 26/27 June.
- Positive impact on creatives: Newhaven is lucky to have a large number of artists, musicians and theatre people living here. They all need a venue to rehearse and showcase their work. Meeching Hall can become a much-needed hub for performing arts.
- Strong social values: Meeching Hall will host a diverse range of events and provide a welcoming space for all ages.
- Investor returns: After Year 3, investors receive interest payments of at least 2%.

INVESTMENT PROPOSITION

Acquisition & Funding

In March 2026 FOMH as holders of the ACV Registration for Meeching Hall gave notice of their intention to bid, triggering the 6-month Moratorium. Meeching Hall is with a commercial estate agent Lawson and on the market for bids over £200K plus

VAT. Our aim is that the transaction will be agreed by 30 September 2026 (end date of Moratorium) because after this it is open to all comers.

Our plans are to finance the purchase and building works and improvements through:

- Community Share Offer: Targeting £250,000–£300,000, with affordable minimum investment of £50.

- Grants & donations: Ongoing applications and local fundraising. Many funds will be open to us once we own the building.

Investor Benefits

- Democratic ownership: Each investor becomes a member with an equal vote, regardless of investment size.

* Modest investment return: From year 4 there will be an interest payment of minimum 2% to be reviewed annually.

- Long-term security: The value of shares is protected, and the asset is locked into community ownership.

FINANCIAL OUTLOOK AND RISK MANAGEMENT

- Growth potential: Using the information provided by NTC as part of their annual budget they indicated that Meeching Hall brings an income of £204 per week. This is without active marketing and with a poor booking system. FOMH have worked out that if we are able to book half the hours available, and taking into account concessionary rates, we should get an income of £924 per week feasibly in Yr 1. This is without hosting our own ticketed events.
- Costs: NTC shows a weekly cost of £310 for utilities and Council tax and taking into account rising utilities cost we would budget for £500
- Initial management: The plan relies initially on volunteers to manage admin and caretaking of the hall. We are blessed to have multi-skilled members of FOMH.

BUILDING WORK AND REFURBISHMENT

FOMH have received offers of work at cost from local tradesmen as well as a substantial amount of money for refurbishment from local businessmen.

We have a list of grants and funds we can apply for as soon as the building has been purchased.

CONCLUSION

This is a rare opportunity to invest in a much-loved local Hall with proven social connection. FOMH and community investors will help secure a vital community asset, strengthen the local economy, and build a legacy for future generations.

2. Background

Meeching Hall was first used for meetings as an Agricultural Hall and appeared on the OS Map of 1874 as part of Meeching Court Farm. It became Homestreu Lodge of Freemasons in 1921 and became known locally as 'The Masonic Hall'. In 1968 it was taken over by Newhaven Urban District Council and then sold to Newhaven Town Council who reported in their Annual Report 1981/1982:



'COMMUNITY CENTRES: The Town Council has over the past two years been very much aware of the need to provide Social Centres which can be available for use by the general public at very low hire charges and the popularity of these as evidenced by the heavy bookings is proof of the wisdom of this policy. The Meeching Hall, purchased outright for the people of Newhaven in April 1981, is our principal Social Centre and is equipped with stage and committee room facilities.'

In their 1983/84 Annual Report NTC went on to report complete re-decoration of Meeching Hall including a new fire alarm system and new furniture.

So Newhaven Town Council have owned Meeching Hall since 1981 and after the initial refurbishment there has been minimal planned maintenance. Repairs have taken place as and when because they were needed to keep the building viable. As a result there needs to be money spent on refurbishment and there are some quick wins to be had - for example putting insulation (with a grant) in the massive loft area

would save significantly on heating costs.

Meeching Hall has been the main Community Centre for Newhaven since it was bought by Newhaven Town Council in 1981. Previous to that it fulfilled this function but was leased from Lewes District Council. It is the only building in the town with a purpose-built stage and parking.

FOMH registered Meeching Hall as an Asset of Community Value (ACV) with Lewes District Council (LDC) in August 2023 expiring in August 2028.

In 2022, concerns were raised about Meeching Hall being considered alongside Ouseside House (2-6 Forth Road) for demolition to make way for an L-shaped block of flats 'interlocking' with Meeching Court. Friends of Meeching Hall was constituted as an Unincorporated Association in February 2023 and called a public meeting of local residents in April. Most of those at the meeting were strongly opposed to the idea of losing Meeching Hall. There was also concern that the area where Meeching Hall is situated is already built-up, and a further 24+ units would strain the local infrastructure and destroy the character of the area. There were concerns that it was difficult to rent the hall from NTC, and out of reach of many community groups because the rates had been significantly hiked in recent years.

A group of local residents who were passionate about keeping Meeching Hall at the heart of the community became members of Friends of Meeching Hall and made public their concerns in the press and social media. Local Councillors reassured their constituents that there were no plans in place, and gave the assurance that they wanted to best for Newhaven. The message was: Meeching Hall is safe and there were no plans to sell or demolish it. Members agreed FOMH would retain a watching brief.

Then an item appeared in the Agenda for the full Council meeting of 12 February 2026 that Councillors would be voting on whether to dispose of Meeching Hall. Looking back to previous Council meetings to see what discussions FOMH had missed there had been comments about consultants undertaking an asset review but no details. A subsequent FOI request yielded 2 reports by Clear Futures with the surveys of the buildings (157 pages) redacted, and indeed the recommendation was to sell Meeching Hall, the old Mortuary and the Cemetery Buildings. Money obtained from these sales it suggested should be used to rebuild Eastside Social Centre used by Nippers @ £577,000.

Ten members of FOMH attended the Council meeting of which there had been 6 days Notice and were told there was no provision for anyone to speak. The mayor relented and said the public gallery could have a few speakers @ 2 minutes each.

Without preparation the following points were raised from the public gallery:

1) where was the community engagement for this decision?; (it was found later Clear Futures engaged mainly with councillors in various workshops and presentations);

2) there was no warning of this and as registered holders of the ACV we understood

that FOMH should have been kept informed of NTC's plans (which it later transpired were already in place & disposal of MH agreed at Full Council November 2024 after presentation of the 2nd Clear Futures Report, and today was merely the confirmation vote for that decision);

3) that the argument that the Hall did not make money was spurious as it had not been actively marketed and the booking system was poor/obstructive. It was said that if this was a person and not a hall this would be a case of constructive dismissal!;

4) for many years the Hall has been more and more run down making it unattractive to rent especially in Winter with the inadequate and noisy heating;

5) the backstage & kitchen areas needed renovation too - was there even a maintenance budget for the building?;

6) It was said that Eastside Social Centre has a significant problem with mold so why is it better to save that?;

7) Far from being underused Meeching Hall was home to MAD (Meeching Amateur Dramatics) since the 1970's and lately Ignite Theatre too. Not to mention AA, Pilates, ballroom dancing, Repair Cafe, Sea Cadets, Gospel Church on Sundays and celebratory, consultation events and all NTC meetings. In fact, the meeting about putting Newhaven forward for 2028 Town of Culture was due to be hosted by NTC (leading the bid) in Meeching Hall the following week - in the only community hall of any size and history which in that same week was being voted to be sold!;

8) Meeching Hall is the oldest and largest community building in Newhaven, it is near the town centre and the only building with a purpose-built stage;

9) The comment was made that Community Buildings were supposed to be subsidised, that is why we pay Council Tax.

Councillors then spoke and most said they were reluctant but the hall had to go because it was underused and couldn't be subsidised by the people of Newhaven any longer. It was argued that Eastside Social Centre hosted Nippers which served 130 families and was more valuable to the community.

Two councillors spoke in defense of Meeching Hall with one making the point that as a new councillor she had not been privy to the Clear Futures reports and despite requesting sight of these before the meeting had not received the reports and was unconvinced by the arguments to sell. The other councillor made the point that there should be a caveat if the hall went up for sale to ensure that it would retain some community function. At the vote: 2 voted against, 7 in favour, and there was 1 abstention. Councillors voted to put in the community use caveat. This was later reversed in an 'email vote' held by the Town Clerk after discussion with the Commercial Estate Agent who advised against it. Instead an Overage Clause was added (this means if a developer buys the building and later makes significant profits a percentage of this goes back to the NTC).

FOMH called a meeting of members on 19th March 2026 to share that Meeching Hall was to be sold by NTC. There was widespread dismay and the resolve to look on this

as a positive opportunity to purchase the building for the community. FOMH committee were mandated to:

1) Register with LDC that FOMH wished to bid. This was done and triggered the Moratorium which runs out 30 September 2026
2) Register FOMH as a CIO with the Charity Commission. This application was lodged on 24 March and by return we received an email that due to overwhelming demand there was a 24-week delay before new applications could be assessed
3) Open a FOMH Bank Account. This has proved very difficult as banks (10 banks ranging from online, High Street to specialist community banks were tried) won't lend to organisations looking to crowdfund and are reluctant to entertain an Association pending Charity Registration. We are currently working with NatWest Business section and hope to have an account there early July.
4) Four initial Trustees for the CIO were voted in: Diets Verschuren (Chair), Lisa Fairfield (Secretary), Donna Lonsdale-O'Brien and Siou Hannam

The FOMH committee have engaged in the following since 19 March 2026:

- We completed and filed our CIO application 24 March and received an email to say that due to the high volume of applications the current delay for the Charity Commission to review new applicants is minimum 24 weeks. This was an unexpected blow.

- We spent considerable time looking for a suitable bank account and went to Metro. After a lengthy in person interview, submitting all our paperwork and 3 weeks of delay the Metro Bank rated our application 'complex' and decided to open it for the FOMH Association but then immediately blocked it from functioning until our charity registration comes through. There was no warning of this and it was a set back.
- We are currently opening an account with NatWest Business Service and are in the final stages.

- After much research and attending a Crowdfunding Seminar we also unfortunately discovered that banks these days don't approve of crowdfunding platforms (money laundering legislation cited) unless you are a registered charity (and even then only very few banks allow it).

- We have had to change our fundraising strategy accordingly.

- We are now urgently seeking philanthropic pledges and community investment as described below.

- At the end of June - 26th 6-10pm and 27th 4-10pm - we have organised a Festival Fundraiser featuring a line up of Newhaven musicians. All the musicians and Cliff Dowding Sound are giving their time for free, and the CEO of Lanoguard is offering sponsorship. Our thanks also to Lizzie Lower of Hospitable Environment CIC for supporting the event by hosting the ticket sales. As well as selling tickets we are requesting donations if people can't make the dates and welcome people to volunteer their time. This showcase will have the dual purpose of kicking off our fundraising and also showing what the Hall and performance space can offer.

- The Festival Fundraiser will be the launch of our Community Asset Purchase Scheme (CAPS) to allow community investment. 'Flint' shares will be offered @ £200 per Flint. There will be a Share Certificate with a choice of Flint Designs created by local artist Caroline Marsland. Share certificates will be guaranteed to retain their face value and will attract a modest %age interest rate payable annually. In the absence of a Crowdfunder platform to collect the money and 'hold' it till the target is reached we propose to use a pledge system. People wanting to purchase one or more Flints would sign an agreement to pledge what they will purchase. Once our target amount in pledges and donations is reached we would call in these Promissory Notes and issue the shares. This money would then be paid to NTC to purchase Meeching Hall. A Share Offer document explaining the details has been prepared and will be available via our website.

- At the end of June we will be launching our Website www.meechinghall.com It is being built by a web designer at cost. On the site will be available the history of Meeching Hall as well as our plans for its future at the heart of Newhaven cultural life. There will be a photo gallery and some short films featuring the history of Meeching Hall and local residents made for us by Jenny and Mike Flood, also giving of their time freely. There will also be a 'Donate' button for contributions to our fund.

- We have elevated our social media profile on Instagram and Facebook. We realise many local residents prefer flyers and posters so we have also designed and distributed these.

- FOMH have looked beyond the purchase of Meeching Hall and we have a list of interested hirers as well as appropriate grants that can be bid for to improve the building, the facilities and to grow the hall as a community business. We are fortunate that a local professional fundraiser who advises community projects has come forward to help with future planning and to identify and support suitable bids.

- The Newhaven Chamber of Commerce following a presentation by Lisa has also offered support through some of its members, and various local trades people have offered practical help.

- We were interviewed by Clive Mellor of Seahaven FM and in an interview which aired Wednesday 17 June we were able to tell their audience (35,000 regular listeners) about the Festival Fundraiser and our Flint Share pledges. We have been invited back to update on progress.

- From our efforts and networking it has become clear to us how much Meeching Hall means to Newhaveners. We are extremely heartened by support for FOMH to date.

- Committee members have met with a number of Councillors on an individual basis to explain our vision and have been pleased that councillors have stated that it is their fervent wish for Meeching Hall to go to a community group. Since it is the Councillors who will make this call it is good news indeed.

3. Location & local community

TOWN AND SURROUNDING AREA



Meeching Hall is situated on Fort Road in Newhaven. It has the benefit of secure parking in front of the building so that performers, caterers and workmen have easy access. Meeching Hall is ideally placed for all transport links. A 5 minute walk from the train station with frequent trains to Lewes and from there to London. And a 5-10 minute walk to the Coaster Bus 12 which goes every 10 minutes to Brighton in one direction and Eastbourne the other. Easy walking distance to three public carparks, and finally Meeching Hall is within walking distance of the ferry to France.



Newhaven is a coastal town with light industry and a fishing fleet. The oldest RNLI station (200 yrs in 2025) in the UK is based here. We also have The Fort which has recently benefited from a £2M refurb and is a major tourist attraction for the area.

POPULATION AND DEVELOPMENT

In 2024 Newhaven population stood at 13,583 but with 1750 housing units approved over the coming years this will likely increase substantially.

The English Indices of Deprivation 2025 provide a high-resolution snapshot of the social and economic challenges facing Newhaven. In a town where deprivation is concentrated in specific neighborhoods a community hall is not just a building—it is a critical "infrastructure of opportunity" that mitigates the impacts of these statistics. Newhaven continues to face a "tale of two towns" scenario, where some areas are relatively affluent while others fall within the most deprived 10-20% in England and so Meeching Hall acts as a social safety net.

The 2025 indices show that East Sussex has a significantly older population than the national average. On the other hand, 23% of the population are under > 17years. The versatility of the hall could meet the needs of all. Historical buildings can serve as tangible links to the community's past, contributing to a sense of identity and continuity. Conversely, losing yet more cultural heritage risks a decrease in community morale and pride For elderly residents, this is often their only defense against the loneliness that exacerbates the "Health Deprivation" identified in the report.

It provides space for adult education classes, training, and youth clubs. Retaining a community hall in Newhaven isn't just about "having a place to meet"; it is a direct intervention against the Index of Multiple Deprivation.

Newhaven has a growing population and annual performances with the local dance school enables creatives of all ages to have valuable stage experience. Newhaven has a population of circa 14k of which 23% are 0-17 years and there is upcoming housing development for 1750 units. Community spaces enabling social cohesion are of paramount importance.

Engagement in the arts is a proven mitigator of "Education and Skills" deprivation. It builds soft skills

Other venues in Newhaven:

> *Hillcrest Centre* rents out rooms and has a hall (capacity 70), but no dedicated stage. Hillcrest Centre is mostly booked up and is open Mon-Fri. It occasionally opens weekends for special events. It does not put on plays and music gigs as a rule.
>
> *Marine Workshops (BN9)* hosts art exhibitions in both the Atrium and on the Top Floor. It is not an ideal venue for music performance because of the acoustics / lack of seating, although one gig has been held in the Atrium. It is not suitable for theatre or dance.
>
> *The Sidings* is an outdoor piece of ground where with funding a temporary stage/tent can be mounted for Summer performances. It is funding and weather dependent to run its Summer programme.
>
> *Room above the Ship pub.* This is where MAD (Meeching Amateur Dramatics) are now based. They also perform there - the venue is up stairs and holds 40.

Meeching Hall has a capacity of 110 in the hall and 30 in the upstairs function room. There is disabled access to the hall via the side door. It operates throughout the year and has a dedicated stage and backstage area. It is our only performance venue in Newhaven which with its growing population is likely to experience more rather than less demand for live events.

Newhaven and Lewes pay the same Council Tax and Lewes, by contrast, has Lewes Little Theatre and All Saints Church as performance venues as well as the Town Hall (classical

music concerts with a full orchestra) & The Depot (cinema and live music) as well as The Subud Centre and Charleston in Lewes (spaces to hold events and arts exhibitions).

FOMH are resolved to safeguard the scarce resource of Meeching Hall for the community of Newhaven because once it has gone it will not come back.

DRIVING REVENUE GROWTH BY SERVING THE COMMUNITY'S NEEDS

A community-owned Meeching Hall will look to collaborate and support as many local groups, clubs and organisations as possible to host their events and meetings at the community discounted rate. We will also actively pursue theatre groups, musicians and dance troupes to use our hall and create a programme of diverse performances hosted at Meeching Hall.

By proactively nurturing relationships with community groups we aim to become a social hub, somewhere for Newhavenerers to connect. This will foster the town's sense of community and build a regular audience to support long-term financial sustainability.

4. Ownership under Community Asset Purchase Scheme (CAPS)

FOMH have adopted the CAPS model to fund the purchase of Meeching Hall. This model was earlier used to set up and fund the Newhaven Rowing Gig.

Key features of the CAPS include:

- Meeching hall shall be run for the benefit of the community
- Meeching Hall shall be run by a Management Committee elected by the members and as set out in the FOMH CIO Constitution
- A member is a shareholder in accordance with the governing rules of the CIO
- membership is open to all, enabling wide ownership by members of the community and by interested businesses and organisations
- Every member, irrespective of the level of their shareholding, shall have an equal say in how the business is run, i.e. one member, one vote
- Profits shall be reinvested into the business or otherwise applied to further the objectives of FOMH CIO
- Subject to maintenance of prudent reserves, and at the sole discretion of the Management Committee, any surplus may be used to satisfy shareholder redemptions or to make interest payments to members on share capital or loans

FOMH CIO will be run by a Management Committee (the 'Committee'), the members of which will be elected and will serve as set out in the Constitution. The current members of the Committee were constituted from Friends of Meeching Hall Association, elected on 19 March 2026. They will step down at the first Annual Members' Meeting of the Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) and will be eligible for election to the Committee alongside other members. A quorum is present

at Members' Meetings if 5 members or 10% of the members entitled to vote at the meeting (whichever is greater) are present in person.

In accordance with the Constitution, the Committee shall comprise of 3 to12 members, of which up to one quarter may be co-opted. The Committee shall elect from amongst themselves a Chairperson, Vice-Chairperson, Treasurer and Secretary. All members of the Committee shall sign a code of conduct as agreed by the Committee and shall comply with the terms of such code throughout their tenure.

In addition to electing the Committee, members will be able to influence the affairs and rules of the CIO and the operation of Meeching Hall by putting forward motions that may be voted on at an Annual Members' Meeting, as set out in the Constitution.

The Committee will be responsible for the operational management and governance of the CIO, including ensuring that appropriate procedures, policies and risk management are in place. The Committee shall meet at intervals it considers appropriate to meet its roles and responsibilities.

The Committee shall from time to time assemble additional sub-committees to manage or oversee certain activities of the CIO (e.g. communications with members and the public; renovation and ongoing general maintenance of the hall; community events at the hall; volunteers). Such sub-committees will always include a member of the Committee and may otherwise be drawn from members of the FOMH CIO and the wider community with relevant experience.

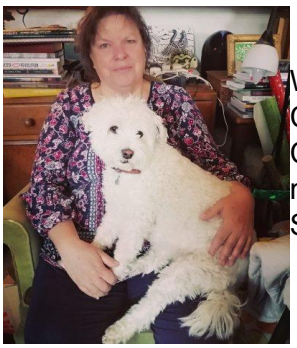
5. Management Committee - Meet the team

The current Management Committee was constituted from Friends of Meeching Hall Association and elected on 19 March 2026 to be the first Trustees of the Friends of Meeching Hall CIO (registration pending). They are founding members of the Association and are volunteers. They receive no remuneration and have no personal financial interest in the CIO beyond any community shares they may purchase.

At the first Annual Members' Meeting post-purchase, all current Management Committee members will stand down. They will then be eligible to stand for re-election to the new Management Committee, along with all other members.

Prior to appointment, a member of the Management Committee must declare any interests and potential conflicts. All members of the Management Committee must update this declaration annually, which will be lodged with the Secretary.

Eurydice (Diets) Verschuren (Chair)



With a social work degree, MA in learning disabilities and Diploma in the Management of Care Services I worked for a number of Local Authorities (East Sussex, Manchester, Chester, Halton) around the UK, managing a wide variety of adult services culminating in my appointment as Deputy Director Older People in Halton (1979-2000). I moved to East Sussex, starting in post as a Service Manager for Learning Disability. I then became a

strategic commissioner of services (Mental Health, Substance Misuse and OP Dementia) for East Sussex County Council 2000-2010.

Taking early retirement I pursued a Nursing Degree and worked at Chailey Heritage with Children with ABI and in Home from Hospital aftercare services in Brighton & Hove as well as Rural Sussex (out of Haywards Heath). 2010-2019.

In 2019 I moved to Newhaven and have been involved with a number of charities: Hillcrest Community Centre (about 3 years as volunteer & subsequently volunteer manager post-COVID and lastly Chairperson), Leg to Stand, Hand to Feed (Treasurer 2020-25), Centre for Ecotherapy, Stanmer Park (2024-26), Haven Young Creatives - A Different Light (Collaborative bid writer 2023-ongoing).

In February 2023 I was part of the original group to set up Friends of Meeching Hall. Currently I am Chairperson and actively involved in fundraising to keep this Hall for Newhaven. I am adept at bid writing and have in the past been very successful. There are a number of appropriate grants to go for once we have secured the building.

At Carlton House (my home and the correspondence address for Friends of Meeching Hall) I have built an art studio where people come for small bespoke courses. I also run a dog-friendly AirBnB. 3 years ago I bid for the money to form Newhaven's Folk Orchestra 'The Dockside Barrel Scrapers' which I manage. As a keen gardener I overlook Meeching Hall and when I am out planting, weeding and watering I have plenty of opportunity to dream about everything that could happen there!

Lisa Fairfield



I've lived in West and East Sussex for 35 years and trained as an actress 25 yrs ago. I've worn many hats in my times and moved to Newhaven in 2021 when I set up Ignite Theatre, successfully producing 9 shows in Meeching Hall. I just love this hall! Currently I'm a mother, gardener and teaching assistant on supply. I've also worked in housing for vulnerable adults and young people for 25 years for BHT and Carr-Gomm and was a housing officer for the YMCA. I'm willing to be a happy helper and good at getting folk together with a passion for community.

Donna Lonsdale-O'Brien



I grew-up in Newhaven, a working port town on the south coast of England. My first childhood experience of attending a disco was at Meeching Hall itself - this is still a vivid memory, one of great promise!

Whilst raising three wonderful children, I much enjoyed my work as a Holistic Therapist, working in the community in a range of settings with older people, students & those with extra needs. Alongside this work and my family commitments, I studied at Birkbeck College, University of London and the University of Sussex, much enjoying these richly rewarding learning experiences.

A working highlight has been playing a part in the East Sussex iteration of the, 'It Takes a Village to Raise a Child', (VRAC) pilot-project. 6 European partners worked on local VRAC pilot-projects, all sharing the same aims. These 6 partners were based in: the UK, Belgium, France and the Netherlands, and all worked collaboratively to successfully deliver the separate pilot-projects in their specific locations. The cross-border pilot-project existed to support young people and their families to improve their wellbeing and to overcome the barriers they faced in engaging with education. VRAC East Sussex

worked with young people aged 11-18 years and their families or carers. I designed & delivered the VRAC Wellbeing Service, and co-designed and delivered other aspects of the wider VRAC project. I currently work for a leading national fuel-poverty charity, working to support a range of clients, raise awareness and achieve enduring change. I much enjoy working one-to -one with the clients and also delivering events and talks across East Sussex.

In my personal life, home renovations have taken up much time over many years - I am proud of my tenacity, the skills I have gathered, and the homes I have created for my family. I love music and radio, I am a skilled wildlife-friendly gardener and possess excellent compost-making skills. The natural world is a real joy to me, and I seek to encourage people to preserve & protect our planet.

I was a founding member of the group, Friends of Meeching Hall, (FOMH), hoping to preserve this beautiful building for the community to enjoy for years to come. Due to changing working commitments it was necessary for me to exit the group. However, I have recently returned to FOMH to further our shared aims to continue the next chapter of Meeching Hall's story.

Siou Hannam



Siou is a Drama therapist, Youth Coach and theatre practitioner. She originally trained as a dancer then went on to work as a Lecturer in Performing Arts for many years. She is best known in the Outdoor Arts, performing and touring small and large scale shows both in the U.K. and world- wide.

Her career began with Emergency Exit Arts working on community arts projects in London. She remained a company member for 30 years,

Siou has since collaborated with artists of diverse backgrounds & art forms. She has directed many arts projects in a variety of settings, from a Storytelling Residency in a prison, to collaborating on a site-specific installation on a beach (commissioned by Brighton Festival).

In 2021 Siou founded Haven Young Creatives to give young people in Newhaven an opportunity to access the arts and to share her knowledge. She is a Trustee for Friends Of Meeching Hall & is passionate about saving the only theatre in Newhaven.

6. Community engagement

Keeping people engaged and informed throughout the process of purchasing Meeching Hall under community ownership (and beyond) is key to its success.

FOMH CIO will ensure stakeholders are well-informed by maintaining regular dialogue across relevant channels and adhering to six key principles i.e. all communications and engagement activities are clear, realistic, honest, inclusive, positive and well-organised. Engagement activities to date (and planned) are outlined below:

Friends of Meeching Hall PUBLIC MEETINGS

Two meetings were held in Meeching Hall on 19th March and 23 April 2026. Approximately 38 people attended the first meeting, and 25 the second meeting. People were updated re the Council vote to sell Meeching Hall. Members were reminded that FOMH had registered it as an ACV and what this meant. The meeting voted that we should bid for the hall as a community group. They also voted that the Association should register as a Charity and elected the initial four Trustees, and that we should open a bank account to commence fundraising.



On 28 May a further meeting was scheduled but due to time constraints a Newsletter was emailed instead to the 100 FOMH members on our mailing list.

Additional public meetings will be arranged in the future (where considered appropriate).

MAKING A FILM WITH CONTRIBUTIONS FROM LOCAL RESIDENTS

Over the weekend of 9-10 May local filmmakers Mike and Jenny Flood recorded memories and opinions from local people about Meeching Hall. Also a separate film about the Hall's history. This has been used in Social Media posts and can be seen in full on our YouTube Channel: Meeching Hall. Also via links from our Website: www.meechinghall.com

Meeching Hall SURVEY

Ignite Theatre kindly shared the results of their survey which they have sent out after every theatre performance they put on at Meeching Hall. The survey elicited

in addition to comments about the show glowing descriptions of the timeless nature of the hall, and what a fantastic venue it is. Here are some audience comments from the surveys:

“

As Newhaven resident I witnessed a wonderful bringing together of community and professional performance at the highest level. West End could not do better. I have seen excellent recent West End shows. This original work should go far. It brings new life and hope to the future of Meeching Hall as a centre worthy of levelling up funding. Thank you for supporting Newhaven with levelling up funds. I hope the Council spends it wisely and supports the home of Ignite Theatre

Meeching Hall with it's community history and atmosphere of past Newhaven generations was the perfect venue to house this event.

That it featured members of the community, was brilliantly conceived and performed, and Meeching Hall was the perfect setting!

It is potentially a life changing event for kids seeing the shows as well as performing for the first time, as Newhaven has been particularly low on creative and inspiring performing arts.

Please comment on how you feel about Meeching Hall as a venue and how important it is to have a purpose built stage in Newhaven for performance?

Answer Choices	Responses		
Extremely important		82.26%	51
Very important		11.29%	7
Somewhat important		6.45%	4
Not so important		0.00%	0
Not at all important		1.61%	1

3	Although the venue is small, I have seen it superbly used by this company three times now. Each time the overall
5	experience well worth the visit.

3	A space for people to express themselves artistically is fantastic and should be treasured.
3	

3	Every town needs community spaces like this hall, where young and old can come together to make memories,
2	learn new things, have fun, get to participate.

3	This is a really first-class community asset very close to the centre of town. The stage and other purpose built theatr
0	facilities set it apart from other venues (such as the Hillcrest). It is also a lovely and well-used building that needs to maintained and developed for even more projects and activities that benefit the people of Newhaven.

2	Holding the shows in Meeching Hall, means that there is a very sound relationship with Newhaven and the
9	Community.

2	Despite living in and visiting my family in Newhaven, I had never been to Meeting Hall before, and probably wouldn't
8	have gone, but I love storytelling and was intrigued by the title of the piece. When I stepped into the theatre I felt flooded with memories of similar public spaces I went to as a child (now gone). Just seeing the coat hooks made me think of all the generations of coats and hats that had hung there, so it felt like I was really part of an historical audience community. The excitement of looking up to the high stage (where everyone could see the action), and seeing the beautiful vintage curtain rails was very special. These experiences are impossible to quantify, but they are the glue of community; they are so easily overlooked, but in reality, truly precious. There are so few spaces where families can enjoy events together that have this ring of history, belonging and continuity. Meeching Hall is a

valuable hidden gem of Newhaven. If it was lost, that would surely be terrible shame and I fear, an act of cultural vandalism.

I was really moved by the performance and how proud I felt to live in Newhaven with this amazing theatre on our doorstep

It's a local and very accessible space

Many thanks to Ignite theatre for bringing the community together in such a special way at Meeching hall. It's a great theatre/stage venue for folks in and around Newhaven, and it was lovely to see an audience of all ages enjoying such a professional performance involving an ensemble of local community creative groups - very positive, uplifting and heartwarming...

This is the only purpose built theatre space in an intact historic building. No other space could truly fill this function in the town. I hope it will continue to be treasured by the local community and council.

Meeching Hall is a great venue for Newhaven, and for theatre in general. I'd love to see a larger more up to date venue built somewhere as well!

We are fortunate to have Ignite Theatre in Newhaven and Meeching Hall is a great venue for them. I love the way they use the whole building including dressing the cafe upstairs in appropriate style such as the wartime cafe in Gabriel and using all the exits to become ways for the actors to make their entrances and exits.

It is essential for a town the size of Newhaven to have a council owned/ run venue. For all members of community at an affordable cost. There are no other alternatives. It would be good to have a disabled toilet.

Meeching Hall works well for small town productions!

I happen to love an old-fashioned hall. Decades of community events become part of the fabric of the space.

…a lovely venue and stage.

Please see comments above. It is essential to Level Up Meeching Hall. The Norcross Dancers are a mixed ability group of children who were given an unprecedented opportunity to perform with professionals of the highest calibre. The Newhaven Young Creatives rose to the occasion. And the local amateur adults were given the opportunity to shine to a full house of a multi aged audience.

Small community venues provide a rich source of community for the arts that is affordable and accessible for the local population. Venues like Meeching hall offer an alternative source of creativity for the wider public, that is both affordable and free of commercial interests, allowing ground roots organisations to develop and express in a positive way for the community.

A lovely little theatre.

I don't live in Newhaven. I've seen two things at the hall and enjoyed both.

”

What an excellent opportunity for a production in Newhaven. A great venue.

All the above comments are drawn from the surveys that Ignite Theatre distributed post their productions. There are further survey results that can be made available on request.

FESTIVAL FUNDRAISER AT MEECHING HALL 26/27 JUNE

FOMH are putting on a 2-day music event which will have the dual purpose of showing what kind of event Meeching Hall is capable of hosting, as well as being

the start of our fundraising campaign, including the launch of our Flint Share Offer Pledge.

All of our acts are based in Newhaven, and the talent is fantastic. All the musicians as well as Clifford Dowding organising the lighting and sound are giving their time for free. Lizzie Lower of Hospitable Environment is hosting our online ticket sales. All the people acting as box office, running the bar, stewards etc are volunteers. Behind the scenes more volunteers are putting up posters and baking cakes. This is a true community effort.

FESTIVAL FUNDRAISER



MEECHING HALL

LIVE MUSIC

Friday 26th June 6pm - 10pm

Saturday 27th June 4pm - 10pm

TicketTailor

WEEKEND OR DAY TICKETS

FRIENDS.OF.MEECHING.HALL

Friends.of.meechinghall@gmail.com

MEECHING HALL

MEECHING — HALL —

Newhaven Talent

Friday



Barely 18, studying music and thrilled to be performing in her hometown, be ready for emotional pop ballads with heartfelt vocals and powerful storytelling.

Jasmine



Swing Swing Swing 6.30pm

Get your dancing shoes on to a 12 piece band of semi-professional musicians Playing the tunes everyone knows and loves from 30s onwards. 7pm

Saturday



Nick Pynn World renowned folk artist plays alongside..



Ouse Valley Morris Dancers 4.30pm



Pemma Thoughtful, folksy singer song writer accompanied by guitar, dreamy and hypnotic. 5.15pm



Dandelion Charm An acoustic duo with their own blend of original Folk/ Prog. 5.45pm



Rick Sharpe You've seen him around looking dapper, now hear him play! Songs from the 40s to 90s. 6.30pm



Imogen Ryall Vocal & Roderick Hart Piano Jazz Duo 7pm

Covers Brothers 8-pm



A to Z Listers. Alphabetically speaking they're AOK..
The audience is invited to shout out a band and they will play one of their songs; from Abba to Zappa!

TicketTailor

SAVE OUR STAGE
Friends of Meeching Hall

Sponsored by Lanoguard

VOLUNTEERS

Members of FOMH (100) have offered to volunteer time and expertise in their gift.

HIGH PROFILE SUPPORT

We have the enthusiastic support of Sir Peter Field, Freeman of Newhaven and served as Lord Lieutenant of East Sussex 2008 - 2021. He has written the message of support in our Flint Share Offer.

“I wholeheartedly endorse FOMH in their prodigious efforts to safeguard Meeching Hall for the people of Newhaven, and I hope you will support them in their efforts to make sure the historic Meeching Hall is around to serve the community for, at least, another 150 years.”

Sir Peter Field

LOCAL MP SUPPORT

Since embarking on our fundraising campaign we have kept our MP James MacCleary (who lives in the same road as Meeching Hall and is passionate about Newhaven) informed and our members have also written him a number of letters. This is a response on James’ behalf by his assistant Ben dated 1 June 2026:

“Thank you for highlighting the situation regarding Meeching Hall. James recognises the important role the Hall has played in the local community over many years and agrees it represents a valuable asset with significant potential. It is very encouraging to hear about the dedication and capability of the team behind the community bid, and the breadth of uses being considered for the space.

Community-led projects such as this can play a vital role in strengthening local connections and providing sustainable, inclusive facilities for residents. We will certainly continue to follow developments closely and will happily give consideration to supporting the initiative where possible. Understandably James’s diary is very full, but we would be keen to hear if there are any particular areas where this support would be useful.”

CREATIVE NEWHAVEN

Creative Newhaven was set up by NEZ to encourage networking and collaboration between the growing creative community that has settled in Newhaven in the past 10+ years and businesses and local government. NEZ also fund a Newhaven Creative Producer post and a part time administrator. The group is chaired by the current Director of The Towner in Eastbourne.

June 2026

To whom it may concern

On behalf of Creative Newhaven, I would like to express our support for The Friends of Meeching Hall in their efforts to secure funding to purchase Meeching Hall. Creative Newhaven is a network of around 30 creative practitioners and cultural organisations, who are all contributing, in a variety of ways, to Newhaven's ever-growing reputation as a thriving, culturally active town. We feel it is important that community spaces in Newhaven are protected for creative use by the community. This is particularly important in the case of Meeching Hall, which is the only dedicated performance space with stage facilities in Newhaven. Experience from regeneration programmes elsewhere demonstrates the importance and value of protecting existing community and cultural assets, alongside investment in new infrastructure support. With this in mind, we fully support The Friends of Meeching Hall campaign.

Yours sincerely

Niamh Pearce
Chair, Creative Newhaven (Co-Director, Towner)

On behalf of Creative Newhaven Members, as follows:

Yvette Aeberhard	Seahaven Academy
Sara Clifford	Inroads Productions
Chris Cook	Newhaven Art Club
Jim Callender	Oceanic Woodstore
Jenny Flood	Creative Newhaven
Siou Hannam	Haven Young Creatives
Eleanor Johnson-Bullock	Hospitable Environment/Individual creative practitioner
Dawn Langley	Alchemy Consultancy
Lizzie Lower	Hospitable Environment/individual creative practitioner
Nick Marsh	Newhaven Art Project/Individual creative practitioner
Charlotte Parsons	Look Again/Art Wave
Renato Pires	East Sussex School of Circus Arts
Anthony Peters	Studio Imeus/Look Again
Phil Rose	LYT Productions
Nick Stockman	BN9 Studio
Helen Turner	Newhaven Art Project/individual creative practitioner
	Culture Shift
	Sussex Community Development Association
Hayley Cox	Individual creative practitioner
Mike Flood	Individual creative practitioner
Lisa Fairfield	Individual Creative practitioner
Xanthe Gresham	Individual creative practitioner
Carol Haverd	Individual creative practitioner
Caroline Marsland	Individual creative practitioner
Sarah O'Kane	Individual Creative practitioner
Galia Pike	Individual creative practitioner
Melissa Shatto	Individual creative practitioner
Diets Verschuren	Individual creative practitioner
Adam Wildi	Individual creative practitioner

MEDIA COVERAGE

The Argus reported on the shocked reaction over the Council vote for the sale of

Meeching Hall in February 2026 and Lisa and Diets were interviewed by Clive Mellor of Seahaven FM (aired on 17 June) with an invitation to come back regularly and report on progress.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media channels used by FOMH are:

Facebook:

Friends of Meeching Hall 294 members and Ignite Fringe 893 members

Instagram:

Friends.of.meeching.hall 90 followers and Ignite Theatre.company 529 followers

YouTube: Meeching Hall

EMAIL

FOMH maintains a list of 100 contacts who have consented to contact by email. Regular progress updates are issued from our email account, which we also use to correspond with volunteers, potential partners and other stakeholders.

WEBSITE

FOMH developed a website (www.meechinghall.com) prior to the Community Asset Purchasing Scheme launch, which will act as the central public information resource for all stakeholders including external organizations, investors and members.

GDPR COMPLIANCE

Engaging with the community results in the collection of personal data for the purpose of disseminating information to members. FOMH holds a secure database of contacts which can only be contacted by the Chair and Secretary. There is a Privacy Notice on our website.

7. Vision for the business

MEECHING HALL - HUB FOR NEWHAVENERS AND VISITORS

FOMH aims to keep Meeching Hall at the heart of the local community, building it into a valuable and sustainable community asset. It will act as a focal point for performing arts, under community ownership with values and services shaped by local people. It will offer high quality, attractive facilities and events where everyone feels welcome, fostering a strong sense of social cohesion and community spirit.

CHARITABLE PURPOSE

To advance amateur dramatics, dance and music performances in particular but not

exclusively, by providing facilities suitable for public performance and other community uses such as for example celebrations, exercise and wellbeing classes, home school hub, youth club, cinema club, AA meetings and art and craft activities. The facilities - including a full size stage - will be housed at Meeching Hall in Newhaven Town Centre for which the Trustees will be fundraising in order to retain and improve this hall for the public benefit.

OBJECTIVES

- A place for performances
- A place of celebrations; party packages
- A place for passion projects; cinema club
- A place for wellbeing practice; yoga; pilates; dance; AA
- A place for pop up themed cafes: repair cafe; seed exchange; crafting
- A place that can be used as a hub for home schooling
- A place that can be used for Adult Education such as U3A courses

Meeching Hall will be open to all Newhaveners: established, recent, young and old

OUR MISSION

Affordable - Welcoming - Can Do

We like to say 'Yes' to the community

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING AND COHESION

Employment

Meeching Hall will only be in a position to employ a part-time manager once income allows. However, we will provide local volunteer opportunities, which will appeal to younger people looking to try out working in a performance venue and offer a way to add experience and a reference to their CV.

As a community hall, there may be additional volunteer opportunities, from support with social media and communications, to building and maintenance. Volunteering benefits people in many ways; developing skills, building confidence, reducing isolation and getting people back into work.

Social cohesion and inclusion

Young people will benefit significantly from community ownership of Meeching Hall. It will offer some social events tailored to younger audiences, creating a space that reflects their needs and aspirations. We will actively reach out to younger residents through social media campaigns and by seeking their opinions in shaping events and services, including by encouraging them to become members of the FOMH.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION (DE&I)

Under community ownership, Meeching Hall will create a welcoming, inclusive, and equitable environment for customers, employees, partners and volunteers alike, embracing and celebrating the diversity of our community.

It will ensure fair treatment and opportunity for all and actively work to identify and eliminate wherever possible the barriers that prevent full access or participation.

The aim will be to create a culture - both as a workplace and social hub - where everyone feels respected, valued, and able to contribute fully to our stated objectives and values. We will:

• Provide equal opportunities in recruitment, training, and advancement • Foster a safe, respectful environment, free from discrimination or harassment • Promote inclusive events and activities reflecting the diversity of our community

We will implement a DE&I Policy to this effect and all staff, volunteers and members will be expected to uphold this approach.

8. Products, facilities, services & events

Local people were asked to indicate the facilities, services and events they would like and this provides a sound basis for plans to provide those most in demand, serve the needs of local people and benefit the wider community.

Youth Club/Disco - Home Education Hub - Tai Chi and Qigong classes - a Drama club - somewhere to celebrate a wedding, special birthday etc - Cinema club - live music venue - dance school - regular drama offers including panto - rehearsal space for musicians

<u>Facilities and services</u>

Some existing facilities will require modernisation to meet customers' expectations (e.g. a refreshed, redecorated and updated function room could significantly assist in increasing the use of this space and generating revenues).

Facilities under consideration include:

• **Wi-Fi:** Ensure strong, reliable free Wi-Fi reception throughout the building and garden areas

• **Projector and screen:** Installed in the hall for big-screen cinema viewing and

as backdrop for community events to feature presentations

• **Online bookings:** To simplify the reservation process for customers and reduce admin time for employees

• **Meeting space:** Including projector / screen, whiteboard etc. for use by local clubs, groups, societies, businesses, for band rehearsals etc.

• **Function /meeting room:** Private functions, meetings and wellbeing space

* **Main Hall:** parties, events, rehearsals, performances of theatre, music and dance

Events

A community-owned Meeching Hall will build upon the events it already hosts. It will actively strengthen relationships with local community groups, clubs and societies, and target for example impresarios & booking agents to view and consider the facilities for their use. The aim is to provide the services and facilities needed to appeal to those groups as well as private individuals to host their activities there. This will also help attract new customers from outside the town, boosted by additional marketing and promotional activities.

Community ownership will present an opportunity to refresh and renew existing relationships with local clubs and societies, as well as forge new connections.

• **Theatre performances:** To provide a home for Newhaven Amateur and Professional theatre, plus encourage touring companies to book our venue. Meeching Hall stage will continue to showcase excellent drama, panto and musicals.

*** Cinema Club:** Hosting regular screenings of e.g. vintage cinema and documentaries of interest.

• **Society and club socials**: A community-owned Meeching Hall will actively nurture relationships with the town's community groups. It will seek to offer those facilities and services which encourage them all to conduct their meetings with us.

• **Artwave Festival:** An annual visual arts event held each September across Lewes District and surrounding villages, featuring free-to-visit exhibitions by hundreds of local artists and makers in venues including pubs and community spaces. In future years, Meeching Hall could participate by hosting exhibitions or pop-up events for local artists, attracting festival visitors and supporting the creative community.

• **Live music / comedy nights:** There is potential to hold social events such as music gigs, comedy nights or open mic nights on a regular monthly basis with

event promotion.

- **Other options:** There are lots of further suggestions such as a regular youth club, home schooling hub, quiz nights, themed Festivals - the Chairperson's personal favorite would be an annual knitted/crocheted tea cosy competition in homage to the Fish Creek Tea Cosy Event in Australia!

9. Marketing & promotion

Following acquisition, Meeching Hall will have a communications plan in place to raise its profile in the local area and promote what it offers to relevant customer groups. Key communication channels and activities will include:

- **Initial media coverage:** FOMH will aim to attract local, regional mainstream media coverage of the Meeching Hall purchase.

- **Branding refresh:** To emphasise the change in ownership, offering and community-based nature of Meeching Hall, a new brand (i.e. logo, tagline, colour palette, communication style etc.) will be developed which will be used consistently in all future communications and marketing activities. This will help establish Meeching Hall under community ownership.

- **Website:** The website will provide a modern, functional platform showcasing its facilities, products, services and events. There will be a calendar to book the upstairs meeting room and/or the main hall. The website will highlight the Hall's history (including the story of community ownership) as well as provide information on becoming a community shareholder and option to join its mailing list.

- **Social media:** Meeching Hall has an active Facebook page, Instagram account and YouTube channel. These will regularly promote facilities, services and social events, providing photos / updates from previous events.

- **Online reviews:** Those attending events at Meeching Hall will be encouraged to fill in a brief survey to capture feedback.

- **Noticeboard:** The noticeboard in front of the building will be kept up to date with events and local news.

- **Sponsorships:** We will seek to attract business sponsorship both in money and in kind. There will be a Board of 'Angels' in the building to commemorate those who have offered a large amount of sponsorship (£5,000 and over)

Note: The above is not definitive or exhaustive and additional activities will be considered, as appropriate.

10. Operations and management model

MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Management Committee will be a group of between 3 to 12 people who will oversee the operations of Meeching Hall. The Management Committee will be elected by the members of the FOMH CIO on an annual basis at the Annual General Meeting.

It is anticipated that the members of the Management Committee will have a mix of expertise including from performance and hospitality trade, finance, communications and community experience.

Key responsibilities

- **Problem-solving:** Addressing operational challenges and implementing solutions to ensure smooth operation.
- **Supplier management:** Negotiating contracts with suppliers and ensuring timely delivery of supplies.
- **Business plan execution:** Being accountable for adherence to the business plan and updating as required.
- **Strategic planning:** Developing and implementing strategies to improve efficiency, increase revenue, and enhance customer experience.
- **Marketing strategies:** Developing and implementing marketing strategies to increase bar traffic and revenue.
- **Staff management:** Responsible for all employment matters relating to the manager and other staff.
- **Financial performance:** Conducting monthly meetings to review performance.
- **Accounting and governance:** Ensuring the preparation of annual financial statements and organise member meetings and election.

MANAGER - initially Volunteer then Part Time

The Manager will ensure a welcoming and inclusive environment. They will be responsible for overseeing volunteers, managing budgets, and maintaining legal compliance.

The Manager will also lead marketing efforts, coordinate events & hirers, and manage stock and suppliers to ensure Meeching Hall runs efficiently and profitably.

Key responsibilities

- **Volunteer management:** Recruiting, training, supervising, and motivating volunteers to ensure a positive working environment.
- **Financial management:** Managing budgets, tracking bookings, controlling costs, and ensuring profitability.
- **Customer service:** Ensuring high standards of customer service,

addressing complaints, and maintaining a welcoming atmosphere.
- **Event management:** Organising and managing events, such as live music, theatre performances, quiz nights, or special promotions
- **Reporting:** The Manager will report into the Management Committee on a monthly basis and otherwise as required.

11. Property and refurbishment work

Meeching Hall is a 150-yr old Freehold Property with a carpark for approximately 6 cars at the front. It has metal railings and a large gate to the front.

The building repair works estimate is based on an inspection undertaken by Brendon Slavin, an experienced builder of 30+ years including 12+ years as a roofer.

His view is that the building is in a reasonable state of repair and there are no major essential works required immediately. However, he compiled a list of recommended improvement works to be undertaken over the course of Year 1 and 2.

Kitchen area needs to be updated and refurbished as does the upstairs kitchen/bar area.

All dormer windows need extensive repair.

Remaining windows need stripping back, filling and painting.

The large loft needs insulation to reduce heating costs.

The backstage area needs refurbishment and upgrading.

General redecoration.

To be reviewed: fire alarms and heating (latter recently upgraded by NTC)

FOMH are budgeting £35k and £20k initially for Years 1 & 2. This will be reviewed when detailed estimates become available.

FURNITURE, FIXTURES AND EQUIPMENT

Refreshing the interior of the hall - to make the best of its period features and using soft furnishings and lighting - will help to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere.

The intention is to also use this opportunity to upgrade the Wi-Fi

We will need to put back the lighting bars on the ceiling and mount a projector and a screen that can be deployed for cinema showings and presentations.

We have made the assumption that NTC will leave the current folding chairs and tables as part of the hall furniture. We will aim to try and control costs as much as

possible by re-using rather than replacing and using volunteers for undertaking work where it makes sense. Additionally, we have made allowance for new crockery and kitchen equipment. We have budgeted £10,000 to cover these costs.

OTHER AREAS

There are various under-utilised areas of the hall such as the enormous loft space. There needs to be a feasibility study to see if the loft can be boarded as storage for the various groups using the building.

- **Kitchen:** this needs a new cooker and a rethink of the lay-out to maximise the available space for basic catering/buffet lay out.

12. Funding strategy

FOMH intends to finance the purchase, renovation and set up costs of acquiring Meeching Hall through a combination of a Community Share Offer, grants, donations and fund raising.

Given the support we have had to date, we are confident that we will be able to raise the funds required.

COMMUNITY SHARE OFFER

FOMH are opening a Community Assets Purchasing Scheme whereby potential investors are invited to pledge to buy Flint Share(s). Each Flint is £50 and the maximum investment is 2000 shares (i.e. £100,000).

How the Community Share Offer will work

➢ The Community Share Offer will provide funds towards purchasing Meeching Hall (subject to contractual agreement), plus associated cost (i.e. the bid price plus 20% VAT payable to NTC and legal costs).

➢ Friends of Meeching Hall is seeking to raise a minimum £250,000 and a maximum £300,000 from the Community Share Offer.

➢ Shares cost £50 each. The minimum investment is 1 share (i.e. £50), and the maximum investment is 2000 shares (i.e. £100,000).

➢ The Community Share Offer is time limited. It will open on 26 June 2026 and close on 31 August 2026. This short timeframe is to encourage investment ahead of our planned completion date of 30 September 2026.

➢ The closing date for the Community Share Offer may be extended at the discretion of the Management Committee if it believes that will help reach the funding total required (the extended date will be no later than 23

September 2026).

➢ The Community Share Offer is open to individuals and joint applicants aged 18 years and over (although shares can be bought on behalf of a child), as well as companies and organisations which support the FOMH's purpose. Joint and corporate members must nominate one individual for voting purposes.

➢ If you apply for shares to be held in the name of someone under 18 years of age, please be aware that the shares will be held by the giftee until the minor comes of age.

➢ All payments must be made from a UK bank account.

➢ Applications will be accepted at the Management Committee's discretion.

➢ If the Community Share Offer Pledge is under-subscribed and the minimum target is not raised by the closing date, the freehold purchase of the premises will have failed and all those who pledged will be informed.

➢ If the Community Share Offer is oversubscribed, the Management Committee reserves the right to close the offer and refuse part or all of an application for shares.

➢ Shares are not transferable at any time, unless a member dies or becomes bankrupt. For further information, please refer to the Community Share Offer document

➢ The value of shares will always remain at the face value of the original investment. This is to ensure that the asset is locked into community ownership.

<u>Reasons to invest</u>

• **A stronger, more vibrant and cohesive community**: Investing in community shares delivers a wealth of benefits to local people, businesses and the environment

Of all the ACVs registered only 2% are ever converted to a purchased community asset. (Locality UK website) Help us to be in that small successful percentage!

• **A say in how Meeching Hall is run:** Each investor will become a member of the FOMH with one vote (regardless of investment level). This gives them an equal say in how the hall is run. They can influence how the hall operates by

voting at annual and extraordinary member meetings, tabling motions, and potentially being elected or co-opted onto the Management Committee.

- **Potential financial returns:** Investing in shares offers investors the potential to earn a modest rate of interest of 2%. The interest rate for each year will be proposed by the Management Committee and put to a vote at the Annual Members Meeting.

  The current intention is not to pay interest on community shares in the first 3 years of operations – this is to ensure there is sufficient working capital to operate it in the early years without having to raise further funds. Interest will be paid Year 4 onwards.

- **Confidence in our Share Offer:** if for any reason FOMH fails to make Meeching Hall viable then the ultimate surety for your shares is the value of the building.

Investors' exit strategy and share withdrawals

The hope is that investors in community shares are doing so with the intention of retaining a stake in their community hall for the long term. No withdrawals will be permitted in the first 3 years.

Thereafter, any withdrawals are at the discretion of the Management Committee. Considerations will include the withdrawal amount, the reason for the withdrawal, the cash balance available, and whether there is a waiting list of potential new investors.

Tax relief

We have applied to the Charity Commission to be registered as a

CIO and our application is pending. We are actively pursuing being

under the umbrella of another local Charity in the meantime

GRANTS

Unfortunately, the grants landscape has become more pressurised as public funding has decreased. Where once upon a time residents could have relied on their local councils to use their council tax to keep community buildings running, now selling off public buildings has become commonplace.

However, we have identified a number of grants and funds FOMH could apply to, including grants available for building repairs and improvement works required for the property. We will identify available opportunities and apply where qualification criteria allow.

Community Ownership Fund - Central Gvt - from Sept 2026

Community Infrastructure Levy - CIL - Local Government

National Lottery Awards for All

National Lottery Community Fund - projects that bring people together

Biffa Award - for community buildings near landfill sites

Asda Foundation - Local community site renovations

Garfield Weston Foundation - requires charity status - for community venues capital projects

Cloth Workers Foundation - fund the purchase of buildings if recipients fall under economic disadvantage.

Queen Elizabeth Trust - opens Spring 2027. Focus on community spaces. Emphasis on restoring, renovation, updating existing spaces

Bernard Sunley Foundation. Fund capital costs for community spaces. Need 1 year's accounts.

Forte Charitable Foundation. Fund salary or running costs for community spaces.

Chalk Cliff Trust and Enjoolata - capital items.

13. Financial projections

METHODOLOGY

This set of financial projections are based on assumptions made using the NTC most recent available Income and Expenditure sheet (23/24) and based on the Council's Hire rates. We have also spoken with a number of regular hall users, past

and present, as well as potential users to produce a list of likely usage.

Likely regular renters:

Definite: Ignite - Haven Young Creatives - Norcross Dancers - AA -

Possible: MAD - Gospel Church - U3A - Hospitable Environment events - Guesthouse Storytellers - Dance classes - Pilates / yoga - Repair Cafe

Other suggestions: Qigong - Dockside Barrel Scrapers & Swing Swing Swing for rehearsals - Singing Mamas - Curtain Call Productions (Seahaven Academy)

Fundraisers: Benefit gigs - Jumble sales - regular disco - Tea dances

PROJECTED INCOME

This is based on the current Fee charged by NTC per hour incl VAT:

Main Hall: £36.60 or £18.60 for Vol orgs/Charities

Committee room: £19.60 or £11.60 Vol orgs/Charities

FOMH proposed fees:

HALL £35 full and £20 concession and upstairs ROOM £15 full and £8 concession

Availability crudely is 30 hrs week days plus 20 hrs weekday eves plus 16 hrs at weekends is TOTAL 66 prime rentable hours. If we manage to rent out half the available hours at the concessionary rate that would be 33 x £20 plus 33 x £8 = £924 per week. For comparison: The weekly income quoted by NTC in their 23/24 figures is £204 per week. With proper marketing and support from local groups we feel sure that we can secure this in 6-12 months.

In addition FOMH would look to put on regular ticketed events (monthly) of films, speakers, workshops. The hall capacity is 110 seated but depending on the event and e.g. cabaret style layout if we project 80 tickets @ £20 = £1600 less cost of speaker and hospitality buffet/drinks = £1200

We project that wiith proper marketing FOMH could hope to generate a weekly income of £900-£1200.

NTC quotes their weekly cost (23/24) as Utilities £230 and Council Tax £80.

Especially utilities have gone up so that would need to be estimated as £450 for this exercise plus the cost of insurance and public liability = £600

In this speculative budget that would mean we could hope to achieve income of £300-600 per week. As soon as it is feasible we would use such income to hire a part-time Manager.

FOMH have written to the Town Clerk to request the 24/25 figures for Meeching Hall for better accuracy. Their spreadsheet also doesn't include the caretaker or booking system cost.

14. Key risks and mitigation measures

RISK 1: Insufficient interest in a community owned hall.

Mitigation: Good communications and strong engagement with the local community; well-thought through plan; community input into events provided by FOMH and its role within the community.

Status: Significant support for community ownership expressed via public meetings and survey response; social media and local press coverage active. Future community engagement and communications activities planned to increase and accelerate support.

RISK 2: Share offering raises insufficient funds to purchase Meeching Hall.

Mitigation: Strong business plan and share prospectus; clear description of benefits to the community and to shareholders; good website, communications and engagement with local community and businesses. Share offer can be extended at the discretion of the Management if it deems that will help secure the funds required.

Status: Business Plan and Share Offer documents completed; website launched and Community Share Offer launch for pledges planned to coincide with our Meeching Hall Festival Fundraiser 26 & 27 June 2026.

RISK 3: Sufficient grant funding may not be available in the required timeframe to support refurbishment of Meeching hall.

Mitigation: Maximise applications for grants that are available; maximise approaches to local businesses and other organisations to invest or donate.

Status: Wide range of grants and loans currently under investigation. Explore alternative funding options such as fundraising through crowdfunding.

RISK 4: Restoration, renovation and refit costs may be greater than projected; carrying out planned improvements may require more work and funding than anticipated.

Mitigation: Survey conducted by NTC funded surveyor as part of Clear Futures Consultancy - this could hopefully be shared with FOMH to assist a community group which is entirely self-funded once the purchase is agreed.

Status: Informal survey undertaken by local experienced builder and assistance has been offered by other trades people and business men

RISK 5: Business fails to operate at forecast level of turnover.

Mitigation: Business plan is based on assumptions using Newhaven Town Council information. Income will be enhanced by improvement to the hall following bids for grants and further bids for running costs.

Status: Business Plan uses available financials for modelling. Committee will stand down (but may stand for re-election).

15. Legal and regulatory compliance

Ensuring compliance with relevant legislation will be crucial for the smooth acquisition and operation of the hall under community ownership. This will be addressed as follows:

DUE DILIGENCE AND COMPLIANCE

- **Licensing**: Obtaining necessary licenses for selling alcohol, for example TENS
- **CRB checks**: for volunteers working with children
- **Volunteer training**: First Aid and Food Hygiene

Health & safety and environmental requirements

- **Risk Assessments**: Conducting regular risk assessments to identify and mitigate potential hazards, such as slips, trips, and falls.
- **Fire Safety**: Implementing fire safety measures, including regular fire risk assessments, maintaining fire extinguishers, and clear escape routes
- **Hygiene Standards**: Maintaining high standards of cleanliness and food hygiene to prevent contamination and ensure customer well-being.
- **Waste Duty of Care**: Ensuring only licensed waste contractors are utilised and adequate records of waste disposed are maintained.

Consideration for residents

The FOMH Management Committee will work with the appointed (initially Volunteer) Manager to consider the following as part of the hall's business-as-usual activities:

- **Noise Control**: Implementing measures to minimise noise pollution within the constraints of the building's central location, reasonable hours for live music / events.
- **Community Engagement**: Engaging with local residents to address concerns and build positive relationships.
- **Social Responsibility**: Promoting responsible drinking and community initiatives to enhance social cohesion and support local causes

16. Partners and supporters

FOMH is grateful for a wide variety of support received to date to help develop this business plan and progress the campaign to bring Meeching Hall under community ownership:

ORGANISATIONS

Kings Head Community Benefit Society Limited, Clifford Dowding - MX Sound and Lighting, Hospitable Environment CIC, SCDA, HavensHub, Newhaven Chamber of Commerce, Ignite Theatre, Rotary Club, Newhaven Historical Society, Mark Beaumont (Lanoguard), Enjoolata

INDIVIDUALS

Alan Bealby MBE, Sir Peter Field, Sara Masters, Brendon Slavin, Penny Shimmin, Niamh Pearce, Paul Boswell, Caroline Marsland, Mike and Jenny Flood and All the musicians playing for free at our Festival Fundraiser!

Our heartfelt thanks also go to every member of this community who has supported our campaign to date - from those who attended a public meeting, donated towards initial costs or responded to our petition, to everyone who invests in community shares. You are helping to create something which will benefit local people and businesses, making Newhaven an even better place to live, work and play both now and for future generations.

17. Contact information

Organisation name: Friends of Meeching Hall - CIO registration pending

Registered address: Carlton House, Hillside, Newhaven BN9 9RJ

Website: www.meechinghall.com

Email: friends.of.meechinghall@gmail.com

Facebook: Friends of meeching hall

Instagram: Friends of Meeching Hall

YouTube: www.youtube.com/@meechinghall

If you have any further queries or would like to get in touch, please email us.