



Working for the Community in Rotherfield, Mark Cross,
Eridge Green, Boarshead and surrounding areas

Feasibility Report for Rotherfield Parish Council on the Proposed Purchase of the Rotherfield Surgery Building 11 September 2018

- 1. Background**
- 2. Why the Parish Council are proposing to purchase the building**
- 3. Progress to date 11 September 2018**
- 4. Moving forward**
- 5. Conclusion and beyond the two year tenure**

Appendix 1	Heads of Terms
Appendix 2	Operating Costs
Appendix 3	CCG proposed rent
Appendix 4	NALC loan application approval form
Appendix 5	PWLB loan application form
Appendix 6	Current loan application rates
Appendix 7	Floorplan

1. Background

Rotherfield Surgery is situated in the centre of the village, it is positioned on the west side of South Street and is accessed by a shared drive which serves residential properties and businesses. Rotherfield Parish Council own the land to the rear of the Surgery.

The building was built in 1980 and extended in 1990. It is single storey constructed in timber frame with brick outer walls and a car park with capacity for 8-12 vehicles. The building has a footprint of 225 Square Metres and consists of 16 rooms including a reception area and

waiting room. At present the building freehold is owned by Drs John Davies, Michael Golton and retired Dr Susan Taylor. Dr Jane Hester is a partner in the business but not in the freehold of this building.

At present the building has planning consent for D1 usage with a restriction that the premises be used as a doctors' surgery. Wealden Planning have informed us that this would cover any similar health-related profession, should we be in a position to rent out any vacant rooms.

2. Why the Parish Council are proposing to purchase the building

In October 2017 the present partners at Rotherfield Surgery made an application to the High Weald Lewes and Havens Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) to close their main surgery at Rotherfield and to move the 3000 patients currently registered to Rotherfield Surgery to their other premises in Jarvis Brook which is 2.5 miles away. Rotherfield does not have any other medical services provision in the village. The reason given was that the present Doctors were finding it difficult to attract new partners into the business and by consolidating the patients to one building it would make it more financially attractive to any potential new partners. This proposal would have increased the patients attending Jarvis Brook to over 7000. This caused a groundswell of concern and protest within the parish about the effect this would have on the residents and the village. Rotherfield is a rural community and has poor transport links, it has a high proportion of senior citizens and residents who are unable to drive, and it was felt that Jarvis Brook Surgery was limited in size and parking spaces and would be unable to cope with such a large increase in patients. There was also a strong feeling that Rotherfield had supported a Doctors' Surgery for over a 100 years and if it was allowed to close it would never reopen.

A public meeting was held by the Doctors and over 400 people attended, the CCG were also present. Various options had been examined by the practice and were discussed, merging with another practice or purchase by an independent GP provision but these had been unsuccessful. The overwhelming sentiment was that the village supported the continuing presence of the doctors in the village and were willing to assist the Practice to maintain that position. Rotherfield Surgery must be kept open. The outcome of the meeting was that a Steering Group would be established between the Parish Council and the Practice with representation from the community to work with the Doctors to explore options to keep the Rotherfield Surgery open. The Parish Council also established a working group with other community representatives to explore the possibility of purchasing the surgery building and to consider how the building might be run.

3. Progress to Date 11th September 2018

The Practice Continued to explore opportunities of working with other healthcare providers but these did not progress.

The Parish Council have received legal advice on the deeds, ordered a building survey and a commercial valuation of the building. The deeds have not shown any issues concerning the building or access to the building. The building was fully surveyed by Lawson Queay, Chartered Surveyors and all councillors have had full access to the survey; the survey did not show any significant issues with the building. The Parish Council struggled to find a commercial valuer as the building and the situation is so unique. The Practice had recently had GP Commercial valuation of £500,000 and a local estate agent giving the same. The commercial valuation was conducted by Stiles Harold Williams and Councillors have had full access to the valuation report. Their market valuation was for a figure below £500,000. The Parish Council also met with Wealden Planning who are supportive of the project and have agreed to a note of our meeting which states that if after the two year agreement it is proved that the use of the building as a doctors' surgery is unsustainable that they would grant permission for use of the site for other purposes. This would clearly affect the value of the site.

4. Moving Forward

After many months of negotiation, we are at a point where we feel that we can purchase the freehold of Rotherfield Surgery to maintain a presence of Doctors in the Village for the next 2 years.

If the council resolves to buy the surgery the purchase price will be £470,000 plus Stamp Duty of £13,100. It is proposed to fund stamp duty from reserves.

Attached (Appendix 1) is a copy of the Heads of Terms which have been agreed by both parties and detailed costings of all the outgoings which the parish council will be liable for over the next 2 years (Appendix 2).

The District Valuer has surveyed the building and agreed with the CCG on the level of rent which will be paid to the Council for its use as a Doctors Surgery (Appendix 3). Full details are on the attached papers. The Doctors wish to retain use of all but one of the current doctors' rooms and one smaller clinical room. The early debates about what use the rest of the building could be put to have consequently reduced in importance.

To purchase the Surgery, the council has already resolved to apply for a loan from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) this will be over a fifty-year period. These loans are available by applying to SSALC (Appendix 4) for approval and then to the PWLB (Appendix 5). There is the facility to repay the loans at an earlier date.

It is thought that our legal fees will be somewhere in the region of £7,500 by completion the council has already budgeted for £5,000.

Subject to final agreement, the Rotherfield Trust have agreed to earmark a substantial budget for use mainly to improve the surgery's facilities and to conduct any urgent maintenance work (the most pressing of which is replacement of the boiler). To satisfy

concerns of the Rotherfield Trust we have had the deeds of the building and its access intensely scrutinised.

As you are all aware the Parish Council voted unanimously to increase our precept for 2018/19 by 20% at the February Parish Council Monthly Meeting or £20,000 this amounts to an additional £12.64 per year on a Band D property. To date we have had no objections to this increase; it was resolved to use this increase to finance the surgery loan. We were also mindful that we did not want any of our present obligations to be affected by purchasing the surgery.

We are confident that the increase in precept and the rent which will be recovered will be sufficient to fund the loan costs and ongoing operational costs agreed to be covered by the Parish Council. If the Parish Council make a decision to purchase the surgery, it is anticipated that the heads of terms agreement would come into effect soon after, thus allowing the two year term to commence.

5. Conclusion and beyond the 2 Year Tenure

In October of 2017 the plan was to close the Rotherfield Surgery by February 2018. It is now nearly September and the surgery is open 5 mornings a week and 3 Saturday mornings a month. It is also used a quiet space in the afternoons for the Doctors to do paperwork. It is hoped that the proposed purchase of the surgery will maintain this service for at least another two years.

Many parishioners have expressed a strong desire to support the project and have demonstrated that they are happy to support it further financially. We have already received some donations to this effect although the Parish Council have not explicitly appealed for funds yet, believing that the loan option would be the quickest and most straightforward method to secure the building. There have also been some discussions as to an appropriate management model going forward and whether this would benefit from charitable status. These matters will be considered further. The boiler requires urgent replacement and there are some maintenance issues that will require early attention such as redecoration, replacement of the alarm system and waiting room refurbishment.

The Parish Council very much hope to secure the surgery's place in the village going forward and make this proposal in the hope that we will secure this for a minimum of two years and hopefully longer. The current GP Practice model and its relationship with the NHS is under some obvious strain and there is no guarantee of what will happen generally in the future. We hope to place Rotherfield in a position where it can continue to have a doctors' surgery for many years to come.

Report prepared by: Rotherfield Parish Council Surgery Steering Committee Members

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