



## Exeter Street Community Hall Limited (ESCH)

Registered with the Financial Conduct Authority, registration no. 8161.  
Recognised by HMRC as a charity for tax purposes, reference no. ZD03543

Please join us for the third **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of Exeter Street Community Hall Ltd, to be held on **Wednesday 14th June 2023 at 7.30pm**. Take part and vote as shareholders.

Here is the Directors' Report for the year

## Directors' Report – 2022/2023

### Introduction

The Hall is back with a bang after the challenges of the pandemic. Our aim is to support the community by delivering inclusive activities and events for all to enjoy. We're thrilled to be busier than ever, with more hirers, more events and more community groups.

We have made great strides this year with the building. We now have a fabulous, commercial standard kitchen and, after a rigorous assessment process covering our facilities and procedures, we're registered as a Food Business by Brighton & Hove City Council (BHCC) with a level 5 rating – a plus for hiring out the Hall. However, there are further projects to initiate and complete, including a complete redevelopment of our toilet block. Look out for our 'Feeling Flush' fundraising campaign.

With increased use comes increased cost, especially the rapidly rising cost of energy. So, in the year ahead for the first time in many years, we'll almost certainly be looking to increase our sales income.

### General

Thanks to some new volunteers we now have access to enhanced graphics skills, a much-improved social media presence and some extra expertise in maintaining the Hall's website and mailing lists.

Our Community Bulletin has become a must read with many subscribers, and we've been able to produce a new pamphlet for general distribution to local homes.

For the second year we ran a 'share buyback scheme' during February, whereby shareholders could apply to withdraw some or all of their shares, subject to the conditions of the scheme. The total amount withdrawn was just £100. We remain grateful for our shareholders' continuing confidence in the Society and the way the Hall is run.

After much soul searching we decided that the monthly Hall Action Team meetings were no longer effective in recruiting, engaging and supporting volunteers and are now reviewing how we can do this better.

## **Hirers**

The Hall is a popular place to hire on a regular basis and currently we have no free slots in the main hall. Our regular hirers all returned after Covid and we were able to support them by not increasing our hire fees. Classes are available in yoga, Pilates, fitness, creative dance, ballet, Tai Chi and more.

Because our hire charges are quite modest, it helps to have hirers who book longer periods and we now have a number of hirers who do this i.e. the Migrant English Project (MEP), Boom Table Tennis and Ballet Brighton. We're proud to host local disability charity The Grace Eyre Foundation, whose Active Lives service uses the hall weekly for dance and performance activities; we've been privileged to be invited to watch their end of term productions.

Hirers have also used the Hall for Christmas and Spring Makers' Markets and for various musical events, when the feedback on our acoustics has been fantastic!

We continue to offer cheap or, in some cases, free hire to other local charities, groups or organisations in line with our 'social justice' agenda, in order to support their own fundraising. This has included Give Street Project (homelessness), Threads of Survival (NHS support) and Thousand 4 £1000 (homes for refugees).

## **Community Groups**

Part of our ethos is to run low/no cost community groups that are run by volunteers. We're very happy that our weekly groups Stay and Play, Table Tennis, Art Class and Book Club are once again a thriving feature.

The Prestonville Repair Café, started just before lockdown, is also back on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of each month. A range of volunteer repairers will fix things for free – although a donation is welcome. Bikes, zips, toasters and teddies! You name it – it's been mended.

In response to the cost of living crisis, in November 2022 we started Prestonville Friday Friends. The aim was to provide a hot, nourishing lunch and warm space to socialise, at no cost. Using our new kitchen facilities, volunteers cooked home-made soup, served with fresh rolls and delicious cakes made by volunteers. The group proved incredibly popular, with more than 60 people coming to the final lunch before we paused until the autumn. It was a real multi-generational affair with ages ranging from 9 months to 92 years old! A grant from our local ward councillors enabled us to buy some equipment and cover our costs for these sessions. Thanks also to The Sussex Peasant, Coburn & Baker and Joe's Cafe for their support with this initiative.

We also have a new drop-in Community Cancer Support Group and will be starting a Crafts Club later in the year. Local paramedic Flora Schneider has held several CPR and defibrillator training sessions to improve our first aid capacity.

We continue to be the home of our local Brownies and Boys Brigade groups under the agreement we have with St. Luke's church. Also, for the third Christmas in succession Nourish Community Meals made full use of our facilities to provide meals and children's toys to care leavers, refugees and other deserving groups. Once again they were supported by our wonderful volunteers.

## Events

Along with St. Luke's church and the Prestonville Community Association we again put on a successful 'Great Get-Together' street party in June – with good weather this time! Planning is already well underway for the 2023 Get-Together.

The Children's Halloween Party was revived after a two-year break during the pandemic. It proved to be wildly popular, with two separate parties both being completely sold out well before the date. Absolute, joyful mayhem! And slime!

In January a new event, Pudding Club, brought lots of people into the Hall on a Sunday afternoon to enjoy a huge range of high-quality home-made puddings and many other desserts on a 'pay as you feel' basis. Newspapers and board games were provided and we ran a bar. We have since held our second, equally popular, Pudding Club and are planning another one in September.

In June we held a Women's Football Panel to coincide with the start of the Women's Euros which included matches played in Brighton; it was well-attended, with a great line-up including women panellists from Brighton & Hove Albion, Lewes FC and Brighton Museums (who were putting on a women's football exhibition) along with some eminent sports journalists. Last autumn, on the few occasions when the Hall was available at the right times, we screened some of England men's World Cup matches.

A 'Community Social' in December for volunteers and the local community attracted many people who all had a good time. This April saw a successful Music Quiz and Curry Night which raised money for the Hall.

Early this May we arranged a tea party for the local community, and the following day we hosted a meal and an afternoon of entertainment for local migrant communities, co-ordinated by the Migrant English Project. Both of these events were packed out and involved a tremendous amount of work by our teams of volunteers, which was much appreciated by the participants. The primary aim of these events was to create enjoyable opportunities for the community to come together and we were grateful for all the donations that helped support them.

Successful events for other causes included a Comedy Night in support of Ukraine back in Spring 2022, and in the autumn there was a gig by The Kites that raised money for Macmillan Cancer Support and the showing of the film 'Mambo Man' by the local Cuban Solidarity Campaign.

## **Building**

CO2 monitors were installed in the main hall and the community room. Happy/Neutral/Sad faces indicate when extra ventilation is necessary, as per Covid advice (and for general well-being).

The big effort in 2022-3 was our kitchen renovation project – paid for by a £4k grant from the Enjoolata Foundation and £8k from our fundraising & reserves. Thanks are due to the building team volunteers who prepared the kitchen for the contractors and especially to the people who planned and co-ordinated the whole project so well.

Alongside the kitchen renovation we redecorated the community room, installed solar insulation film on the community room and kitchen windows, and we finally completed the underfloor insulation of the main hall.

Other works carried out include: anti-damp and condensation work in the old toilet block, repairs to the gas heater in the community room, replacing the hand wash heater in the accessible toilet and improving the curtains on both sides of the building.

Early in 2022 we installed infra-red radiant panels in the community room as a trial to explore the possibilities for improved, more sustainable and quieter heating throughout the building. Sadly, the trial showed that the panels were not suitable for our needs. Nevertheless, we're thankful to the academics and students from Brighton University for monitoring the trial and studying the effectiveness of the heating panels, and to all the people who filled in the community room heating questionnaire. We will need to revisit the question of better heating at some point in the future; for the moment the solutions that would meet all our requirements are too expensive and our current heater in the main hall, though too noisy, is quite efficient.

Our next big building project is a replacement toilet block, which could cost up to £100k. We aim to apply for a grant this autumn in time for building works to take place in summer 2024. By then, we will have spent over £4k on the drawings, specifications, surveys and reports necessary to gain planning consent and be in a position to apply for a grant. We'll also need to provide matching

funds – possibly 20% of the grant. A condition of our planning consent is that we commission an archaeological survey of the excavations as Saxon and other remains have been found locally. To this end we've obtained and submitted a mandatory 'written scheme of investigation' that sets out the archaeological history of the area and the projected scope of the survey.

We also have plans for remodelling the storage area at the south side of the building to enable (amongst other things) easier access to the stage blocks and the construction of a proper – and stowable – bar. In the immediate future, as far as money allows, we hope to redecorate some or all of the main hall during the summer.

## **Finances**

With the decline of cash as a payment method we have been moving to contactless transactions and donations. We can take payments by card and phone at the bar and you may have noticed the 'Ways to Donate' posters around the Hall. Both one-off and regular donations can now be made by phone or online via our website, plus – of course – we'll still take cash.

Despite being shut for 6 weeks during the 2022-23 financial year, the Hall is now very well used and our accounts for that period show that it is financially healthy. Because of this we have been able to increase our Hall Manager's salary and contracted hours, taking the job up to 0.5 of a full-time employee. This is a much fairer reflection of the time taken to undertake the role as the Hall has become busier and of the multi-skilled nature of the role. We have also been able to increase the amount we pay our excellent cleaning contractor. However, we do need to keep income and expenditure under constant review and because of rising costs (especially, but not only, energy) we may need to increase some hire charges – most of which have been unchanged for several years – later in the year. It is very important, though, to keep hire charges as low as possible to ensure they remain affordable for hirers and Hall users.

## **Looking To The Future**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of buying the Hall falls in September. Lots of things will be happening in that month under the overall title of "A Hall for All". Please watch out for information on upcoming anniversary events and lend a hand if you can. It's going to be fun.

With the support of our shareholders and our team(s) of tenacious volunteers, the Hall has become a real asset and – as promised in our Society's objectives – a benefit to the community. Since buying the Hall ten years ago we have improved the building and enhanced what the Hall offers in terms of facilities, activities and events. We intend to continue to do this, listening to and supporting our local community as circumstances change and opportunities arise.

Meanwhile, we remain unconditionally thankful and grateful to our Hall Manager, our cleaning contractor, and all the wonderful volunteers, hirers and users that make Exeter Street Community Hall the successful concern it is now and, we very much hope, will continue to be in the future.

## **Directors**

The following people served as Directors during the year

Robin Bailey – elected 25 June 2021

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

Rosie Dewick – elected 25 June 2021

David Fellows (Chair) - elected 17 July 2015, last re-elected 29 Jun 2022

Graham Thomas (Secretary) - elected 4 Oct 2019, last re-elected 29 Jun 2022

Co-Opted Management Committee Members

Nell Killick & Alexa Povah (joint Bar Managers)

The Hall Manager, Susan Corlett, formally reports to the management committee and attends meetings as required. In practice, we are pleased that she plays a full part in MC discussions (except for those that directly affect her employment conditions).

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

(on behalf of the Directors)