

East Malling Institute Hall

Charity No. 253531

Chairman's Report 2017

It seems hardly possible that we are a year on since Derek Carpenter stood down as Chair of the Institute. I do hope he hasn't missed us too much! Meanwhile I have been made to feel very welcome by the Management Committee and I wish to thank them from the outset of this report for their patience, and support, while I have been getting to know all the ins and outs of the Hall and the way it functions.

For the benefit of anyone who does not know, the Institute Hall is a Registered Charity managed by volunteers. The current building dates from the late 1970's, the previous building having been very badly damaged by fire in 1977. It is one of 2 Village Halls in East Malling – the other being the Hall at New Road, owned by the Parish Council – and of course we also have the East Malling Centre in the old primary school building at Chapman Way with its community hall and café.

East Malling is a vibrant community with a great many groups and organisations requiring meeting space, and here at the Institute we surely have something for everyone with a wide range of groups meeting regularly including the East Malling Conservation Group, East Malling Singers, LARA Arts & Crafts, LARA Singers, the Heath Players drama group, the Kumon Centre, Music Mayhem, Talking Spirit, the Watringbury Flower Club, the WI, 2 Yoga classes, and a Zumba class. Alongside this, the Hall is let for occasional hire - individual bookings catering for family parties and celebrations, workshops, exhibitions and so on.

In this last year, and in order to promote the Institute and the groups that meet here, we have launched our own website. You will find us at www.eastmallinginstitutehall.co.uk The site is simple in design and easy to navigate, providing booking information, a gallery of photographs, a little about the Hall's history, how to contact us, where to find us and so on. Each user group has been offered a page, for free, to advertise their groups and activities. Not all have taken up this offer but I hope they will think about doing so. If you have not visited the site I would encourage you to take a look and if you feel the site could be improved in any way we would welcome your feedback.

When groups and individuals hire our Hall we want their experience to be a good one. We recognise the importance of retaining our existing hirers and attracting new bookings. We want our hirers to feel confident about recommending us to their friends and family and so we must make sure the Hall is well kept and is an attractive space in which to meet. We want the Hall to look its best and we are conscious that some interior cosmetic attention would not go amiss. As an initial step we have arranged for a professional deep clean to take place which will include a full clean of the kitchens, washrooms, and polishing of the floors. The Hall floor itself will probably need some fairly major attention in the next year or so. That work is beyond our financial reach at present but it is on our 'wish list'.

General cleanliness of the Hall is obviously very important. We have had some issues on occasion this year with a minority of hirers not leaving the Hall in a satisfactory state. This is problematic as it takes our cleaner away for her allotted tasks or means she has to work additional hours. We do ask, please, for all users

to co-operate with us in leaving the hall in a clean and tidy condition. This includes clearing up any spillages, making sure crockery and cutlery is washed and put away, removing items from the fridge, and placing any rubbish from the bins in the communal rubbish container in the yard. New notices will be put up in the Hall shortly and will be sent to each user as a reminder of what is required. Unfortunately, where the Hall is not left in a satisfactory condition we may need consider imposing a charge for the additional time our cleaner spends tidying up.

To help us keep on top of the situation I hope that sometime in the spring/early summer we will be able to organise a volunteer clean – if you would like to offer your services for that please do let me know!

During 2018 we plan to carry out some internal decorating with help from Community Payback, but first we need to secure some funding. We decided to put in a bid to Trudy Dean's 'Dragon's Den' event that took place on 18th November, where members of the community vote for their favourite projects. Along with redecoration costs, our bid incorporated some security and safety improvements: provision of alarms and a security camera system, alterations to the serving hatch and purchase of a space-saving clearing station to free up space on worktops during busy times in the kitchen. I am very grateful to the Heath Players who came along to the event and supplemented my presentation with a short sketch. There were some very strong and deserving bids from organisations such as those helping terminally ill patients, bereaved children, and isolated older folk – and the ever popular Scouts! – and unfortunately our bid was not successful this time but I am quietly confident that we will secure some funding elsewhere in the not too distant future.

Our main focus during 2017 in terms of maintenance has been on the replacement of the ageing and inefficient radiator system. This was a very costly but necessary exercise. We are extremely grateful to County Councillor Mrs Trudy Dean for her grant of £2,500 towards this project from her KCC Member's Fund. Reports received so far are that the new system is working well in the Hall, although it has highlighted the need for some insulation in the Committee Room so that has gone on to our 'to do' list.

Clearly the work we are able to carry out is dependent on our income, whether through grants or hire charges. Our charges have remained at the levels set in 2016. I think we do need to revisit these, as we should every year or so, to make sure they are at the right level and I will be recommending to the Committee when we next meet that we conduct a review.

Of course, how we manage our funds is crucial, and if you are to manage things well you must have a reliable and competent Treasurer. The Institute has had the good fortune over the last 10 years to have Clive Spinks in the Treasurer's seat. He has been diligent in issuing invoices for hire charges and settling our bills when these are due. He has been meticulous and timely in producing monthly Financial Statements so that we always know where we are financially. It must be said that his patience has been sorely tested this year – not by me I hasten to add! – but rather by the Bank. We have had the most extraordinary amount of difficulty updating the account signatories. It has taken up an astonishing amount of Clive's time but, fortunately, Clive is nothing if not persistent and after many months, innumerable telephone calls, visits to the Branch and discussions with the Ombudsman the matter is *almost* resolved. Thank you Clive for not giving up!

Shortly after last year's AGM Clive gave notice of his intention to stand down as Treasurer – an understandable decision after holding the fort for so long. Although he gave us ample warning of this I was secretly a little anxious about how long it might take his successor. I am very grateful – and relieved! - that Vanessa Johnson, one of our existing Committee Members, has offered to take up the reins. Vanessa has a financial background so I am confident we will be in good hands. Thank you very much for stepping forward, Vanessa.

I am delighted that Clive has offered to remain on the Committee as a community representative for St James the Great Church and so we are not really saying goodbye – but we should take this opportunity to express our thanks to Clive for his dedication and commitment to the Institute over the last several years. At the time Clive agreed to be Treasurer the Institute's finances could hardly have been more dire, but with his, and Derek's, careful stewardship the tables were turned. Clive, quite simply, your contribution to the Institute has been immense, and we thank you most sincerely for all your efforts.

There are a few others I would like to thank – firstly all the Trustees and Committee Members for their help and input, for turning out for meetings throughout the year and helping where they can. With a building of this nature there is always something that needs attention and we are extremely fortunate to have several Committee members known for their practical skills! Roger Roud and Colin Powell deserve a special mention for their help with managing many of the maintenance jobs that arise – tackling many problems themselves or otherwise ironing out technical details and liaising with contractors. Roger also continues to act as the Booking Secretary, a task that is time consuming and, knowing how busy Roger has become in the last few years, I'm sure we are all grateful that he still manages to find the time to handle all the issues that managing the bookings entails. Thank you Roger. Thanks also to Peter Coombs who has been another practical and resourceful member of the Committee. He is standing down after a number of years and I would like to thank him for his contribution. To Pam Roud, our Secretary, for her efficiency in taking the Minutes for us. And to both Pam and Roger who have kindly allowed the Committee to meet in their home when the Hall has been unavailable – with the added bonus of refreshments! And to Anne Marsland, Hilary Dowling and the ladies from the WI who continue to do such a wonderful job looking after the outside space, tackling the weeds at the front and rear of the Hall, and tending the plants and shrubs. Their efforts ensure a good first impression for anyone visiting the Hall – so thank you very much indeed to them.

Last, but by no means least, my thanks to you all for coming along this evening. I am sure I speak for all members of the Management Committee when I say how much we welcome your continued interest in what happens here at the Institute and appreciate your encouragement and your support.

Michelle Tatton
Chair

20.11.17