

SHRIVENHAM PARISH ASSEMBLY 2023

Report of Chairman of Viscountess Barrington Trust

- It has been another year of uncertainty! Although our bookings for the hall have held up, the bookings for the pavilion have lagged behind our expectations. And we have had both great sadness and hope for the future.
- Our wonderful lady admin officer, Julie Sarsons passed away on 21st March and we hosted her funeral reception in the pavilion last Tuesday. Julie joined the team at a time of crisis when we had lost our chairman and most of the staff. She took over the bookings for the hall and her smile and winning ways did much to restore our fortunes. She had been ill for some time and we are at least comforted by the knowledge that she is now released from her suffering. Our sincere condolences go out to Nicole, Paul and Adrian and the rest of her family.
- The impact of the energy shock still continues to reverberate and its effect has been dramatic. Our gas and electricity costs for this year have tripled rising from around £4,500 p.a. to over £13,000 which with the addition of the pavilion makes out utilities costs nearly £20,000 a year!
- The new pavilion in the Rec was finally finished at the start of our year and it was opened officially on the 14th October by Cllr Richard Bartle in the presence of representatives of the District Council, the cricket club and our MP Richard Johnston! Sadly as I say the message has not got out that it is a great place for a meeting or a party and booking have been slow to take off but we plan to promote it actively this year.
- Although the equipment in the playground passes its annual ROSPA inspections it was looking tired to say the least. As part of a planned upgrade of the equipment the old kiddies' slide has been replaced with a super brand new slide and a zigzag twister and a rock and bowl unit have been installed. In addition the Fete Committee repainted the tired equipment which gave the play area a whole new look this summer.
- Also in the Rec, we successfully applied for Section 106 funding to allow us to expand and enhance our existing multi-use games area or MUGA and this project was completed in June last year. In addition we have applied for the remaining S106 funding to install a mini-MUGA penalty shoot out area for younger kids which is due to be installed shortly.

- We have regular meetings with both Cala, the developers of Cross Trees Park and ISG, the contractors for the new school. With the good offices of the football club we have persuaded ISG to create a proper path behind the football ground instead of the muddy track it is at the moment. In addition with the help of Cllr Elaine Ware we are in discussion with Cala about extending this path through the Rec to meet up with the Manor Lane entrance. This will create a safe and direct walking route to the school from the centre of the village.
- Back at the hall Lewie and Phoebe have continued an ongoing programme of work which we started last year to spruce up and redecorate the internal facilities. In particular the Vic Day Hall has been given a completely new look.
- In February we had another shock when part of the floor in the newly redecorated Vic Day Hall collapsed and the timber bearers underneath the floor were found to have rotted away. Luckily we were able to call upon PJE, the contractors for the pavilion, and they installed a brand new floor in engineered oak properly damp proofed on top of a layer of insulation.
- PJE also successfully completed the rebuilding of the bay window in the Claridge Room following the accident last year when a lady delivering her children crashed into it. PJE did an excellent job which included sourcing and matching the Cotswold stone mullions on the façade and redecorating the interior.
- In February we were alerted to the impending deadline for applying for the Platinum Jubilee Village Halls Grant. As part of the platinum jubilee year the government made available £3m to upgrade and refurbish village halls all over England. The criteria for the grant are extremely challenging in that one had effectively had to have a readymade project waiting to go and have at least 80% matched funding.
- However we decided it was worth a try as there is a substantial sum of money available in S106 funds specifically allocated to improving the hall which can be used for the matched funding and we had long had a scheme in mind to develop the loggia into another meeting room with a glazed façade overlooking the Rec. We aim to submit the application at the end of this week but we are not very hopeful as the competition is extremely fierce for a rather paltry sum to be spread amongst all the village halls in England.
- Earlier in the year we had successfully applied for a grant from the Westmill Solar Cooperative to carry out an energy audit of the hall.

Given the impact of the energy price rises it was important that we understood what we could do to improve and mitigate the energy efficiency of this almost 100 year old building. So in early March the audit was carried out by the Energy Information Exchange at Oxford Brookes University and we have just received their report with a number of recommendations as to how we can make specific improvements.

- Last year Julia prepared a strategic plan for the hall which will enable us to prioritise the ongoing improvements including improving the energy efficiency and extending the loggia. We also hope to be able to re-plan and refurbish the main Ladies and Gents toilets but more of that later.
- This year SADS resumed their annual pantos after a three year break due to the pandemic. They put on Aladdin which turned out to a quite marvellous show – some said it was their best ever. In addition we had both the Watermill Theatre and the Rain or Shine Theatre Group back to perform outside in the Rec. Although the weather wasn't as conducive as it might be, we made a small profit on these shows. The aim this year will be to actively promote the use of the hall and we have set up a small working group to examine how we can improve our publicity and promotion.
- Unfortunately with the pressure on the budget particularly from the utilities we have been forced to rationalize and implement a new charging structure earlier in the year. We have increased the charges for commercial users by approximately 10% but have tried to leave the charges for community users largely the same.
- The Hall will be coming up for its hundredth birthday in three years time and we hope to have a grand celebration in the presence of a prominent personage.
- The Hall is very much the heart of the village and we are keen that it remains the splendid community facility that it is.
- I am extremely grateful to Julia and Lyn for all their hard work in running the hall and for keeping a tight rein on the finances including preparing the budgets for each year. With Lewie, Phoebe, and Maria we have a great team which will allow go forward with confidence into next year.