

APPROVED MINUTES

Annual General Meeting of the Grundisburgh Village Hall Management Committee on Wednesday, 11 March 2020 at 7:30 PM, at the Village Hall, Grundisburgh

Present: Judith Bignell - Chair, Richard Pepper -Treasurer,
John Talbot, Bryan Laxton, Peter Kendall, Tracy Kearney, Stephen Cooper.

Apologies: Ann Willetts, Clive Willetts, Michelle Sanford, Richard Garnham, Chris Garnham, Alison Garrod, Phil Bailey.

Judith welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending.

1. Minutes of last year's Annual General Meeting:

These were proposed by Peter Kendall and seconded by Bryan Laxton. They were adopted unanimously and there were no matters arising.

2. Plans for 2020 officers

Judith made the following statement:

"We are aware we need to do things absolutely by the book because of the National Lottery scrutiny.

Our constitution says we need to elect the committee at the AGM then, the committee chooses the Chair, Vice-Chair and Treasurer at the next meeting after the AGM.

I have decided I would like to step down from the Chair after 19 years.

The committee at its last meeting unanimously decided to support the following as officers, to be ratified at our next meeting after the AGM.

Chair – Bryan Laxton

Vice Chair – Judith Bignell

Building Manager – Richard Pepper, who has decided to step down as Treasurer to focus solely on the increasingly challenging task of keeping this hall running.

Treasurer – Stephen Cooper (co-opted onto the committee at our last meeting)

We are aiming to strengthen the committee next year and bring on more people with valuable skills for the building and running of the new hall".

3. Treasurer's report – Accounts for 2019/2020 and current hall update

Richard Pepper reported as follows:

"The village hall is lost in a nowhere place: the old hall has come to the end but is not yet gone: the planned new hall not here yet.

The deficit for the last twelve months has been £1,500 or £5,000 depending on which accounting convention you follow and the probability is that the hall revenue will not meet its costs in the coming year. It is important to recognize that the financial viability of the existing hall is draining away quickly. It has accumulated resources to carry it through the year ahead, perhaps the year after, but not longer.

Just under £1,800 was spent on essential maintenance over the past 12 months. It was essential only to keep the building safe and to, quite literally, stop bits falling off, but its overall condition is now poor and given its many faults there will be little justification for spending any more money on it. My recommendation to the trustees is that this building should close not later than 31st July 2021.

The choice for the village is therefore a new village hall or no village hall. If it were to be no village hall, then Grundisburgh would join an ever-growing list of villages that have lost this vital amenity. This hall will close, for reasons both financial and physical. It may yet close for a third reason: that as the charity is presently constituted, it might place the trustees under too great a personal risk. The trustees continue to work hard to create a new hall fit for the years ahead; this is the moment for the village to support them both financially and practically.”

4. Finances for 2020/2021

Stephen Cooper reported that it was his aim to make financial matters as easy as possible for moving from the current double entry bookkeeping to a linked, spreadsheet-based system for the accounts, and using online banking – BACS - and a system such as iZettle for booking. Reference was made to the Annual Report and Unaudited Financial Statements for the year ended 31 January 2020 which had been made available online and in hard copy form in Williams Stores prior to the meeting. The distinction between restricted and unrestricted funds was clarified, as was the difference between an independent examiner’s statement and a full audit.

At this point a large bouquet of flowers was presented to Judith Bignell in recognition of her long service (and that of her husband, Richard Pepper) which was gratefully accepted by her with much applause from the entire company. Small individual gifts were also made to each of them as mementos.

5. New Hall Update

Bryan thanked Tracy Kearney and Michelle Sanford who had recently stepped down as trustees and commented that their support, engagement and energy had been important to the committee during their time as trustees and they would be missed.

Bryan emphasised that this was going to be a particularly important year during which we needed to (a) achieve the necessary funding and (b) decide how we operate a new hall.

Bryan explained this project had been 30 years in the making and that it takes a whole village to build a village hall. Funding by the village had so far achieved more than £11,000 from events and contributors

There had been a lot more engagement with the community as a whole, but specific elements in particular.

Engagement

User Groups - The VHMC had engaged more with the PCC and the Bowls Club, both of whom now have trustee representatives on the VHMC (Clive Willetts and Heather Langdon). In addition the WI had been approached and agreed that although (for reasons of personal liability) Barbara King, the Grundisburgh WI President did not wish to join as a trustee, she wanted to attend meetings as a guest, without voting. These three groups were warmly welcomed back and their views and involvement were much appreciated.

Community/Fund raising - A lot of events had been held in the last 12 months to both engage with people and also to raise funds for the new hall. Ten events had been held raising over £3,300 involving hundreds of people – Lynda Bridges and Heather Langdon had organized a number of cakes sales, Adam Kearney and others organised a New Year's Eve disco, Stephen Newton and others had organised a very successful and popular Tea Dance recently, Sarah Cavanagh and John Richards were thanked for their part in organizing a number of Grundisburgh Symphony Orchestra events, Jenny Sewell had run a safari meal and Will Barber and Richard Pepper had organised the first (hopefully of many) village cycle rides. In addition, very valuable donations of £500 had been made by each of the Folk Dance Club, GADS and Upbeat! The Noble Rotters had made a donation of £100 and The Horticultural Society had donated very substantial sum of £2,500. There are also a number of future events planned to continue the engagement with the community and raise much needed funds, including a Pudding Evening, contributions from local gardens in the NGS scheme, a Cake Stall at the Village Show and another Village Cycle Ride.

Each of these sums raised had been doubled up by the Match Funding that a handful of generous local individuals had created which gave up to £50,000 of funding to match any other funds raised by other people's efforts. Bryan thanked those who had made the significant personal pledges to create the Match Funding.

Other people engagement - Engagement and support has come from Andrew Jolliffe, our local Communities Officer and Colin Hedgley & Tony Fryatt our District Councillors.

Will Barber (Caption Design), who has been designing the new village hall website (for a fee at reduced charity rates), described how the new website will provide detailed, geographical information from those who visit it, and will include an automated online booking system for hiring/renting the hall, giving a real audit trail with the advantage of eliminating cash. The system will be able to migrate from the current to the new hall when it opens.

Bryan stated that he believed that a considerable amount of momentum had built up during the year and that the committee had worked hard to bring the community with it on the journey to building a new village hall.

2020 Tasks

Bryan Laxton continued the update, describing the considerable amount of work to be done in the next 12 months or so, including running the VHMCM differently. This involved creating new working groups, including: a) conversion to a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO), b) new building project, c) internal layout, d) kitchen design and e) new hall business plan.

Given that even now some 7,000 people visit the hall in a year, it is likely that this will exceed 14,000 when the new hall is established. The need for a business plan working group is critical to make a sensible projection of future income, use and costs. Proposed members include John Talbot, Stephen Cooper and David Keates. John Talbot explained the way in which the new Business Plan working group would operate.

National Lottery Grant

Bryan was commended for his hard work on the National Lottery grant; he referred to the 73 page, 27,000 word application and to his research on other recent village hall projects from whose leaders he had received considerable, helpful information. Bryan confirmed that we were still waiting for a decision from the National Lottery.

Use of the new hall

Bryan said that in the preparation of the National Lottery application and in discussion with many other halls, it had become apparent that it was key that the community use the new hall for additional purposes in addition to the current main users. There are quite a number of people in Grundisburgh who live “on the margins” and he had been personally motivated to make the extra effort to help these people and these groups.

In connection with the National Lottery application he highlighted the assistance he had from the Rev Canon Clare Sanders, whose report (presented by Judith Bignell) is reproduced below:

“ I am sorry I am unable to be with you this evening – wearing my Rural Dean’s hat, I am hosting the Woodbridge Deanery Lent Lecture elsewhere!

Over my time in the village, which is 15 years this summer, I have been enormously aware of just how much goes on in the village and how much happens in the village hall. At my licensing service in 2005, the “bunfight” which followed the service took place here; I’ve attended numerous funeral teas; celebrated several significant birthdays; laughed my way through many village pantomimes; shivered in the cold on Thursday evenings while on Youth Club duty; sat through Annual Parish Meetings and attended consultation events about the dreaded northern bypass and housing proposals.

This village hall is well used, but past its sell by date – and I am just sorry that I won’t be around to enjoy being able to attend events and happenings in the new village hall- because this village needs and deserves the best we can offer in terms of community facilities. Grundisburgh is a village where so much goes on - it has a fantastic community ethic.

What I think I have become even more aware of in the past few years, however, is the need that exists to serve families and carers in homes where there is ill health and dementia, and have a warm and welcoming place to provide for them with easy access; the same applies to those who live on their own and the opportunity to meet together in pleasant surroundings; I’m aware of the issues that arise from rural isolation and over the last few years of families in the village in need of help from the Food Bank and in need of debt advice.

I know there are other groups in Suffolk keen to run sessions for those with specific needs and serving a wider community base than just Grundisburgh as a village – such as the local Domestic Abuse Champions who have said: “We would be very interested in using the village hall as a venue for our Domestic Abuse Champions training. We tend to have approx. 25 delegates per session, it runs over two full days. I would envisage being able to host one 2 day course every six months or so. They have nowhere to the immediate north of Ipswich that they can use”.

The church , now working together as a group of 9 parishes, I hope has done its bit in responding to some of these needs, but as you know it has taken 14 years to get to the point of getting toilets installed – God willing I may still be able to make the first flush before I retire – but we haven’t got a hall - use of the parish room yes - but that is limited in its scope and so I wish my successor – whoever that might be - joy in being able to forge a partnership with the new village hall and take forward initiatives in serving local needs.

Clare Sanders”

Graham Parker, founder of Charity Fundraising Ltd, described the background to his advice on the National Lottery bid, in particular the building into it of the needs of individuals and families in need and on the edge who exist in the village, but who are often not visible. Graham believed that his team would help in raising not only capital,

but also revenue funding and confirmed it had been engaged by the trustees to advise on fundraising and to make various applications.

Current Funding

Bryan summarized the approximate funding so far:

£250k cash

£250k current site value with outline planning

£100k match funding

£200k possible Big Lottery

£800k

This sum of £800,000 will enable only a modest sized hall to be built, but the advice of many experienced recent new hall project leaders was to build as big as you can on the basis that you can never have too much space and a new hall will attract a lot more uses and users than you imagine. Bryan confirmed the latest cost estimate of the hall for which we have planning consent is approx. £1m.

Delaying the build is not a feasible option; each 12 month delay could increase the costs by the rate of building inflation and add approximately £20,000 to the build costs.

Options

Assuming we get the National Lottery grant, but failed to raise any further significant monies, Bryan set out the options he believed we had:

1. Build a smaller hall costing £800k
2. Build the Planning consented hall, but delay non-essential works
3. Borrow some money e.g. £200k from the Public Works Loan Board

Bryan promised that the VHMC would consult the village ahead of taking the decision as to which option to pursue. There would need to be public presentations and open discussions to explain the details as well as the pros and cons of each option.

Updated calculations had been undertaken for a long term loan and if a 25 year loan of £200,000 was considered with the PWLB, this would result in a council tax increase of £18 per annum for a Band D house, and £12 for a Band A house. These both represented an increase of around 1.05% in each household's council tax bill and involve repaying a total of £300k over 25 years.

Questions

Questions and comments followed from Steve Newton, Alistair Turk (who suggested "build as big as you can" from his experience in another village, John Richards, Andy Redman on the PWLB process, Paul Whittingham on the time frame, and Heather Langdon on the allocation of the current fundraising events.

Graham Parker emphasized the importance of evidence provided by the questionnaires devised by his company which would provide strong support to any grant awarding bodies. The attendees were encouraged to complete these.

6. User Group Nominations

Heather Langdon is the new rep for the Bowls Club, joining today as a trustee. Barbara King is the new WI rep who wishes only to be a guest on the committee.

7. Elections

The following were put forward to be elected as Trustees at this AGM:

Bryan Laxton
Peter Kendall
Richard Pepper
Judith Bignell

These were elected by a majority vote of those present.

Peter Kendall
Secretary
15 March 2020