

## GREAT WHITTINGTON VILLAGE HALL COMMITTEE CHAIR REPORT YEAR 2020-2021

This is a very strange report for several reasons.

Firstly the year ended on 31st March 2021 and it is nearly six months into the new year without an AGM.

Secondly I as chair was not a member of the committee during the year I am reporting on nor were any current members of the committee serving at the end of the year. Two current members were on it but resigned during the year.

Thirdly the hall was closed for the whole of the year due to Covid and only one event was held outside during it.

Fourthly the hall has been subjected to an attempt to relocate it into a function room in the Queens Head which was only thwarted in the current year.

Addressing the first issue the AGM would normally have been held in June but as the current members of the committee were only elected at an EGM in the middle of April and only took the reins at the end of April when previous members resigned advice was taken from Community Action Northumberland (CAN) as to when the AGM should be held. They consulted with the Charity Commission who advised that September was an acceptable time. The AGM can revert to the normal time next year.

On the second and third issue I am sure you are all aware of why I became a member of the committee and subsequently chair. As to my qualification for it I can only report that I previously served on the committee as treasurer for about 25 years before resigning as I now normally spend most of the winter in Spain handing over to a younger, more energetic, group about 15 years ago. This group have also all passed on the mantle some time ago. I have no real knowledge of the actions of the committee in the reporting year but as an accountant I have inspected the accounts and report that, surprisingly, it was financially the best year ever. This is only because as village halls were designated as part of the leisure industry we were entitled to Covid grants of £13430 dependant on our rateable value. Other income in total was £316. Of course with no employees and no rent or rates to pay the normal outgoings we're limited. There were only two significant expenses in the year, £2700 in legal fees, which I will refer to later and £1604 for a marquee. The purchase of the marquee was properly approved by the committee. Other Covid related expenditure was £264. Apart from that the expenditure was limited to the usual insurance, £657, electricity, £766, water, £108, licences £125, repair and maintenance £720. Other minor costs were £61. This all means that in the year there was a surplus of £6739 income over expenditure. The only item which cannot be verified accurately is the electricity which is basically the sum paid which does not necessarily relate to the amount invoiced which in itself is not the amount used

As to the fourth reason for it being a strange year, the proposed sale of the hall I will limit my comments to what I know as fact and not supposition.

I know that the previous committee were looking into selling the hall in February 2020, a year before any information was passed to parishioners, as a letter from a estate agent giving them advice is on file from that date.

I know that advice was requested from solicitors as to the possibility of circumventing the clause in the trust deed requiring a 75% by the change of trust deed to a CIO as we are in possession of a copy of the advice given by the solicitors. This advice cost £2700.

What I do not know is if that advice was correctly authorised as the minute of the meeting when it was discussed does not give any amount or maximum amount authorised. It is therefore not known if the £2700 spent on legal fees was correctly authorised or not.

I know that the previous committee put out a survey to the parish concerning the possible sale of the hall but the question was biased being either against the sale or in favour of looking into the sale. It therefore was not an equal question and the previous committee were in favour of the sale because it was supported by a statement made to the parish council that £184000 needed to be urgently spent to repair the hall and no grants were available. No effort was made to inform the parish that the proposal was to be put to the parish council and neither of the statements made was correct.

This resulted in an EGM being called for 12th April to elect a new committee. Before then the previous chair had resigned quoting a possible conflict of interest and all members stated they would not stand again. Prior to the meeting previous members announced that they would stand and the EGM resulted in a committee with a majority in favour of retaining the hall. All the previous members of the old committee plus new members in favour of progressing the Pub deal resigned before the first committee meeting on 29th April leaving an all new committee to take up the challenge. Whilst checking documents it was discovered that no committee meetings had taken place between September 2020 and January 2021.

Forty two parishioners, including all the new members of the committee, had signed a letter to Ralbos, the pub owners, stating that as a majority of 75% was required to authorise the sale with the level of opposition in the parish it was extremely unlikely to succeed. This letter was sent to the three named directors at their official address as we had neither email or phone details. No correspondence from them or details of the proposal they made was passed to us by the outgoing committee and no response was received from Ralbos. We can only assume that they do not wish to progress any further negotiation and therefore no vote on one is required. Most of the same people also signed a submission to NCC for the hall to be designated a community asset and this was granted.

Although not relevant to the reporting year I feel it is important to say what the new committee has done since being elected as we are now nearly half way through the next year. I will cover them under four headings, housekeeping, events, bookings and forward plans.

Housekeeping in its widest sense. The first decision we made was that with end of the pandemic in sight due to the vaccination scheme we no longer needed a marquee and it was sold for £1540. Marion organised this successful sale. The removal of the frame from the garden enabled work to start on renovating the garden. This is still a work in progress but thanks to work by four non committee residents, Angus, Kaz, Jane and Chris we are well on the way. Our thanks go to them. We then set about a check of what needed doing in the hall. The roof was inspected and found to need some minor work with some cracked slates and repointing needed. This was done for £480. The cast iron gutters on the front were leaking from the joints and repaired at a cost of £140. The five yearly electrical inspection was needed. That together with some other electrical work was completed for £230. An inspection was completed by the fire service which has resulted in no major work to be completed. An additional alarm may need to be fitted and other minor things done by committee members. We conducted a Health and Safety Inspection and have identified that an alteration is needed in the kitchen with the installation of a dedicated hand washing basin. This has been ordered and we are awaiting installation. I specifically thank Maggie and Judith for their work on Health and Safety. Apart from these major works members of the committee have done several smaller jobs including the removal of the piano that had been quietly rotting in the shed for many years and I myself spent three happy hours with my hands down the blocked drains from nine downcomers so that rain off the roof did not just filter into the foundations. Also worth mentioning is that the new committee have had three training sessions conducted by CAN, covering the role of trustees, the legalities of trustees and health and safety. Our thanks to them and especially Louise Currie for this. Along with all that we started a new webpage under the CAN village hall portal for which I thank Morris. Nearly one third of properties in the parish now have someone in them registered to receive email notifications from us. Marion took over running the Facebook site and that now has over 300 members. A great result

Events. We decided very early after our appointment that openness in communication with the whole parish was essential and so we distributed a newsletter to all properties detailing forthcoming events together with a document refuting the need to spend £184000 on necessary repairs. Unfortunately the delay in lockdown release meant we had to change dates so another newsletter needed to be distributed. Not easy in such a spread out parish and I thank the seven committee members who did this. The change in release dates for Covid also meant that the timings of our events were concentrated starting with the planned return to regular coffee mornings on the first Saturday of the month, followed very rapidly by a BBQ, a gardening talk and our first pub night. Michele has done sterling work in organising social events and Maggie is starting a gardening club. All were very successful and enjoyed by all. It is planned that coffee mornings and pub nights will continue in the future but more of that later.

Bookings. Regular bookings have started to return following the easing of restrictions. The WI are back sharing our hall with Matfen, the proggy mat group meet here and we have a new yoga class on Monday evening. This has been increased to two sessions from the beginning of September as numbers increase and the desire for greater distance between mats continues. The same teacher is also thinking of starting a mindfulness class. We have also had bookings from The Woolly Wanderers and The November Theatre Group as a result of the new website which together brought in £165 of rental income whilst providing entertainment for the parish free of charge. It is hoped to start a Pilates class soon but the potential instructor is still concerned about Covid so is not looking to start until later in September

Future Plans. Our plans obviously depend on the election to come later this evening. We have applied for and been successful in obtaining £4997 in grant aid from the NCC community chest scheme to install an AV system. We have added to this a further £1662 from the Covid restart grant to enable the system to be purchased. We have also applied for £1562 from the Lottery Local Connections Fund to purchase a laptop to go with it plus first year subscriptions for TV licence, broadband and Netflix. BT need to put a new pole in for the system to be up and running and this should be completed by the end of September. This will enable the start of a film club and we are looking into the possibility of live streaming items such as The Royal Opera House and Royal Shakespeare Company. Although not yet fixed it will probably result in changes to our regular weekend events but the first Saturday in the month will remain as the coffee morning. This autumn we have two other events planned from Highlights Theatre Group. Our aim is to provide regular cultural or educational events and to that end we have arranged for a talk by CPRE and one from Linnels Farm titled bulbs, bulbs and more bulbs. We also plan to have a social evening dinner on Friday 17th December with a homemade main course and deserts plus cheese and biscuits and mince pies. Also included will be beer, wine and soft drinks. All this will be provided at a very reasonable price so watch the website for full details of all these events. The regular coffee mornings and Friday night at the hall will also continue.

We also have plans to improve the hall. With the government pushing environmentally friendly energy sources and heating we are progressing a plan to put an array of solar panels along the rear of the car park, linking it through batteries and heat pumps to radiators in the main hall and individual air heating for the kitchen and toilets. This will cost in the region of £70000. We have applied for a grant of £30000 from the Lottery Fund for which we have done the initial presentation. We have been unofficially advised that our application has been favourably received and are expecting to hear within the next month if we can go forward. CAN can point us in the direction to get an equivalent sum from other sources and we have already approached Ray Wind Farm Fund who have advised us "Following a directors meeting I have been asked to invite a full application, however as the hall and a significant part of the parish falls outside our area of benefit the full amount may not be granted" and Green Rigg Wind Farm Fund whom we hope will be supportive. We will be expected to contribute up to £10000 from our funds. If successful this will enable the hall to be continuously heated solving the winter cold problem whilst reducing our electricity costs to virtually nil.

In summary finances have never been as healthy since the hall was formed fifty years ago with the bank balance rising from £14168 to £28001, over the five months of which only two we have been able to operate. The major elements of income and expenditure are £8000 Covid reopening grant, £4997 AV grant, £1540 marquee sale, £485 hall hire and £1172 net revenue from events we have held, BBQ, two coffee mornings and five Friday nights plus a donation of £208. Expenditure includes £954 on maintenance including roof repairs, gutter repairs and electrical inspection and work, £657 insurance, £265 water and electricity and other expenses totalling £304. We have a commitment to pay £6659 for the AV system and we still need to look into woodworm treatment which we may have to fund ourselves. This still leaves us in a very strong position.

This report will be posted on the website along with the draft minutes of this meeting shortly.

Finally I wish to thank all members of the outgoing committee for their Sterling efforts in the four and a half months since we took over running the hall.

I now ask you to approve the accounts for last year and then open the meeting for discussion and comments from the floor prior to the election of the committee for this year.