

# **SMARDEN CHARTER HALL**

## **Annual General Meeting 2022**

### **Report from the Chair of Trustees**

As a result of restrictions imposed by Covid, this is our first Annual General Meeting since May 2019. Mike Barkway stood down as Chairman at the end of 2020, but has remained a trustee, for which we are all immensely grateful. At that time, Carol and Eric stood down as trustees having served for an incredible thirteen years and Roger agreed to take over as Chairman for a year, starting in January 2021. Trustees who have since joined are Mark and Paul, who were appointed on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2021. Caroline van den Born was appointed as Hall Administrator on 1<sup>st</sup> July 2019 and Sarah Smith was appointed to replace Nina on 21<sup>st</sup> July 2021. My stint as Chair of Trustees began in February of this year.

It is a pleasure to report that the Charter Hall is recovering from the effects of the pandemic and the Covid restrictions of 2020-21 and is once more a venue for a wide range of community activities. It is once again a home for many of Smarden's groups and societies, and for private functions, both for villagers and those in the surrounding area. We are delighted that, after fifteen years, the hall still continues to be enjoyed by so many people of all ages.

#### **Usage**

Most regular village groups and activities have returned, thanks in part to a generous discount on Hall charges for the first three months of the year. This was to enable groups and clubs to restart despite low attendance, and was partially successful. Many members have gradually overcome their reluctance to mix indoors, but numbers are on average lower than before due to the impact of the pandemic on people's confidence, and health. The most significant change in bookings has been children's parties which, at 41 this year, have doubled over recent years. This has boosted our income considerably, and has relieved the financial pressure somewhat.

#### **Costs and Charges**

The accounts for 2021 reflect a reasonably successful year, and our financial position remains healthy. We owe this stability to a package of government grants over three years, designed to stave off the financial losses caused by the pandemic. In all we received £30,860, which, it's no exaggeration to say, allowed us to keep the Hall open.

The Hall has no debt, and is managed by Caroline van den Born, our Administrator, and the trustees, on behalf of the village. We have some money in reserve, which enables us to deal with unexpected expenditure, and occasionally to purchase new equipment.

However, we now face a significant increase in running costs in this hostile economic climate. We have therefore reluctantly decided that an increase in Hall charges is unavoidable and fees will go up in January 2023 for both village residents and non-residents. Details have not yet been agreed formally.

### **Improvements**

- The outdated sound system has now been upgraded. Bluetooth is available, and has proved very popular, both for children's and adults' parties, and at other events. Microphones have also been upgraded. Trustees have all undergone sound system training this year, in order to enable hirers to operate the system successfully.
- The internet coverage has also been extended, so that mobile phones (despite the notoriously poor signal) are able to function, and card readers, now one of the most popular payment methods, can be used in the hall.
- The upper stage area has been cleared, shelving erected and boxes and cabinets are in place for Charter Hall records. Of which there are many!
- There are three new CCTV cameras, to enhance security both inside and outside the hall.
- New signs, shortly to be displayed in the car park, will deter overnight parking, and alert intruders and hall users to the use of CCTV, both inside and outside the Hall.

### **New housing and Community Store**

The residents in the fifty new houses are now an established part of the Smarden community and, together with the new community store, have brought this part of the village to life. The store and the hall have proved mutually beneficial, and together provide great facilities for Smarden residents and others from further afield.

### **Charter Hall Management**

Caroline is paid by the Hall and is responsible to the Board of Trustees. She mainly handles bookings, payments, and liaises with hirers. The ten Trustees are volunteers, and each has specific responsibilities which ensure that the Hall runs smoothly. In addition, we each undertake the role of duty caretaker for one month, three times a year, opening the hall for hirers, and, where necessary, explaining the way things work. This means that all Trustees must be familiar with every part of the Hall.

Many people contribute to the success of our Hall, and I would like to place on record my grateful thanks to those who have contributed so much.

Without the continuing commitment of those who run, maintain, and develop the Hall so that it can be enjoyed by so many in the village, it could not exist in its present form.

I would like to thank:

- **Mike**, a driving force who worked tirelessly for thirteen years as Chairman, and still gives us the benefit of his support, knowledge and experience as a Trustee.
- **Roger** who took over as Chairman for a year, achieved a great deal in a short time, and was always on hand when needed.
- **Carol and Eric** who stood down in 2020, having done amazing work as Trustees for thirteen years.
- **Nina Bromley** who kept the hall in pristine condition during the many years in which she worked here, cleaning, painting and decorating
- **Sarah and Caroline** who between them keep the hall in beautiful condition, and ensure it is well-used.
- **Jocelyn** who has ensured that the flower tubs in front of the Hall are always well tended and that everyone who visits the Hall is greeted by an attractive display, whatever the season.
- **Peter Morten** who was late night duty caretaker for several years, and was indispensable when potentially noisy events took place. He locked up and ensured that neighbours were not disturbed by those leaving the hall after 11pm. **Adrian Hackett**, a familiar name to most residents, has kindly agreed to take over this sometimes challenging job, and I know that those living in close proximity to the Hall will have reason to appreciate his presence in future.
- **My fellow Trustees**, Angela, Brian, Fran, Gill, Lea, Mark, Mike, Paul and Roger are the mainstay of the Hall. If I were to talk about them individually, and give an account of all that they do, this report would be twice as long. They have willingly and unstintingly given of their time and talents to support the management, upkeep and operation of the Hall. Their efforts are very much appreciated, and the whole community has every reason to be grateful to them for keeping standards high in every area, inside and out.

And finally, my thanks go to all those people in the village who support the Hall in so many ways, who book the Hall, and who use the Hall. We hope you continue to enjoy its use for many years to come.

**Geraldine Dyer**  
*Chair, Charter Hall Management Committee*

*24<sup>th</sup> September 2022*