

SMARDEN CHARTER HALL

MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD AT THE CHARTER HALL ON SATURDAY 22 JUNE 2024 AT 10.30.AM.

Present: Geraldine Dyer (Chairman)
Mike Barkway
Mark Bickerton
Brian Bristow
Roger Craig
Adam Green
Fran Lester (Hon. Secretary)
Paul Ryan
Sue Williams
Angela Wilson

Smarden Residents: Carol Barkway
Bill Collins
Pat Collins
Judy Hollis
Elizabeth McLeish
Stuart McLeish

Apologies: Caroline van den Born
Nick Marden
Mel Marden

Welcome:

Geraldine welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting and noted the apologies that had been received.

Minutes:

The minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on 24 June 2023, which had been made available, were noted.

Report from the Chair:

Geraldine reported that a year ago Trustees had been extremely worried about the Charter Hall's financial position. Covid, the increase in the cost of living and international turbulence had taken such a heavy toll on finances, that they were unsure whether they would recover. However, when comparing this year's situation with the previous two years, it was

a more promising picture. Whilst not yet where we needed to be, it now felt far more positive.

Pressures brought on by a reduction in income, during and since the Covid pandemic, and by the cost of living crisis that came in its wake, had impacted the Hall severely. We had ended 2022 with a balance of £28,671, but by the first quarter of 2023 we were down to £19,311, a reduction of almost £10,000. Our energy bills alone for that quarter totaled £10,770.

We decided early in 2023 to map out a clear approach to overcome these financial difficulties, with a plan that was now well underway.

Measures taken:

Early on in the year we shared our problems with the village and asked for support. The very generous response in donations - £8,089 in 2023 - enabled us to install new water heaters, and alter the main boiler, which now only provides heating, and was more efficient and less costly to run. Having researched the market, a better deal with new contractors was negotiated for our gas and electricity suppliers, and also the phone and Internet. These measures had resulted in vastly reduced running costs.

By the end of the year with the steps we had taken, the financial position had stabilised at £19,343.64.

An annual review of charges was, as ever, a balancing act. The revised letting fees for 2024 were now on the website. We tried to reconcile the need to recover financially, with the recognition that we do need to keep charges at an affordable level for hirers. A letter was sent to all regular hall hirers, detailing the thinking behind our new charges, with an explanation of the discounts available.

Earlier this year we were successful in our application for a grant of £4,702 from Ashford Borough Council to enable us to switch to LED lighting in the main hall, thereby reducing running costs. This work was scheduled to take place next month. We hope eventually to extend LED lighting to other areas of the building, particularly the Hop Pocket.

With the new heating system, increased prices and profitable bookings such as TODS and the imminent election, we are reversing the negative position. The balance was £24,760.12 on 31st May 2024. We have £5,855 in the reserve account, which did not include a recent generous legacy of £1,000 from the estate of Jim Carr.

Currently we were taking advice on the installation of solar panels. The capital cost is a challenge but hints from Charlie Simpkins, our Kent County Councillor, suggest that government grants may be available to support us in reducing our carbon footprint.

Fundraising:

James Marchant's talk on the Coronation of King Charles 111 in August, and the return of the Charter Hall Quiz in October of last year together raised £2,101. Both events were a great success and we were immensely grateful for so much time, effort and enthusiasm on the part of everyone who participated, with particular thanks to Barbara Marchant and Jan Barnes for their efforts.

In March this year, Gill and Les Bromley and Kim Marsh held a Bring and Buy Sale, with tea and cake included at the Drop-in. They raised £500.

In a few months time, on 7th September, Smarden Big Bid, was being planned. It will be a major fundraising event and we have no doubt that the silent auction, with music, refreshments and children's entertainment, will be hugely successful. There has been an amazing response from residents, with many exciting and valuable auction promises.

The Big Bid will support both Macmillan Cancer Nurses and the Charter Hall. Our thanks go to Marilyn and Alex Ferris for caring enough to make this happen.

Thank you in advance also to Natasha from the Flying Horse, who is planning an Elton John evening on 23rd November in aid of the Hall.

The annual Charter Hall Lottery raised £1,760, the purpose of which is Hall maintenance. Thank you to everyone who bought a ticket this year, and especially those who have loyally supported it for many years, some since Gill Bromley started it in 2010.

Trustees are all volunteers, committed to ensuring that the Hall continues to play a central role in village life. They are crucial to its continuing success. Two of our trustees, Lea Randolph and Gill Sadler, are standing down at this AGM, and they will be sorely missed. They have supported unstintingly, efforts to steer the Hall through these difficult years.

We welcome Sue Williams and Adam Green who, as proposed new trustees, are joining the CH Management Committee. Both have already started work, Adam with late night caretaking, and Sue who is taking over licensing from Gill.

Geraldine took the opportunity to thank most sincerely those individuals who have donated money, time and talent to support the CH; also our village clubs and societies for their continuing support, and all those who support the Hall simply by using it for their activities.

On behalf of the Trustees, thanks go to

- All individuals, clubs and societies who have given donations
- Caroline who manages the books and the bookings.
- Natalie who keeps the Hall looking clean and inviting.
- Mark Rogers, our Webmaster, who ensures that our website is active and up to date.
- Smarden WI members who have worked hard to rejuvenate our hydrangeas
- Sue and Adam, for agreeing to join us as Trustees, with all that entails.
- Marcus Palmer, former Trustee, for his help and support whenever needed.

- And lastly I would like to thank my fellow Trustees who support, for no remuneration and often little acknowledgement, the management, upkeep and operation of the Hall. They are the mainstay of this invaluable village resource

The meeting thanked Geraldine for her excellent report.

Report of the Trustees and Unaudited Financial Statement:

The Report of the Trustees and Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 December 2023, which had been approved and signed on behalf of the Trustees, were adopted.

The Hon. Secretary confirmed that the Trustees were not required to have the Statements independently examined as the income of the Charter Hall fell below the threshold set by the Charity Commission. However, the Trustees believed that it was good practice to appoint an Independent Examiner to review the Statements.

Trustees:

It was noted that the Constitution had provision for up to six Trustees to be elected at the Annual General Meeting and that those Trustees could then co-opt other people to the Management Committee as Trustees.

It was resolved that the following Trustees be re-elected:

- Geraldine Dyer, Mike Barkway, Brian Bristow, Roger Craig and Angela Wilson.

It was resolved further that the above Trustees be authorised to approve the co-opting of the following persons to the Management Committee as Trustees:

- Mark Bickerton, Fran Lester and Paul Ryan.

Geraldine confirmed that Lea Randolph and Gill Sadler had tabled notification that they wished to stand down at this Annual General Meeting. Geraldine noted that they would both be sadly missed as they had contributed significantly to the management of the Hall. She thanked them for their past service.

Gerladine then confirmed that Adam Green and Sue Williams had both indicated their willingness to join the Management Committee and she welcomed them.

It was resolved that the Trustees be authorised to approve their appointment to the Management Committee as Co-opted Trustees.

Independent Examiner:

It was resolved that Ms Glynis Dance of Orchard Business Limited be re-appointed Independent Examiner.

Any Other Business:

The Trustees took questions from the Swarden residents attending. Stuart McLeish congratulated the Trustees on the improvement in performance but noted the need to keep expenditure under control.

There being no further business the meeting closed at 11.15 a.m.

Chairman