

**Buckden Parish Council
Annual Meeting, 17th May 2022**

**Report from Matthew Beldam, Chair of the Board of Trustees
 Buckden Village Hall**

2021 continued to be a difficult year for the Village Hall. With the onset of the Omicron variant and the various government restrictions in place we were forced to close a number of times until restrictions were lifted.

The Trust took steps to review its Covid-19 guidance, ensuring that we had prominent notices displayed which included the compulsory wearing of masks in enclosed spaces and that adequate ventilation was in place by providing guidance to hirers to ensure windows and doors remained open. We encouraged hirers to also adhere to social distancing rules.

Levels of hire remained particularly low during 2021 and therefore, the Trust's revenues did not improve. We continued to take advantage of financial assistance offered by the UK Government, including furlough.

It was fortunate that Buckfest was able to take place in 2021 in between the lifting of restrictions. This was a highly successful event and well attended event, despite the poor weather that day.

In July 2021 I joined the board of trustees. I bring to the trust a wealth of commercial & health and safety knowledge. I have carried out a complete review of all of the Trust's health and safety documentation as well as revising our Covid-19 guidelines.

At the Trust's AGM meeting in Oct 2021 – Cynthia Alers resigned as Chair and I was elected by the trustees as her replacement. Cynthia agreed to take on the role of Treasurer which was again agreed by the trustees. Hamish Masson was also voted as Secretary.

The trust has also benefited from 3 additional trustees joining taking the total number to 11 during 2021/22. This now ensures that we have representatives from all of the clubs and one trustee who now also sits on the village club committee too.

As previously stated the hall floor was replaced, however, this started showing signs of wear and marking and had not been sealed correctly. The company who installed this were asked to come back and inspect this and remedial works were undertaken to sand and reseal the floor. This was carried out in early 2022 preserving the floor for many years to come.

Further maintenance works carried out at the hall in 2022 has been replacing non-functioning external lighting with LED, which included the flood lights above the covered area of the club. Internally we have replaced the foyer lights and all the lighting in the main hall with LED's. This change will reduce energy consumption and long term maintenance costs. We hope in time and when funds improve to change all remaining lighting to LED's

Our biggest concern remains the viability of the Village Club which suffered very badly during the Covid lockdowns. At their AGM meeting in March 2022, the majority of the committee resigned. This committee was replaced with new members and Andy Peckham as the new Chair. Recent changes at the club has resulted in increasing revenues with monthly events scheduled and advertised ,such as at Easter with a bouncy castle and food being served. The Trust has a member on the Club's committee and this ensures that we have much closer ties between us. The new committee has recently increased membership by 50% and has a new business plan to improve its revenues and pay down its current liabilities which includes outstanding rents to the Trust. The new committee meets every two weeks and the published minutes are displayed on the club's notice board.

The refurbishment of the Valley which was completed in Nov 2021 was warmly welcomed by the village. Having been untouched for decades and declined water quality this has be restored to its former glory. The trust is now seeking grants to maintain the current standard. Animal shelters and bird boxes were also installed and this has encoroughed wildlife to return to the Valley. We'd also like to thank the Parish Council for the installation of three new general purpose waste bins in the Valley.

We have received quotations to replace the aged mower and we have applied for funding for this and await a response to see if we were successful. The FA will also make a contribution towards the cost of the replacement.

The original proposal for a purpose built storage building proved too costly, well in excess of £100K. We are working on a revised proposal currently with Offord Containers to provide refurbished and cladded containers with power and light. We are awaiting the plans and costs for this.

Our ties with the Parish Council continue, and we meet on a regular basis to discuss joint projects. This has culminated in the recent addition of a zip wire and climbing wall. We have engaged with BPC for "No Mow May" and have agreed for the installation of conferencing facilities in one of the meeting rooms. Both Chairs' have a passion for sustainability and wellness. The Trust would warmly welcome the installation of fitness equipment around the field for the benefit of all as a future project.

The trustees have also undertaken a review of its legal structure. All of our tenant leases have been renewed now and on a proper commercial basis per our obligations under the Charity Commission. Regulations and procedures have tightened up considerably since the leases were granted 25 years ago. Now that the process is complete, the Trustees are planning in 2022 on undertaking the conversion of our legal status from an unincorporated charity to a CIO ("charitable incorporated organisation") which is a path most organisations are now pursuing as protection against personal liability. It is increasingly expensive to obtain insurance for unincorporated organisations, and conversion to a CIO is a structure encouraged by the Charity Commission and ACRE.

Wages and utility costs remain the Trust's largest expenditure. Since Oct 2021 we've seen a doubling in monthly utility charges. Therefore, the trust had no other option but to increase hire charges to village residents and non-residents alike. Hires are continuing to improve in numbers

but we've yet to see a return of corporate booking in numbers, prior to the Covid pandemic. Therefore, we must monitor carefully, our cash reserves and only essential expenditure is currently permitted. The hall age continues to present challenges for maintenance costs. We are fortunate that a number of the trustees are willing and able to carry out basic maintenance tasks. We continue to use external contractors for essential item due to H&S and compliance/ legal reasons.

The recent exhibition by the History Society on the archological finds at Longhall Road, proved extremely popular with residents and non-residents. There is now a permanent exhibition of pictures in the Milliard Suite and foyer for all to enjoy. These were kindly donated to the Trust in return for the use of the room over the May Day bank holiday.

The Trust has recently undergone an audit by ACRE and we are pleased to advise that we have been successful in retaining our Hallmark 1 status.

2022 will remain a challenging year financially until hires return to pre-pandemic levels. We will continue to work on the option to replace the current containers with the option being provided by Offord Containers. We will present the plans and costs to BPC once received.

We will work closely with the Village Club, maintaining the new and excellent relationship between the Club and Trust Chairs. We are fully supportive of the regular events now being held both inside and outside of the club. We have for example recently allowed the club to open at 3pm each Friday during the summer months. This has proved extremely popular with mums and children, who can use they playground and field whilst enjoying a drink in the sun.

We plan to apply for Hallmark 2 status during the year. We already meet over 90% of the requirement to meet this accreditation.

We will continue to meet with the BPC on a regular basis and we thank you for your continued support.