**Chair’s Report for Year Ending 2023**

Good evening and welcome.

My name is Lorna Gough, and I am the Chair of the Village Hall Committee and I want to give you a report on the activities of the past year.

With me, this evening, are Sandra Gamble, Richard Scott and Paul Bryant – who are all Trustees of the VH.

Richard Scott and I are representatives of the PC aligned to the VH and Gaile Bishop (who can’t join us this evening) handles the Administration for the Hall.

I’d like to extend a special welcome to those of you representing those groups who hire and use the Hall – you are the reason we are here.

This evening, I will bring you up to date with what has been happening at the Village Hall since the start of 2023, which has been a period of consolidation for us on the VH committee. We have had many challenges along the way, which have slowly been resolved thanks, primarily, to Paul and Gaile. So, special thanks go to them for all their continued hard work 😊

I think it is important to remind everyone of two things:

Firstly, as in many areas of society, the aftermath of Covid continued to be felt in 2023.

During Covid we lost volunteer support, and bookings.

In 2022, due to ongoing financial constraints, we had to make the Hall Manager redundant, and by this time, we had no caretaker. We were then faced with an issue with the roof which meant closing the Hall for a month for safety checks.

As you can imagine, that set a difficult path to the start to 2023.

As we had no paid employees, every aspect of hall management fell initially, to the 3 Trustees, but we were thankfully joined by another volunteer (who then became a Trustee) who also saw the potential in the VH, and we gained our Admin volunteer.

This set the path of determination to ensure the continued operation of the Hall.

Secondly, it is probably worth me reminding everyone that the West Lavington Village Hall is a registered charity. Many people think it is run by the Parish Council – it is not. Although the charity is very grateful for the support and co-operation from the Parish Council.

The purpose of the Charity is to manage and maintain the West Lavington Village Hall for the benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of West Lavington.

The charitable status means at the present time the Trustees take full responsibility for everything to do with the Village Hall. As you can appreciate this brings its own concerns.

Under the terms of the current constitution most committee members, including those representing local groups, automatically became Trustees. This has now become unwieldy, and the responsibilities of trusteeship deterred volunteers from coming forward. Also, through the passages of time, some of the original groups identified as putting forward representatives to the management committee no longer even existed.

Therefore, A few years ago, a commitment was made to switch to become a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with Charity Commission approval. With Parish Council support, funds were allocated to pay for the initial legal work required. This support was ongoing in 2023 with legal work to create the new lease for the building. Thank you to Sandra Gamble for her legal eye on this.

The CIO has now been registered with the Charity Commission and is up to date with the returns required by the Commission and the final transfer of VH assets (from the Charity to the CIO) will hopefully take place in the next month or so.

The CIO means Trustees will no longer have personal liability for what happens at the Hall, and we hope it will encourage more organisations to nominate Trustees and individuals to come forward to help in the running and administration of the Hall.

That’s dealt with the legal and technical challenges that have had to be faced and I’m grateful to my fellow Trustees for the hard work that they have invested.

***Now for what’s happened since the start of 2023***.

The Trustees have endeavoured to maintain a secure, attractive and fulfilling environment in order that a wide range of social, charitable and commercial lettings can continue using this building. It is the only public building in the village which can provide such a facility. I am sure you will agree that our central location and onsite car park, in the heart of Wiltshire, has proved beneficial in attracting county-wide groups – and income generated by these lettings helps the Trustees to fulfil their objective providing a facility for the ultimate benefit of the inhabitants of the Parish of West Lavington.

Despite our ideal location making the VH easy access, it has not been easy to raise the VH profile. So many aspects of the hall’s management and maintenance needed (and still does) addressing.

Initially, necessary cleaning and general maintenance of the facilities was carried out by a Trustee and his wife, though thankfully today we have a cleaning company one hour per week and they are making a fantastic difference to the hall’s appearance and smell.

Trustees now meet monthly and with that continued momentum, we have been able to look closely at what was needed from the start of 2023.

We needed to:

* Overcome access issues with the banking system which meant for some months we were unable to pay our bills (and I’m grateful to two of the Trustees who personally financed the Hall for almost six months). People who had left the village long ago were still on “the books”.
* Implement regular, planned safety checks throughout the VH.
* Regular electrical testing, PAT testing of all our electrical equipment including the stage lighting,
* An asbestos report had to be commissioned.
* Fire checks and report which led to the checking of all our Emergency lights.
* With the heavy rains we’ve all experienced, essential maintenance was required on our gutters and drainage system.
* Licencing of the Hall had to addressed and we now have the correct Premises Licence which determines what we can do in the Hall and deals with the sale of alcohol and the VH has a Designated Premises Supervisor who holds a Personal Licence for the management of the alcohol licence and other areas. This is an advantage for our hirers who do not need to apply for a Temporary Entertainment Notice.
* Loos were given attention with new loo seats and brushes and changing long-expired batteries to ensuring the water flushing functions were working in the male toilets.
* Seating and heating were highlighted as our priorities for 2023 as the VH had lost bookings over hard seats and cold meetings!
* The Parish Council kindly enabled the Hall to replace 150 chairs for which the Committee is very grateful – this has made seating comfier for hirers and gives the VH flexibility to enable the old chairs to be used outside for fetes etc.
* A radio mic has just been purchased to make things easier at meetings.

During the year approximately 350 bookings were made (and it is encouraging that figure is already approaching 400 in 2024). Without exception the hirers have been a pleasure to deal with, and happy with the facilities - but find the personal touch, via email, is what hirers tend to prefer and what works the best and our regular hirers are very much appreciated.

Volunteers are always needed to help run the hall’s events, and a successful and profitable bar was run recently at a gig which added £400+ to funds. ***Thanks to Jodie and Mason for sorting refreshments tonight*** 😊

The website is being updated to a new colourful site which we hope will go live over the summer.

Many admin issues have been addressed – three years’ accounts have now been sent to the Charity Commission and for the first time in years the hall is up to date with its returns. This means with accounts in place the Trustees will be able to apply for grants once the CIO is finalised.



The banks accounts are now healthier, and we have a new energy provider contract which should prevent huge bills and our Broadband has been changed.

There are plans afoot to update the heating to something quieter, more efficient, and more economical – which is being researched by Richard Scott who is our retired architect.

Richard will tell you his principal interest is the fabric of the VH and he admits to having often wondered why the bricks and mortar roof and walls, etc. are referred to as “the fabric.” The last two plus years, have made him realise it’s particularly suitable in this circumstance because we’ve been stitching our approach of the VH fabric together as a committee, initially making the building safe and legal.

It has been a learning and catching up process attending to all the legislative requirements demanded of a building in public use and our principal targets had to be setting up those legislative requirements and keeping them (and ongoing maintenance) up to legal standards, while trying to encourage new uses to boost the hall’s income and keeping the buildings fit to serve the community demands.

The costly (but necessary) survey of the structures in question gave us the all-clear structurally but a very clear message regarding the maintenance burden both current and inherited. So, we have the challenge to fund those necessary repairs.

Lack of funds and concentration on day-to-day running has favoured us with time and the opportunity to observe the Village Hall in action. We have been able to focus attention on day to day running and this has given us time to observe the buildings in use. What it provides, what it could provide. How it works and where it doesn’t.

As already said, the CIO status will enable us to apply for grants for specific projects, but we must stay on a day-to-day basis, hoping all we meet are minor fabric demands. Whilst the future is ever brighter for the VH, there should be no doubt we remain on a narrow path.

We must continue to look for ways to reduce the gap between income and expenditure and running costs. To achieve that we will have to look at the efficiency of the fabric and its ability give us the best income reasonably possible from every square metre of floor space. We are committed to seek a fabric that achieves a net zero carbon footprint and low maintenance, enabling us to hand over an efficient building to the next generation to take forward.

We need to look at the previous plans and consultations that have gone before us and we will be setting up a framework for discussions and consultation with the community and all interested parties for the Parish in the future.

***The remit is simple really***, ***to survive we must continue to find ways to narrow that gap between running costs and income***.

**No pressure!**

However, running a Hall like this is always a challenge – but it’s fun. Of course there is always the issue of ongoing maintenance and expense, for example repairing extractor fans, situating a post box (the hall did not have a postal address), washing tea towels and mop heads, all of which again fall to the VH team, but we get pleasure knowing we are maintaining this amazing village resource which comes to fruition when the parishioners are seen using and enjoying it.

“She” is looking a bit jaded but (as you have heard) we are making inroads but any support with general maintenance would be so much appreciated.

For example, we would like all the exterior walls and windows washed for Spring and hope to place an outdoor tap to facilitate this. The bins must be placed so prominently at the front, but we hope the new planter supplied by StreetScene will make the area look more attractive. 😊

The Committee is very positive going forward and should anyone wish to be involved in any way or have new ideas please do talk to Trustees after this meeting.

Thank you for your time 😊