

Wootton Memorial Hall Council
Annual General Meeting – Year 2023-2024
Held at the Memorial Hall on Wednesday 29th May 2024 @7pm

Present – David Blackburn (Chair and Trustee)

Neil Goram (Secretary/Treasurer and Trustee)

Trustees and Members of the Management Committee

Residents of the Parish of Wootton, Northampton

Apologies Received from Lucy Lloyd (Management Committee member)

1. Minutes of AGM held on 31st May 2023

- a. These minutes were agreed as a true record of the meeting – Proposed by S McNair and seconded by D Baxter. Minutes were signed by the Chairman.

2. Chairman's Report

- a. DB delivered his report to the meeting as follows:
 - i. When I took over as Chair in 2012 the hall's finances were just starting to improve. The original building of the hall had been completed in 1932, but the chemical toilets weren't upgraded until the late 1940s. I therefore must pay tribute to Trevor Driver for all his efforts to improve the hall and its facilities through his refurbishment programme. With a grant from Northampton Borough Council and donations from residents via his 'Buy a Brick' appeal, he upgraded the Committee Room and toilets, organised the replacement of the old and rotting metal windows and altered the porch into its present form. He had also reserved some capital towards replacing the leaking roof. Some of us have fond memories of the buckets. After Trevor's death the rest of the Hall members realised that they needed help and letters were circulated to the residents of Wootton. In response, Michael Penny, Fiona Cook and I, volunteered to assist and a resident who worked for Howden Kitchens organised a donation of kitchen units Howdens had previously used for a catalogue shoot. Following other modifications, most of which I undertook, the upgrade kitchen and tea bar was completed.
 - ii. After taking over as Chair for a period of 3 years, I applied for and received, a grant of £5,000 from Wootton Parish Council. The main roof was replaced and a new boiler fitted. Since then, rotten joists have been replaced, the present floor installed, a new wooden and replacement wired fence have been fitted.
 - iii. During the COVID pandemic, after much form filling, we received a number of grants from Northampton Borough Council to allow us to survive through the period when there were no hirers allowed in the hall. In effect, these grants allowed us, in 2022-2023 to replace the flat roofs over the toilets, Committee room and porch, including the addition of previously absent roof insulation.
 - iv. As far as repairs are concerned, this last year has been a quiet one apart from the biennial work of treating the wooden fence with linseed oil and the wooden sleepers with wood preservative.

- v. The final investment purchase, this year, has been the new audio system and I thank Neil for his perseverance in sourcing and introducing this. We all agree that this has become a very valuable asset.
- vi. Our annual fund-raising event, the Art Exhibition, was supported by 36 artists producing 230 entries. 16 paintings were sold, and the overall profit was £496.
- vii. On behalf of the Hall Council, I must also thank the Wootton Heritage Organisation for their very generous donation of £500 in September.
- viii. Additional income has been received from various mums encouraging their children to enter dance competitions and rehearse in the hall. 8 parties have been held for a variety of celebrations including a baby shower which we have never experienced before.
- ix. Our support for the community continued as we raised £370.71 through our Tombola Stall at the WHO annual May Festival.
- x. I feel pleased to know that, as I leave, the hall is financially secure, and I hope it will continue to be so well supported. I must thank my fellow Hall Council members for their continued support over the last 12 years, especially Fiona and Neil as treasurers, keeping the accounts in order and Sally and her Playgroup cleaning team for keeping the hall so spotless.
- xi. Finally, I extend a very warm welcome to the new members of the Hall Council and long may you reign! Thank you!

b. The Chairman ended his report and there were no questions from the floor

3. Treasurer's Report including year-end accounts for 2024-2025

- a. The treasurer had published the year-end accounts and his annual report via email to the Management Committee and those documents are also provided as an appendix to these minutes. However, copies of the year-end account were distributed to those present. These year-end accounts were adopted and following points were raised and discussed at this meeting:
 - i. The Year-end accounts were prepared for the third time by June Meadows, including spotting the very occasional error made by the treasurer in his cross-recording! All agreed that the P & L was being developed to better analyse both income and expenditure and further development would be undertaken in the future.
- b. The treasurer highlighted a few items from his report rather than reading it in full.
 - i. An additional purchase not mentioned had been the new oven and hob in the kitchen.
 - ii. Following previous years in which significant investment in the fabric of the hall had been made, generally resulting in a deficit at the end of the operational year, 2024-2025 saw investment made in hall facilities e.g. the audio equipment and oven and hob and, as a result, a surplus of around £2,000 had been achieved with an 'operating profit' of £4,395 which was heading in the right direction and was in line with recommendations made by June Meadows.
 - iii. With less need to plan for short-term major investment, we made a decision, towards the end of the year to invest a proportion of our reserves in a fixed interest bond, initially just for one year to 'yest the waters'. £10,000 was invested in the Dudley Building Society's Community 1-year fixed rate bond @ 4.9%. Unfortunately, it appears that the banking industry, in general, is offering less and less in terms of investment opportunities for charities for fear of money laundering. We were, therefore, very lucky to have found this opportunity through DBS.

- iv. Although I mention it every year, Playgroup continues to provide the highest income total, in fact over 50% of that total.
- v. Looking forward, with David retiring the Art Exhibition will not be taking place in 2025 and this was one of the reasons the DBS investment was made in an attempt to cover any shortfall that may occur without that main fund-raising event. The treasurer called on everyone to give a 'noisy' vote of thanks to David for all his hard work over the years to put on an event that attracted so many people to the village and the hall and was an unrivalled success.
- vi. Looking further forward, the treasurer hoped that the new committee would be able to sustain the successes achieved by the outgoing Chair and look for new ways to make that happen. A prime example will be the development of the hall's new website which will not only provide a presence for the hall but will, hopefully, deliver added benefits through the introduction of a calendar (already in place) and hall booking system in due course plus a members' section to include storage for this and other documents produced and links to information about our main hirers e.g. W.I. and WHO. The treasurer thanked Martin White for all his efforts to get the website in place. There will be an awful lot of work to do over the next year for the website to reach its potential.
- vii. As part of the booking process and as a small financial protection measure, for the first time, hirers for special events will be required to pay a 'refundable' deposit in case the hall suffers any damage or requires special cleaning.
- viii. Cash will no longer be an acceptable method of payment for hire, only online payments and 'occasional' cheques will be accepted.
- c. There were no questions from the floor and the Treasurer, therefore, completed his report.

4. Election of Officers and Management Committee

- a. The Chairman, David Blackburn stepped down from the position he had held for many years and was thanked by all present for his selfless dedication to the role. A celebration of his time as Chair took place after the close of the AGM.
- b. Mr Simon Shaw was the only candidate proposed to serve as the new Chair, and he was unanimously elected by those present. He then took over proceedings.
- c. The Secretary/Treasurer also offered himself for re-election. He was also unanimously re-elected to the two positions. Secretary Proposed by Simon Shaw and seconded by David Blackburn. Treasurer Proposed by David Blackburn and seconded by Sally McNair.
- d. All existing members of the Management present put themselves forward for re-election and were unanimously re-elected.

- 5. There was no further business for the AGM. The meeting was, therefore, closed at 19.26 (7.26 pm).

APPENDIX

Wootton Memorial Hall Council – Annual General Meeting – 29th May 2024 – Memorial Hall, Wootton @ 1900 hrs Treasurer's Annual Report

Review of the year from a financial perspective

In the previous financial year 2022-2023, there had been considerable capital investment (£13687) in the fabric of the building resulting in an overall nett deficit in the year-end accounts of £8047 with an operating surplus of £6769.

During the financial year 2023-2024, the capital investment of £2036 was confined to facilities offered within the hall. A new portable audio system was purchased which provides much better options for visiting presenters and regular meeting such as WI and WHO. In addition, a new oven and hob was installed in the kitchen. Whilst this greatly improved the food heating facilities the kitchen remains at a three-star level that does not offer full cooking facilities since, to achieve that additional star, all events where food preparation is carried from scratch would need constant supervision by a member of the Hall committee which is impractical.

As a result of the greatly reduced capital investment, the year-end accounts show an overall nett surplus of £2359 with an operating profit of £4395.

The hall has also maintained healthy reserves to act as a contingency fund. These reserves are held in savings accounts which offer different levels of access to the money from Instant Access which, in turn, offers only a very low interest rate whilst providing immediate emergency funds, through to a 32-day Access account offering a medium level of interest but a delay in accessing the funds.

Towards the end of the financial year, it was agreed to place a sum of £10,000 into a higher interest savings bond and to make that investment for a short period i.e. 1 year only, in order to measure the efficacy of committing such a large amount without having access for a long period. Unfortunately, this investment was being made at a time when many banks and similar institutions are loathe to accept investment from Charitable Organisations due to a number of factors among which is a fear of the Charity being involved, often unknowingly, in money laundering activity. However, through patience and perseverance the investment of £10,000 was finally achieved through the Dudley Building Society in a Charity Bond for 1-year earning interest at 4.9% which will mature at the end of March 2025.

Energy costs for Gas and Electricity saw significant increase over the previous year with Gas going up by 140%. Electricity rose by 33% Water by 15%. Overall operating expenditure was up by 16%.

Conversely, overall income rose by a modest 3.5%.

Whilst there were no new regular hirers there was a further significant increase in the use of the hall for practise dance sessions resulting in a 33% increase in income from this source. Other significant increases in terms of percentage came from Parties/Concerts (social gatherings) at 350% and Interest received from savings accounts at 280%.

The Chair's report will detail income and expenditure in relation to the annual Art Exhibition and its future.

To repeat my comments in last year's report, because they bear repeating - The Wootton Pre-school Playgroup continued to provide the most significant income for the hall whilst, at the same time, they also continued to provide a reliable and efficient hall cleaning service. This is a quid pro quo relationship that the Council will look to continue into the next financial year and beyond.

I will also repeat the other comments made about the Pre-school Playgroup previously. As a charity, it is important to highlight just how much the Hall Council appreciates the continuing loyalty of this particular hall user and exactly what it means for the continued existence of the Hall as a viable operation. Total income for the year from this source was slightly increased over the previous year at £9401 but, overall, this represented 50% of the total income received.

I would also like to thank the Wootton Heritage Organisation for their very generous donation to the Hall's continued operation in the amount of £500.

The treasurer continues to work closely with June Meadows, as the appointed accountant, to ensure that the Hall Accounts are properly recorded, maintained, reconciled, audited and produced in a way that clearly identifies the spread of both income and expenditure, enabling the Council to identify areas that may need closer oversight.

Looking Forward

Clearly there continues to be a need to review how additional income might be generated, with such a small number of regular hirers outside of the Playschool and very few attractive slots to be hired during the week. It is hoped that an emphasis on promoting the facilities, especially through an investment in an internally developed website and competitive hourly hire charge available for private parties may generate increased income from that source. A booking system for one-off events is also planned via the website and, coupled with the pictorial and other information provided about the Hall and its facilities, it is hoped that this will provide an easy way for prospective hirers to make the right decision and choose Wootton Memorial Hall for their 'Special Event'.

In the coming year, the Hall Council (Management Committee) will concentrate upon adopting the most appropriate short and long-term strategies to guarantee the future success of the Hall based upon a sound financial footing.

I commend this report to the AGM on 29th May 2024.

Neil Goram

Wootton Memorial Hall Council

Treasurer/Secretary and Trustee