

The Bourtons Community Hall - May 2022

In late January 2020, the Community Hall held an open day to show local residents our wonderful new facilities. But as we all remember, within a few weeks the doors were firmly locked and everything stopped.

Over the next few months we learnt how to hold committee meetings online; we found our way around the ever-changing government Covid regulations; we tracked down cleaning and hygiene supplies; we applied for grants to compensate us for our loss of business; we discovered sources of funds for specific projects; and we maintained cleaning, safety and security regimes at the Hall to ensure we were ready to reopen.

As restrictions eased, we were able to begin offering the Hall to hirers. There are now regular weekly fitness, Taekwondo and yoga classes, as well as children's activities. We were pleased to be able to offer the Hall and garden for the village fundraising fete in July 2021, and will be welcoming the Big Lunch Jubilee Celebration in June this year.

We have become a popular venue for children's parties - not least because the Hall has adequate ceiling height to house a Bouncy Castle! There are frequent bookings from visiting Caravan Clubs and the large Hall is regularly used as a rehearsal space for an amateur dramatic group. Private parties and wedding events have been held there.

Maintenance of the facilities has been challenging at times. The oil central heating system failed three times during cold weather in January, the car park surface is unsatisfactory, there have been issues with the front doors and the plumbing in the disabled toilet. The support of the Parish Council in dealing with these issues has been much appreciated.

We have Invested to enhance the facilities. Thanks to certain grants we have been able to add acoustic panelling to the hall ceiling, and have also purchased garden furniture, as well as a timber shed to house it. There is a 'wish list' of new projects which we hope to progress this year as funds allow.

We will also be looking at ways to improve utilisation, particularly of the Meeting Room which is currently an underused space. We will also need to think about ways of improving energy efficiency to reduce the impact of rising costs.

Of course, none of this is possible without people. We have a small committee of trustees and volunteers who undertake many roles, but most of the cleaning is undertaken by a paid employee. We have been able to maintain a very high standard of cleaning, partly funded through the Covid grants received. Earlier this year we took the decision to move the booking system to the cloud-based Hall Master system and to employ a paid administrator. The move to the new system should be completed soon and we hope it will provide a better service for hirers as well as a less time consuming, more efficient and auditable system for us.

We look forward to the next year being less dramatic than the previous two.