

Chairman's Report – AGM February 2020

Here we are in 2020 – a time to ring in a new decade and also a time for us all to celebrate 10 years of success in rescuing an ailing “Club”, as it was called in those days. It was John who suggested that this might be a good opportunity to look back and review the achievements over the years.

The Club was in a serious financial state and in need of refurbishment and replacement throughout. The central heating boilers kept breaking down and User Groups were leaving as the Hall was often unheated. It looked shabby and run down. The crunch came when a letter arrived stating that unless the electricity bill was paid the electricity would be cut off. There was no money to pay it. It was then the new Trustees rallied round and set about trying to save the Club from going under. A letter was circulated around the village and we received around £5000, User Groups paid ahead of time for their bookings and a Trustee, the Bowls Club and the Tennis Club all gave a loan to pay this outstanding debt.

About the same time Peter Smith came on board and became a franchisee and started to run the bar as his own business, paying us a rent. This has been a big asset as he has brought in many more members and created an enjoyable atmosphere to meet, have a drink and something to eat.

We also started applying for Grants. The first was for £2,000 from Fords – a modest sum but enough to be able to buy a new central heating boiler and some radiators for the hall. .It was a start! Over the next few years a further 14 grants have been awarded to the Community Centre totalling £110,000. We were also awarded a Certificate by the Essex Trust for being one of the very best projects funded by the Trust. These grants, along with careful housekeeping, membership fees, car parking charges, hall hire, rents and donations have enabled us to transform it into the greatly improved and viable place it is today.

We have had double glazing, cladding and soffits fitted around the whole building, new central heating installed throughout, the cloakrooms downstairs , including the toilet for the disabled , upstairs and in the dressing rooms have all been renewed, the snooker room has been totally refurbished, the front car park has been relayed and the rear repaired. The main hall has had a new ceiling, new lights fitted, been painted and the floor is now regularly resurfaced and polished and we have new chairs and tables with stacking units. A tea bar is available for the use of the User Groups and is used regularly every Tuesday for our very popular Coffee Mornings. There has been a complete refurbishment of the kitchen with stainless steel units and wipe down plastic walls. This year a new dishwasher and freezer have been installed and a new cooling unit for the beer – the old one gave out in the heat of the Summer. The kitchen regularly receives a five star rating from the Council.

The bar was in great need of an uplift and we asked members to donate towards the, not insignificant, cost of it all on a match funding basis. We had a good response and were able to have new lighting installed, buy new tables and chairs and have it decorated. We also needed to replace two fan heaters. This year the carpet has been laid so it is now complete.

The latest grant aided installation was the automatic doors from the car park which are quite useful. The doors into the main hall have been refurbished as well as the front entrance door and we have two new fire doors in the bar. This year the stairs and upstairs toilets have been redecorated as well as the entrance hall, cloakrooms, dressing rooms and Conference room.

A number of years ago we started celebrating Christmas in the hall with our Father Christmas grotto and stalls selling local produce or run by local charities for fund raising. We worked alongside the Parish Council and shopkeepers for their Victorian evenings. When the Victorian evenings stopped we were approached by the Rotarians to ask if they could use our car park for a Xmas Market. This seemed like an excellent idea and we have had two very successful and enjoyable events with them. They were generous enough to donate £1100 of their profit from the first year to us and we have this year bought new black curtains for the back and sides of the stage, for which we are very grateful.

Not only have we been successful in saving this Community Centre we have also helped save Fryerning Parish Room by working in conjunction with some residents of Fryerning who were keen to keep it going. It was in a very run down state but by donations and fund raising the residents have been able to transform it into a really attractive smaller hall, ideal for children's parties, classes and smaller functions. Bookings and administration are conducted from our office upstairs.

We now have three members of office staff. Our latest addition is Karen Rayment, who along with Jacky and Lee's husband Martin, has set up a new website for our Community Centre, which went live towards the end of 2019. On it you can log in to see all the latest updates and keep in touch with all our activities, including two very successful tribute nights last year – the Jersey Boys and Abba. We have Take This in March to look forward to.

It has been a busy but rewarding 10 years. To mark our achievement and reward our loyal supporters it was decided to reduce the members' subscriptions by 1/3 and introduce a swipe card system for our bar. This will provide an even more attractive incentive to become a member with a two tier pricing system for our drinks and many of our social events. John is going to explain this at greater length later on and answer any questions you may have.

Looking forward we still have ideas to work on and the first is our Cinema Club, which had its first showing in January of Brief Encounter. It was a great success. We are looking for suggestions for future showings and would like to encourage you and your friends to support this new venture. It is for non-members too. Watch for details of our next showing on our website or our posters. If you have other ideas for anything you would like to propose and become involved in please tell us and we will see what can be done.

Looking back, it is immensely rewarding to think how our efforts have saved such an amazing facility for our village - not only the hall but also the Bowling Club and Tennis Club. Volunteers work hard to keep them going and our thanks go out to them for their efforts and support. Our car park is also a great amenity in our busy village and with low fees it provides a safe off street area for our cars with good lighting and CCTV cameras.

We will continue to work hard to pay off our existing bank loan which is down to £118,789 from £278,262 in 2010/11 – a massive achievement in itself. A reduction of roughly £160,000 in ten years. We are working towards clearing it in roughly six years' time so we have something really spectacular to aim for.

Thank you for your support and may you continue to enjoy our Community Centre for many years to come.