

Lavant Memorial Hall Annual Report 2021

For the second year in succession 2021 was a year dominated by the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. Restrictions were sufficiently severe at the beginning of January to preclude use of the Hall by any of our regular users and the normal types of occasional bookings, so the Hall was closed. This situation prevailed until April, when it became possible for child-related activities to resume, with a further relaxation in May prompting some further limited use. Most regular users had indicated in a consultation that they intended to return to the Hall in September, when it was anticipated that restrictions would have ended.

Throughout the year we received strong financial support from Chichester District Council in grants and rates relief. Some regular hirers very generously donated payments they had made for bookings that could not be fulfilled. The trustees had taken the view that the Hall had an obligation to be open to serve the community whenever possible. Use of the Hall to support the vaccination programme was offered, although not taken up, but we did provide a drop-in centre to support the census completion (a permitted activity) locally in April. We also supported the community fibre-optic cabling to Lavant initiative by pledging to switch to fibre-optic for a minimum of one year with a provider of our choice, and assigning our government grant to Open Reach.

Following lifting of legal restrictions in the summer users did indeed return in September, albeit with some delays and an initial lower level of occasional bookings. At the time of writing bookings continue at a slightly depressed level.

The lower levels of Hall activity provided an opportunity to take stock of the building and, with this in mind, a condition survey was commissioned from a chartered surveyor. The resulting comprehensive report, running to some 60 pages plus an accompanying 70 photographs, provides an excellent baseline for future maintenance requirements and includes a 10-year costed schedule of suggested works. There was good news in that no major issues were uncovered beyond prudent maintenance and the opportunity to upgrade as finances permit. Nevertheless, the funds required will be challenging. A small working group was formed to oversee implementation. Routine maintenance activity was reduced after the substantial spend on electrical services and drains in 2020, but the external windows overlooking the village green were repainted.

Early in the year enquiries were made of Southern Water as to whether any further action had been taken in the light of the flooding in 2020, caused by overload in their sewers. We were advised that camera inspection had revealed no problems in the sewer and the incident was being put down to exceptional circumstances.

The Hall was last surveyed for asbestos 10 years ago, since when there have been a number of renovations and an asbestos removal by a licenced contractor. A re-survey was undertaken by a suitably qualified contractor, which confirmed that there is no need for further intervention and no risk to users.

The Fire Alarm System at the Hall was substantially upgraded to bring it up to current standards. There are now a comprehensive set of smoke and heat detectors, call points at all exits and both audible and strobe alarms throughout.

The trustees also gave consideration as to whether occasional problems of over-heating in summer could be resolved by air-conditioning or, more interestingly, air-source heat pumps that could also deal with winter heating. The trustees ultimately concluded that the age and style of the building and the usage pattern (insulation, absence of conventional radiators, draft-proofing etc) made it unlikely that heat-pumps would be viable without major building upgrades. Nevertheless, opportunities for incremental building improvement should be taken as finance permits. The trustees also decided to embark on the long-delayed upgrade to the sports showers and washrooms and have begun the process of specifying the works and seeking tenders.

We had originally planned an exhibition to mark the centenary of the Hall, to be held in conjunction with the village fete and other community events. However, with the cancellation of those events due to the pandemic and the near impossibility of getting timely access to archive material, it was reluctantly decided to defer the exhibition and review the position in 2022.

The Covid Working Group members were kept busy with the evolving and frequently changing regulations and again ensured that the Hall was able to operate as a "Covid secure" facility whenever possible. Caretaker, Tony Bleach, and Booking Secretary, Jennie Lindfield, did most of the heavy lifting dealing with rescheduling and re-arranging activities and making things happen on a day-to-day basis, whilst generously and voluntarily contributing to the general belt-tightening during lockdown. My sincere thanks are due to all of you.

A small presentation of a gift and photographic mementos was made to former Chair, Peter Winter, during the year.

It is apparent that it is becoming increasingly difficult to find volunteers willing to serve as trustees, so I would particularly like to thank the management committee for their support and especially the Treasurer, Bob Mayne, whose diligent attention to securing financial support has kept us afloat, and the Secretary, Sheila Sims, who in addition to her normal workload has also kindly taken on promoting the "200" Club, following Peter Winter's retirement. We owe you both a debt of gratitude.

Richard Wignall

Chair

December 2021