

SMARDEN CHARTER HALL

Annual General Meeting 2024

Report from the Chair of Trustees

A year ago Trustees were 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 our finances, that we were unsure whether we would recover. However, when comparing this year's situation with the previous two years, it is a more promising picture. We are not yet where we need to be, but it now feels 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, 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 is now well underway.

Measures we have 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 is 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 are resulting in vastly reduced running costs.

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

Our annual review of charges is, as ever, a balancing act. Our revised letting fees for 2024 are now on our 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 £4702 from Ashford Borough Council to enable us to switch to LED lighting in the main hall, thereby reducing running costs. This work will take place in July. 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. Our current balance was £24,760.12 on 31st May 2024. We have £5855 in the reserve account, which does not include a recent generous legacy of £1000 from the estate of Jim Carr.

We are currently 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 £2101. 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, is 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 £1760, the purpose of which is Hall maintenance. Thank you to everyone who bought a ticket this year, and specially 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 our Hall continues to play a central role in village life. They are crucial to the 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 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.

I would like to take 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.

Geraldine Dyer
Chair, Charter Hall Management Committee

21st June 2024