

Chairman's Report August 2020

This report covers a longer period than normal as our AGM needed to be postponed from its normal June date until September due to the Covid virus. This, following Government guidance, effectively shut the village hall to all hirers for 6 months from March until September. The only exception has been the Outreach Post Office, which has used the entrance hall and cloakroom to host their services three mornings a week from May onwards. This has provided an important service to the village and the postmaster has been very diligent in only allowing one customer inside the hall at any one time and sanitising door handles and all used surfaces before and after each of their sessions. Shortly after resumption of the Post Office service the committee installed an automatic hand sanitiser just inside the entrance door for mandatory public use to increase Covid security.

Up until March when the country went into lockdown, the hall was well used by both regular weekly and monthly hirers and exercise classes, along with Artsreach and the Piddle Valley Players, all of whom provided our bread and butter income as detailed in the financial report. On the 17th August 2019 our regular annual clean-up and repaint of both the hall and the garden area took place, led by the committee and a small task force of other hall users, with a follow-up of the kitchen area by the Lunch Club. This has proved providential as it has been impossible to do any annual clean-up this summer.

Thanks to a grant of £10,000 applied for and received in May 2020 from Dorset Council, the hall is financially in a position to weather the loss of income during both the period the hall had been closed and an unknown period from September onwards when our Risk Assessment will limit hirings to local users able to use just the main hall within the guidelines of social distancing. Our regular high cost outgoings of heating and cleaning have been reduced, and thanks to the grant the Committee has been in a position to pay our loyal cleaner a retainer of 50% of her normal salary through her shielding lockdown.

In September 2019, the programmer for the boiler was replaced by Steven White with a new Honeywell programmer to reduce wasteful use of oil. The new programmer automatically adjusts for both frost settings and the spring and autumn clock changes. Ian Scott and Nick Barker are familiar with setting the programmer for regular weekly users, otherwise hirers use the programmer in the same fashion as the previous one. The committee is grateful to the United Charities of Buckland Newton for assistance with the cost of this.

In June, 3 members of the Committee risk assessed the hall for reopening based on Covid safety guidance by ACRE and our insurance company. This resulted in a decision to keep the hall shut until September when the cleaner would once again be available. This will be re-assessed nearer the reopening date. To remain as Covid-secure as possible, only the main hall will be available to hire out with a single loo, the disabled toilet, available for emergency use. The kitchen area and storeroom and other toilets will remain unavailable initially and the green material covered chairs will be replaced temporarily by the old red plastic chairs from the loft, which are easier to sanitise. A new sanitising station has been installed in the main hall with paper towel dispensers in all toilets and the kitchen along with an additional automatic hand sanitising dispenser in the kitchen. An additional Hiring agreement covering hirers' responsibilities on Covid security has been drawn up, which will form an addendum to the existing Hiring Agreement, and the attached notice will be put up on the entrance door and possibly to hand out to all users covering these conditions of hall use.

Externally, the gardener, Ricki Edwards, has continued to keep the grass mown and strimmed. A work party in August 2019 and July 2020 has kept the weeds in check around the building and patio area. The wilderness area is very much in need of future maintenance, although the trees, mainly willow and hazel, overshadowing our neighbour on the north side were cut hard back in February at their expense. Similarly, the rough bramble and scrub area on the north side of the entrance gate

was cut down and sprayed off at the expense of A R Foot Ltd, who is renovating the adjacent building in Stevens Walk. This area will now be considered for either additional car parking space or replaced with grass.

On a sad note, the committee were devastated to learn of the death of Sue Sulkin in April. Although she resigned her position as Treasurer and Hall Booking Clerk in 2018 following a move to Sherborne, she has been so intrinsically involved with the Village hall for so much of its modern history that her legacy continues to guide much of how we deal with Village Hall business. It is also with great sadness we accepted the resignation of Jan and Trevor Marpole. Both have been invaluable and virtually irreplaceable members of the committee with their freely given and willing hands on all repair jobs over so many, many years. We already miss them enormously and wish them a speedy return to health.

Nicki Barker (Chair Buckland Newton Village Hall Committee)