

Chairman's Report

This report provides an opportunity to look back on what the Hall has been up to over the past year; and to look forward to the year ahead.

The year has been busy, and the Hall continues to be well used. The report looks at our finances, our bookings, fund raising, and improvements at the Hall.

In terms of finances, the difficulties caused by Covid and the resultant cost of living pressures, are now well behind us. We had set a three year recovery plan, and thanks to generous donations from villagers, some great fund raising, and increased bookings, the plan has resulted in a very healthy financial position. This has enabled us to invest in improvements at the Hall, both reducing running costs, and opening up opportunities for new uses at the Hall; whilst also maintaining a healthy reserve, to give us at least some protection against untoward happenings in the future.

Bookings have remained at a high level during the year. Regular bookings include meetings/ talks etc by most village organisations, health and fitness activities, weekly drop-ins, Heritage Centre, Parish Council office, weekly mat bowls, weekly Toddlers. And the Hall remains an excellent venue for private functions; children's parties, family and friends parties, and wakes. We are also looking to offering packages (catering, flowers etc) for private functions. Due to our financial position, and subject to this being sustained during the year, we will aim for a no-uplift to charges for next year.

The year sadly saw the demise of the Smarden WI, after being in existence for over 100 years; and the Smarden Players also formally closed down, after a first production in 1982, and then 70 greatly enjoyable productions over the next forty years.

Tenterden Drama Society (*aka TODS*) have now established a base at the Charter Hall. Many of us greatly enjoyed their performance of Oklahoma, which ran for 4 days a few months ago, and they will be performing a new play, Cabaret, in the autumn. We look forward to further TODS productions in the year ahead.

We continue to look for other activities which could be housed in the Hall. Ideas from villagers are always welcome. We can help with seeking grants if any equipment is needed, and we also offer discounted hire fees for the first six months of any new activity.

Improvements made at the hall have enabled us to reduce running costs. We have now installed led lighting, local water heating, remote control of heating, all of which have helped reduce costs. We would like to install solar panels, and replace our boiler, but both require up-front investment, which we continue to seek.

Significant improvements have also been made to our lighting and sound, with new speakers, an electronic large screen, a new projector, together with a new sound system in the hop-pocket. This has all opened up opportunities for new activities. We would like to pursue these. It could include a Smarden Film club.....perhaps monthly films, cafe style seating. Attracting travelling theatre groups, which include local halls in their

locations. Tribute performers / bands which could attract a larger audience than our pubs can handle ; an excellent ABBA performance last year was one such tribute band. Perhaps photography competition evenings a few times a year...on large screen. Perhaps even a village am-dram group.

We have also been able to start a programme of internal painting within the Hall. This year included painting the hop-pocket and the corridor. We hope to continue the programme next year. This all ensures the hall remains in good shape.

During the year we streamlined our door opening. We have replaced the door opening mechanism, and provided an external key box. Regular users can now open for themselves. Trustees have been relieved of opening for every booking; and now just open for one-off bookings.

Not involved in any significant costs, but after 20 years the hall has accumulated a huge amount of clutter! Much of it is out of sight in our roof space, but it has had to be dealt with. An electronic document storage system is now up and running , and being populated; and creating single (backed-up) documents for our own records, including minutes, our statutory policies etc. Much out of date paperwork is now being disposed of, although we are keeping an archive of some documents , including the development of the hall itself, which started being thought about in the 1930's , before the first Hall actually being built in the 60's . Also an archive for the WI and the Smarden Players is being established. Roof space is slowly reappearing.

We are pleased that the hall remains an important part of our special community. And pleased that so many are involved in supporting the hall throughout the year. This report gives us an opportunity to express our grateful thanks.

To Lou, for so efficiently and calmly handling our administration, bookings, and finance

To Natalie, for her commitment to keeping the hall clean and welcoming

To our village clubs and societies , and other regular hall bookers; and all those who have booked, and enjoyed, the hall during the year

To those who support our annual lottery, which provides us with very valuable income

To those who give their own time and talents to support our own fund raising , and to keep the hall in good shape.

My own personal thanks go to the hall trustees. They are all volunteers, and often have to balance hall time with their other commitments. They are all talented, and all totally committed to supporting the Hall.

Finally, we will be keeping our supporters in touch with the hall as the year rolls out. We will be emailing out a quarterly update to supporters, so they are kept aware of what we are up to, and how important their support is.

Thank you

Mike B
Chairman

