

Chairman's Report Alderholt Village Hall AGM 22 October 2024

Reflecting on the year just gone can be a rewarding experience. On this occasion I confess to finding myself pleasantly surprised at quite how many live performances we hosted. In October Chris Walker brought us another splendid toe-tapping evening of jazz and the following month we had a joint promotion when Sally Barker of BBC One's *The Voice* fame performed a soulful set. Bumblefly Theatre returned in December with their riotous take on Robin Hood and although attendance was down on the previous year we just about broke even and, more importantly, lots of local children enjoyed themselves.

More local children were entertained in the February half term as they headed to the bottom of the ocean with Coppice Theatre's Science Adventures Deep Sea! and just two days later we were delighted to welcome back the BSO when their strings ensemble's Music of Reflection proved so popular it necessitated some emergency cleaning to ensure we had the required 130 usable chairs. We secured both these events through our collaboration with Artsreach.

Members of that BSO strings ensemble were so enamoured with our audience and the hall's acoustics that they booked the hall in May under the guise of their recently formed British String Quartet for which we ran the bar. The following Saturday Chris was back with his tribute to Benny Goodman and Glenn Miller which went down a storm and proved profitable both through ticket sales and very good bar sales! Another marvellous result for live music, Chris.

We were equally active in June with two more events. At the start of the month, as a new venture, we agreed to run the tea tent at the annual village fete, which proved challenging but generated useful funds. Considerably less profitable was our stand-up comedy night at the end of the month. The audience loved it; there just weren't enough of them. This matched our experience with the Abba tribute group in 2022. That was also in June. Hmmm.

In August, we hosted an African drumming workshop, which proved a great hit with adults and youngsters alike. This was also brought to us through Artsreach. And we have more to come before the end of the year with November's jazz and December's return of Bumblefly Theatre.

Administratively, we further improved the amount of information on our web site and the way it is presented. As an experiment we have streamlined our bookings process by doing away with the requirement for a deposit. We restructured our health & safety risk assessment and have recently completed a new fire risk assessment after attending a presentation at Dorset Community Action's village halls event. Both of these activities prompted some actions but, whilst not wishing to be complacent, we were reassured by how few.

It was not a big year for infrastructure developments. We had to replace a window in February after it was vandalised and have completed a few minor maintenance tasks, perhaps the most important of which was finally getting the chairs cleaned and repaired, cannibalising one for spares. Maintaining the chairs is proving to be something of a Forth Bridge task as, inexplicably, there are already more than a handful with screws missing. It was disappointing not to be able to progress the toilet refurbishment project but we have at least now secured all four grants we sought and have a clear plan for what we want to achieve; we just need to find a reliable and affordable contractor. We also have plans to replace the patio railings and refresh the beds in the garden.

After some doubts about our capacity to continue with the monthly market and café it returned with a bang in March, after a two month hiatus. The new café team hit the ground running. Led by Faye and ably assisted first by Lena and more latterly by Pat, amongst others, they brought fresh presentation, which drove record sales of £237 in April and four further months in excess of £200. The demand for stalls has never been greater nor has the variety on offer thanks to Lin's skill and dogged determination as the market admin manager. The market operations manager role has proved more tricky to fill. After no fewer than three false starts Jo kindly came forward to offer her services but regrettably a change in her circumstances means that she will only be able to continue in the role until the end of the calendar year.

Also leaving us this year was Kim who stood down as the bookings officer after revitalising our offer and processes, leaving bookings in a strong position. We thank her and wish her well too, as we do Karen who left the role of secretary. I am very pleased that Wendy has stepped into that role and is settling in well as is Dave who has taken on responsibility for maintenance matters. I thank and welcome them both to their respective roles. Meanwhile Naomi continues to do an excellent job managing our social media presence. Amid the comings and goings we benefit greatly from the stability of Tina's experience as treasurer to ensure the finances are in fine fettle and from El Presidente Norman's watchful eye, sage advice and horticultural enthusiasm.

As always there will be many challenges and frustrations in the year ahead, not least with recruitment and retention. But here's the thing: on almost every metric Alderholt village hall is thriving. The monthly market & café are going from strength to strength; bookings - both ad hoc and regular - are going from strength to strength; the finances are going from strength to strength and the building looks great.

Committee members are committed, capable and determined to succeed in making the hall the best it can be and keeping it at the heart of the community. So, yes there will be challenges but as Bette Davis once said: "The key to life is accepting challenges. Once someone stops doing this, he's dead". On that basis I think it is fair to say we should all feel very much alive!

Graeme Thorley
Chairman Alderholt Village Hall
22 October 2024