

Chairman's Report to the AGM July 2022

This last year has seen a period of consolidation and recovery as we find our way through the other side of Covid. I'm delighted that after a difficult and uncertain period we are once again seeing the Hall put to good use.

Thankfully, since our AGM in July last year we have not had to jump through so many legal and procedural hoops but Covid is still with us and so we have encouraged users to continue to take sensible precautions. The sanitising station remains in place in the entrance lobby although many of the Covid posters that littered the walls have now come down. We have left the one-way system in place for the benefit of those who would wish their groups to use it.

As restrictions relaxed it was important to look at how we could attract users back to the Hall and as part of this we spent some time planning next steps and looked hard at what improvements we might undertake which would increase the likelihood of encouraging hirers to return and new hirers to try us. We ended up with quite a list which we are working through.

Although financially we have fared reasonably well, as the Treasurer's Report will show, we did feel it was time to increase our hire charges across the board and this has been done. Regular hirers had not had their charges increased for some time. We do remain competitive overall when compared with other local halls.

I reported last year that we were attempting to secure a Wifi connection. This was one of our priorities. Achieving it was much easier said than done but we got there eventually and our hirers are now able to get on line during their meetings. I would like to say a special thank you to Gian Bertorelli of The Total Package – a local IT guru - who donated quite a lot of his time to us to help bring this particular project to fruition.

It would be very helpful to know how useful the Wifi is turning out to be for our hirers and how it is supporting their groups.

I should mention that we are looking at the possibility of purchasing either a projector or an LED display that would work with the wifi and that our hirers could use; and wifi enabled CCTV which could be monitored remotely.

We thought we were all systems go on purchasing new chairs but then had difficulty sourcing the item of our choice. They may well still be on a boat somewhere! We have found an alternative and hope to soon have chairs that are much lighter and easier to move.

Work has been taking place over the last few days to create storage under the stage where we will then be able to stack the tables on trolleys. We thank our County Cllr Trudy Dean for her grant of £1000 towards this work.

The contractor who replaced the Hall floor has also been on site this week as well, installing identical flooring in the lobby and the rear corridor. This should brighten up the lobby and, in both cases, should aid cleaning.

I would appeal to hirers to take care when moving items around, particularly heavy items, to avoid damaging the floor. Paint from the stage steps has recently been imbedded in the Hall floor, perhaps due to the steps being dragged. Roger has hopefully solved this particular problem for the future by adding some rubber feet to the steps.

We have acquired a larger table and some chairs for the Committee Room and now the stage work is almost complete we will turn attention to reorganising the store room and will look at whether we can move some of the Committee Room cabinets to the store so as to make the Committee Room less cluttered and give it a better feel as a separate, hireable space.

For the kitchen we purchased some new tea pots! There is a surplus of old pots in the cupboard and we will be disposing of some of these. Thank you to Glenis Bryant who kindly gave some of the useable teapots a good clean!

Outside, the paving at the front of the Hall was in a very poor state and did not give a good impression. A local builder, John Hilden, very kindly offered to tarmac the area at no cost to the Institute – thank you very much to him and his team. It is now much better.

Unfortunately, Roger Roud could not attend this evening. He has sent me his report which I will present in a moment. What I would say at this stage is that we have had to take the decision not to accept bookings for 18th and 21st birthday celebrations after problems associated with a 21st party which resulted in some damage and mess that took the cleaner 4 hours to tidy up.

There have been some suggestions locally that it would be nice for residents who cannot walk all the way to the East Malling Centre to be able to come together over a cuppa now and again at the Institute. The Committee agreed recently that an 'open coffee morning' could be arranged and I have had

discussions with some volunteers about it who were keen to help. We had been looking to possibly hold this in June but it has now been deferred for the time being. If this takes off I will circulate details as anyone connected with the Hall – or not! – would be very welcome.

We received a request to consider installing a defibrillator – a commendable suggestion – but, as the Hall is managed by volunteers, unfortunately this was not something we felt we could take forward. A defibrillator is already installed outside the nearby Village Hall in New Road, managed by the Parish Council.

We are fortunate that our hirers have access to car parking facilities at the rear of the Institute. Parking cannot be guaranteed but parking availability is clearly a factor for some hirers. This car park is not owned by the Institute but is managed by the Parish Council. We have asked whether the car park could be re-lined as markings are very faded. This would help to ensure space is maximised. The Parish Council was supportive of the request and as a first step is obtaining a quote and will then consider the matter again so we thank them for that.

Some further thank you's are due... firstly, thank you to everyone who has come along this evening; to all the Trustees and Committee Members who come to our meetings to discuss what are often fairly mundane topics but give up their time none the less; to Vanessa Johnson for her diligence in looking after our accounts and keeping proper records for us – a most important job – and to Chris Hubbard who, once again, has kindly carried out the audit; to Roger Roud who, as well as being Booking Secretary, takes on many of the maintenance issues, putting his practical skills to very good use on the Hall's behalf; to the WI continue to do a splendid job keeping the garden tidy; and others who also help about the place in a variety of ways – Colin Powell, Glenis Bryant and The Heath Players, and I'm sure others too who do lots of things that I never even get to hear about – and there is also our cleaner, Jennie. It takes a team to make the Institute what it is so my thanks to them all.

Michelle Tatton, Chair – 22nd June 2022

Booking Secretary's Report

Thankfully he says he is happy to stand continue as booking clerk again which is a relief!

Just a couple of house keeping comments really...

Four tables were reported to be broken recently. Roger has fixed these. He asked that if anyone finds a damaged table they notify him as quickly as possible quoting the table number which is marked on the end. He also suggests that if someone damages a table they own up to it. Most of the time the tables can be fixed. A reminder to please take care when folding the tables and take time to makes sure the catches are released properly before folding the legs. If you are not sure how to fold tables please ask for help.

Roger also asks for more care when positioning the steps at the front of the stage to avoid causing damage to the floor.

Several times Roger has found that chairs have not been put away tidily in the store room making things difficult for the next hirer or preventing access to cupboards. Please make sure the chairs are stacked properly.