

Pencombe and Little Cowarne Parish Hall

AGM 3rd July 2023

Chair's Report

I gave notice at the AGM last year that I would be standing down as a trustee at the next AGM, which is today. So this report is less of a review of the significant events and issues of the past year and more some thoughts from the 15 or so years that I have served as a trustee for the hall, many years of which I was chair and, given the proximity of where I live key holder, caretaker, trouble shooter and general dogsbody.

Over the past year hirings have steadily increased and are, at last, beginning to match those of the pre-Covid times. The school and Under 5s have continued to be a regular hirers even if the number of hours have been reduced. The trustees have supplemented the hiring income with funds raised from LinC lunches, the Community Cinema and the bar. The Wine Society and Garden Club and Book Club are now stand alone operations but they also make a good contribution towards funding the hall. These various activities are essential to ensure the trustee can meet the operating costs of the hall which you will see from the accounts are now in the region of £10,000 per year. Without the fundraising and the grant from the Parish Council it would be difficult for the hall to stay solvent. A recent review of costs against hired hours indicates that the charges are too low and that the hall is being hired out at a loss! The trustees are ever mindful of the need to control costs and, given the range of other options available in the area, keep the charges at realistic and competitive.

The trustees are keen to ensure that the hall is both appreciated and used by the local community. The original hall and this successor was set up in accordance with the Village Halls Act which means it is held in trust by the Group Parish Council on behalf of the residents. The trustees do not own the hall, rather they run it on behalf of the Parish Council and residents. If they are to succeed in this task they need the support of both Parish Council and the residents.

Running the hall does take quite a bit of time and energy. At times it can seem to be a bit of a burden as there is always something that needs doing or people who need attention. Things break, go wrong or, like in any human organisation, get forgotten or miscommunicated. An ability not to take offence or be too quick to make a judgement is essential together with an appreciation for the contributions that volunteers bring to the enterprise.

No job is for life and, especially, no volunteer role is for life. In addition to me stepping down, two trustees have resigned this past year both for personal health reasons: Alison Maynard and Karen Davis. The trustees are grateful for their contributions. There will be a new way to book the hall, a new contact phone number and rota to share the phone responsibility among the trustees for 'customer contact'. Susan Drew has masterminded the initiation of Hallmaster, an on-line application to both the book the hall and invoice the hirers. Our intention to keep the website up to date was initially something of a challenge but has been recently overcome thanks to Susan Drew and Karen Hodges persistence to get the better of WordPress.

In the meantime I am sure we are all thankful that Janet Legge, Susan Drew, Emily Barrett and Frank Nicholson will continue to serve as trustees for the coming year. Without doubt these four undertake a great deal of work to make sure this Parish Hall serves the community. They are supported by other Trustees drawn from the various community groups and other volunteers. We are keen to recruit more people to serve on the trust and also recruit some volunteer supporters who are willing to help with the community activities undertaken by the trustees.

Andrew Mottram
30th June 2023