

Chairman's Report July 2021

Under Government Guidance the hall has been closed to all users throughout this last year except for 2 relatively brief periods between the 1st and 2nd wave in November/December and currently in the post 2nd wave period from April. The only exception to this has been use by the outreach post office operating on Monday, Tuesday and Friday mornings occupying the cloakroom and entrance hall areas only. The Post Office, as an essential and valuable village service, has been diligent in ensuring that customers only enter the hall lobby singly and that masks wearing and hand sanitising is observed. The toilets have remained out of bounds, with the disabled toilet only being available in an emergency.

Thanks to continuously updated guidance by ACRE (Action with Communities in Rural England), the committee have been well briefed on how and when we could open the hall. At the last AGM in September 2020, the Committee took the decision to only allow hirings to regular users when an easing of restrictions permitted, and only allow use of the main hall and stage area, but not the kitchen, committee room and toilet areas. The hall cleaner was retained on half pay and the hall was thorough cleaned prior to restricted reopening. The cleaning rota was then designed to pre-clean immediately before all booked usage. During the November/December reopening only the Monday Yoga classes restarted with class numbers restricted to 10 places based on the floor area available, along with a one-off hire for a number-limited health demonstration. Post the April easing, both Yoga and Pilates have returned with restricted numbers, and a one-off village hiring (limited to 6 persons) has taken place. Although there have been inquiries about hirings, it is difficult to safely accommodate larger groups of villagers such as the Luncheon Club until lockdown restrictions completely ease..

The period of closure has allowed the Committee to bring outstanding safety issues up to current specification.

Under the guidance of Kate Parish as the Hall's Fire Safety representative and Emergency Services contact, a Fire Risk Assessment has been carried out. Pascalle Wells from the Fire and Rescue Authority inspected the hall on the 13th October 2020 and found all met current requirements. We still intend to install a more robust fire bell system than our current bell in the kitchen. The fire extinguishers and fire blanket were given their annual inspection in May 2021 by Vale Fire Safety.


Caron White, the hall's Electrical Safety representative, organized an initial inspection of the work required to bring the hall up to current electrical safety standards, particularly the stage spotlights and Emergency lighting. She oversaw P N Gray carrying out the necessary upgrades along with a NICEIC inspection and PAT testing of all equipment on the 7th/8th April 2021. She now does a monthly check on the emergency lighting. The fire alarm system in the lobby has been permanently disconnected (with the approval of the Fire Officer) and the red "break-glass" boxes in the hall removed.

The grounds have continued to be mown by Ricki Edwards the gardener, with spraying and tidying up of the patio and tarmac weeds and shrub clearance by Ian Scott and Nicki Barker.

Clearing of the path through the wilderness area is still an outstanding issue along with consideration of how to make the best use of the north corner of the parking area, next to the road.

Financially the hall is in a sounder position than it has been for many years thanks to a generous initial Covid "Shut-down" grant of £10,000 received from Dorset Council in May 2020. Although rental income has been extremely curtailed, this has been offset by a large reduction in heating and electricity expenditure. The grant has allowed not only for the installation of Covid safety equipment (hand sanitisers/sanitising trolley) but given the flexibility to bring electrical and fire safety equipment up to date. Further grants of £7,335 and £2,096 were received in February and March 2021 respectively when the hall was required to fully re-close again during the second Covid wave, and a grant of £8,000 in May 2021 to assist reopening (this being in the 2021-22 financial year).

With this unexpected and very appreciated financial help, the management committee now has the funds to implement other outstanding improvement needs for the hall and grounds that will enhance its hiring potential when we reopen. However, it remains prudent to retain a certain proportion of these funds against a continuation of the pandemic disruption.



Nicki Barker (Chair Buckland Newton Village Hall Management Committee)