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Recognised by HMRC as a charity for tax purposes, reference no. ZD03543

## Exeter Street Community Hall Limited (ESCH) **Directors' Report – 2019/2020**

### **Strengthening our Community**

It is customary for our AGM and the Directors Report to focus on the preceding financial year. However, given the unusual circumstances of this period dominated by the Coronavirus pandemic and associated economic constraints, we've decided to include recent and current developments affecting, and affected by, our Community Benefit Society.

Let us first acknowledge the consistent and tireless efforts of our volunteers at all levels of involvement and of our two part-time employed staff. Particular praise should go to our previous Hall Manager Amanda Nichols and her successor Susan Corlett who job-shared for a time during the early 'lockdown', dealing with the consequences of closing the Hall to hirers and promoting initiatives to keep the Hall involved with the community.

The success and prospects for ESCH depend hugely on the goodwill of the volunteers (*you know who you are – a few volunteers have been thanked by name below but others have done equally valuable work*) and the hardworking staff, but also on the continuing support of you, our shareholders, and the many others who hire and use the Hall for the many and varied activities and events we're able to host.

We feel that we have a solid basis to build on, further establishing the Hall as a valued contributor to people's lives in our community and beyond, as well as making it an inspiration to others for whom our local community strength is an aspiration.

Please join us for the first ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of Exeter Street Community Hall Ltd, which will be held on **Friday September 18<sup>th</sup> 2020** at 7:30pm (*The*

*meeting will be via Zoom videoconference, details are in the AGM notice) to participate in and vote according to your rights as shareholders.*

## **Key Events and Achievements**

### **1. Transfer of business and the aftermath of the 'asset lock' interruption**

- The 'transfer of engagements' from The Hall Get Involved Ltd. (THGI) to Exeter Street Community Hall Ltd. was registered with the Financial Conduct Authority (FCA) on 8 November 2019.
- We agreed the continuation of the covenant with St. Luke's Church which, alongside our new charitable asset lock, ensures that the Hall will remain a community building.
- Via our solicitors we submitted a property transfer application to the Land Registry. Because of Covid-related delays we are still awaiting final confirmation of the transfer but we're confident that it will proceed.
- In the process of preparing the transfer application we discovered that our official address was still 'Church Hall'. This has now been changed to Exeter Street Hall.
- We created new financial systems to link to our ESCH bank account and informed a wide variety of suppliers and contacts about the changes.
- Thanks go to Graham Thomas and Jo Camplisson for steering through these changes.

### **2. Finance**

- In financial year 1 April 2019 – 31 March 2020 we gained several new hirers and increased the usage of both the main hall and the community room.
- At the end of the 2019/20 financial year, at the start of lockdown, our financial situation was healthy, which gave us confidence that we could survive the Hall's closure in the short-to-medium term.
- We were very pleased to be awarded a grant of £1,000 from the discretionary fund of our three Preston Park ward councillors at the beginning of this year, which will help us to implement energy efficiency measures.

### **2019/20 summary**

- Overall, and largely because of the cost of renovating the back windows and an increase in the contracted hours of the Hall Manager to reduce the gap between hours worked and hours paid, we ended the year with a small deficit of £133 in the annual accounts (£12,005 surplus in 2018/19).
- Our operating costs for 2019/20 (excluding building works) were £21,749 (£17,850 in 2018/19), with most of the increase being due to the increased wage

bill, a back payment of energy costs and legal expenses relating to the transfer of business.

- Income from Hall hire in 2019/20 was £20,805 (£21,506 in 2018/19). This would have been higher without cancellations in March 2020 due to Covid, and the 2018/19 figure was boosted by a large one-off hire.
- Volunteer-organised FUNdraising events such as comedy and quiz nights, concerts and the big book sale raised £7,180 (£10,398 in 2018/19) and made a valuable contribution towards the cost of the renovations.
- Our Business Plan Executive Summary 2020 is available [here](#) . We continue to revise and update the business plan to reflect what has been achieved and what has still to be done in terms of meeting community needs and creating a building to adequately serve that purpose.
- The Financial Report will be presented at the AGM. The income and expenditure account can be seen and downloaded from [here](#).

### **3. Covid and lockdown**

- The Hall was closed to hirers from 23 March – the decision to do so was taken a few days before the government required it, although the closure began on the day the government enforced lockdown.
- From April until the end of July we hosted Time to Talk Befriending (TTTB), a charity that produced thousands of meals for isolated people and those in supported accommodation. Hall volunteers including Alexa Povah and Rose Dewick helped TTTB chef Wendy Maas to create these meals.
- We set up a network of street reps to relay information about Covid services and the people who needed them, and liaised with St. Luke's Church to make sure local people who were isolating could get supplies.
- We supported the street-by-street food collections for the Brighton Unemployed Centre Family Project (BUCFP), encouraged by FareShare and co-ordinated by Sally Hunt.
- We transformed our newsletter into a fortnightly Community Bulletin, ably edited by Hall Manager Susan Corlett and formatted and distributed by Norman Wright, which provided information about local services and initiatives alongside some amusing and inspiring stories.

### **4. Surviving lockdown & loss of income**

- When the closure began we offered refunds to hirers for events and sessions that could no longer take place. We were overwhelmed by the response: many hirers left their money with us, banked for whenever we could reopen, and some hirers offered to turn deposits they had paid into a donation or a shareholding. Many thanks to our hirers for their goodwill and support.
- A key concern at the start of lockdown was how long the Hall could survive financially without hire income. As mentioned above, our finances were in a healthy

state at the end of the 2019/20 financial year, but outgoings remained almost at their pre-closure level during lockdown. A slightly lower insurance premium was negotiated from July 2020 onwards and we were able to reduce our monthly energy payments by 10%, but clearly we would need extra funds if we were to emerge from closure in a solvent position, especially if we were to go ahead with much-needed renovations.

- Along with many other organisations we received a £10,000 small business support grant from the government soon after lockdown, which was very welcome. In addition, we successfully applied for two more Covid-related support grants, from the Sussex Communities Foundation Crisis Fund (£3,000) and from the Power to Change Trading Income Support Scheme (£6,500). This money gave us confidence that we could both survive the closure and undertake restoration works without the need for an immediate fundraising drive and enabled us to host TTTB without charging them.
- Our Hall Manager and Cleaner/Caretaker Chris Phipps remained on contracted terms & conditions, i.e. not furloughed, as they were and are our front line key workers.
- The Management Committee, Building Team & Hall Action Group continued to meet via Zoom.

## **5. Works & Plans**

- The main works completed during the summer of 2020 were to the front windows and doors (renovating the woodwork, filling in gaps, re-glazing and decorating – the back windows were renovated in 2019) and the floor of the main hall (flattening nails, sanding and varnishing).
- Other smaller jobs completed this year include a new chimney cowl above the Community Room, the overhaul of the gas fire and surroundings there, an extra door at the back of the corridor and a new lockable cleaning cupboard.
- Big thanks go to Amanda Nichols for project-managing these works and dealing with all the different quotes and contractors (saving us a considerable amount of money in the process), and to Dave Fellows for his constant presence during these works, setting up equipment, dealing with contractors' requests and problems and personally carrying out many smaller pieces of work.
- Thanks also go to green-fingered Jo Sandgrove who previously turned the small yard at the back of the Hall into a lovely garden and made it even better this year.
- For the longer term we have put in a planning application for small extensions at the rear of the building, to house improved toilets at one end and an office / consultancy room at the other. The application was designed and submitted to Brighton & Hove City Council (B&HCC) by our architect Manolis Datseris. It has been approved subject to conditions requiring an archeological survey (to be carried out when the works begin) to ensure the preservation of any Saxon burial remains. These works will not happen for at least a year and will require a successful grant application and (probably) some fundraising.

## 6. Reopening & Fundraising

- We have prepared the Hall for reopening in 'the new normal'. All measures will remain under review and will require updating when new local and national guidance is issued.
- We have carried out risk assessments, developed new terms & conditions for hire and updated relevant forms and policies.
- We have set new standards for cleaning, installed hand sanitisers and reduced the capacity of the Hall in line with current guidance.
- Existing and new hirers have been contacted to see whether, when and how they would like to (re-)start their activities. Some activities have had to be paused because they are not currently allowed.
- We are holding down prices and absorbing the extra costs of cleaning and (for the sake of better ventilation) energy in order to support our hirers, many of whom have had a tough time since lockdown.
- Many thanks to Susan Corlett, Chris Phipps, Tim Nichols and Robin Bailey for preparing the Hall and for wading through the thickets of changing government guidance for community facilities like ours and on the many different activities that take place within the Hall.
- We contracted Brighton & Hove Energy Services Cooperative (BHESCO) to undertake a heating/energy survey. We aim to use their advice, and perhaps their services, to improve our heating and ventilation system.
- New initiatives are being planned, for instance Kay Stephan hopes to expand her careers advice sessions in the Hall to provide a full programme of employment skills advice for people who need to rethink their work options in the face of Covid-related unemployment.
- It will be quite some time before we can get back to our former level of hire income, so we will soon need to raise funds to help cover the costs of keeping the Hall available to the community. We can't put on the sort of events that have filled the Hall in the past, so we will need other ways to sustain our income, e.g:
  - We will be relaunching the Friends of the Hall scheme and, we hope, updating it to allow online donations.
  - Later, we will have a campaign to attract new shareholders. This is partly to get extra funds for planned developments but mostly to engage new people, especially those who have moved into the neighbourhood since the original share issue in 2012/13.
- As always we'll need your help, enthusiasm and ideas. Please do make suggestions of how we can all raise funds for the Hall and, ideally, have fun while we're doing it!

## **Main Focus**

Our principal areas of priority and provision remain unchanged, they are broadly:

**The Building** - its restoration and enhancement whilst in the fullest possible use.

### **Our Hall Events and Community Groups**

The events we put on aim to raise funds and to entertain and enhance the community. They include theatrical, musical, literary, comedy and local history events, quizzes, film showings, themed meals and many other events. We will need to assess which of these are viable in the current situation.

One big annual event had to be cancelled this year but we hope to revive the Great Get-Together street party (in collaboration with St. Luke's Church and the Prestonville Community Association) in 2021.

Also we aim to maintain our regular community activities including: table tennis club, children's film club, Stay and Play, Brownies, Boys' Brigade, the monthly Tea Club, weekly art classes, defibrillator training, volunteer days, FareShare food collection point.

### **Our Regular, Occasional and One-Off Hires**

These remain central to our ability to keep the Hall viable and able to progress. We hope to facilitate the continuing availability – though in some cases not immediately – of many of the following:

Yoga, Pilates, Fitness League, Tai Chi, adult tap dance, high impact exercise class, Gong Bath meditation, table tennis coaching, learning disabled adults' enrichment activities, Baby sensory sessions, children's ballet classes, Mini Athletics, pre-school football, NHS meetings, fostering drop-in, parenting sessions, therapeutic massage, language classes, singing/musical workshops, rehearsals, performances, dance classes and workshops, drawing workshops, Brighton Fringe Festival performances, film shoots, children's parties, family celebrations, Christmas makers' market.

### **Social Justice and Low Cost Hires**

We are always keen to support local projects and charities e.g. for refugees and other disadvantaged groups. We offer special hire rates to these groups.

## Links and Networks

We are a member of Co-operatives UK, Locality and Brighton & Hove Communityworks. We have strong links to Brighton Open Air Theatre, the Community Buildings Network and the Sustainable Business Partnership.

## The Year to Come

2020 has of course been a very challenging year and remains so. However, despite the pandemic we're still standing, in reasonably good shape and able to serve the community and enhance 'social infrastructure'. As well as dealing with Covid in the coming months we aim to address new challenges; for instance, the Black Lives Matter movement has reminded us that we need to do all we can to increase the diversity of our volunteers and Hall users.

We remain enthusiastic about the Hall and trust that this is shared by you, the shareholders, as well as other volunteers and supporters. We are aware, though, that over the last couple of years our volunteer numbers have diminished significantly – perhaps because the Hall is now seen as running along nicely and doesn't need the effort of earlier years – and we are in urgent need of new volunteers to help out across a broad range of areas. Currently a few volunteers are spending significant amounts of their time dedicated to the Hall. This is not sustainable. We urge anyone who's interested in being part of this great project to take the plunge and support it in any way you feel able to, be it in a practical way with the building, in communications including our website and social media, in helping to organise events, helping with administration or making a financial donation – all are needed.

So please consider what you can do to support the Hall. Ways to get started include:

- Come along to a **Hall Action Group** meeting (all welcome – 2<sup>nd</sup> Tuesday of every month), find out what's going on and help to plan future events
- Join the **Building Team** (3<sup>rd</sup> Thursday of every month) and help to improve the Hall building
  - both of these groups are currently meeting via Zoom. For details of how to join meetings or to be put in contact with someone who can tell you what goes on in them, email [secretary@exeterstreethall.org](mailto:secretary@exeterstreethall.org)
- Make a one-off or regular **donation**. Go to [our web page for donating](#)
- **Tell your neighbours and new arrivals** in the area about the Hall. They may also wish to become shareholders like you, or contribute and participate in other ways.

## **Directors**

The following people served as Directors during the year (dates refer to THGI – THGI Directors became ESCH Directors following the transfer of engagements):

Jo Camplisson (Treasurer) - elected 6 October 2016, re-elected 4 October 2019.

Norman Wright (Communications) - elected 6 October 2016, re-elected 28 September 2018.

Sunita Shier (Policies) - elected 28 September 2018

David Fellows (Chair) - elected 17 July 2015, last re-elected 4 October 2019

Graham Thomas (Secretary) - elected 4 October 2019

## **Co-Opted Management Committee Members**

Dexter Coombe (Bar Manager)

Amanda Nichols (Building Team Coordinator, in this capacity from April 2020)

The Hall Manager (Amanda Nichols, then Susan Corlett from April 2020) reports to the management committee and attends meetings as required.

## **Dave Fellows – Chair of the Management Committee**

(on behalf of the Directors)