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Please join us for the **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING** of Exeter Street Community Hall Limited, to be held on **Wednesday 5th June 2024 at 7.30pm**. Take part and vote as shareholders.

Here is the Directors' Report for the year

Exeter Street Community Hall Limited (ESCH) **Directors' Report – 2023/2024**

Introduction

This year we feel we have come a long way towards realising our ambition to be a 'Hall For All'. We say this in light of the increased use of the building to around 80% of the time with an average of 1500 people using the Hall every month. Also, in the 10 years since first opening as a Society owned by over 900 community shareholders, our income has increased from £6k per year in 2014 to £56k in 2024. This sum is comprised of hire charges, fundraising campaigns and donations, All this despite the recent sharp rise in costs, a significant achievement.

We've evolved from a church hall that hosted kids parties to a well run community centre hosting a wide range of activities, events and community groups that seek to anticipate and meet the needs of the community. Be it helping to tackle issues like loneliness and the cost of living crisis through e.g. Prestonville Friday Friends, or promoting sustainability through the upcoming Prestonville Great Big Green Weekend. Plus, we're regularly supporting two valuable local organisations that work with the more vulnerable in our society, and which reflect our social justice ethos, such as The Grace Eyre Foundation and the Migrant English Project (MEP).

To mark our 10 year anniversary in September, we celebrated with the 'A Hall For All' festival, including the 'Feeling Flush' campaign: 1 month, 13 events, 330 tickets sold, over 1200 people through the door, £10k raised towards our proposed toilet

block and a huge amount of volunteer effort – but worth it to see the community piling through the doors. We're truly now 'A Hall for All'.

“What I’ve loved about the Hall For All celebrations is that after 10 years of ownership and hundreds of events, the enthusiasm and commitment of the volunteers is as fresh as it ever was. It was a pleasure to play a small part in such a wonderful team. Here’s to decades more of community at its best” (Iain Chambers).

General

Another element in our assertion that ESCH has become a 'Hall For All' is how we're perceived by others in what we can broadly describe as the Community, as well as our relationships with that Community. This manifests itself in terms of good relations with the hirers over time, the number of enquiries we receive, the use of the Hall by Community groups e.g. Stay & Play, Friday Friends, Table Tennis etc, and the number of Community events and their popularity.

Over time we've also nurtured informal links with organisations, enterprises and establishments in and around the local area e.g. The Chimney House and The Prestonville pubs, Joe's Cafe, St. Luke's Church, the weekly Sussex Peasant mobile farm shop, and relatively recently, Port Hall Stores.

We also enjoy good working relationships with e.g. Xoomtalk our internet provider, Loop Electric our long term electrical contractor as well as other contractors required to keep us compliant with the stringent safety requirements etc. for the building.

Other positive factors are less specific in that we're generally accepted as a mainstay and focal point for the Community with whom we're interdependent. It's not uncommon for people to comment that regardless of how long they've lived in the area, they've only got to know so many other people since ESCH came into being. This is particularly the case if those people have also been involved in the Hall in some way.

The initiative on the part of our Hall Manager to produce a regular 'Community Bulletin' has in our view been a significant factor in sustaining and developing this ethos of mutual cooperation and support.

It's worth repeating that the Directors remain indebted to our Shareholders and their continued support for, and confidence in, the Society. An indication of their/your commitment over time is that since the introduction of our 'share buyback' scheme in 2022 we've only had a handful of applicants, and these have all been for sound reasons of one sort or another.

Hirers

As indicated above, our hirers continue to be several vertebrae in the virtual backbone of the Hall, and essential to its continuing success. This, despite having to increase fees slightly in 2023 due to inflating costs. Nevertheless, the core hirers are incredibly loyal and we haven't lost any because of the increase in fees.

During last year we have benefitted from some new regular hirers, e.g. Life Coaching class and Sunrise yoga. Although the Boys Brigade paused in the second half of the year for reorganisation (merging two troops), they have since restarted and will be making a regular voluntary contribution.

Finally, we remain every bit as grateful as ever to the hirers and users who make Exeter Street Community Hall the great community benefit it is still becoming.

Community Groups

It remains a matter of importance and pride to us, and our ethos, that the Hall's community groups continue to thrive as a low cost means of pursuing stimulating activities at the same time as encouraging informal community cohesion.

The Autumn/Winter 'Friday Friends' weekly community lunch with its wholesome homemade soup and cakes, socialising and free raffle, has gone from strength to strength in its second year. It means hours of weekly involvement over several months by some very committed volunteers and was again a highlight of the year for many people in the community. We look forward to a third year, and remain grateful to Joe's Cafe, Coburn & Baker and The Sussex Peasant for their material support.

Stay & Play paused temporarily for operational reasons, but when once more the group was up and running it was well attended and bustling with activity. Many have expressed gratitude for the volunteers who commit their time to this valuable group.

The other groups like Art Club, Table Tennis, and our monthly Repair 'Cafe' – the place to get things fixed – continue to go from strength to strength.

For the fourth 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 our wonderful volunteers joined in.

Events

During the year (i.e. April '23 to March '24) we held, or jointly held, 28 events in and around the Hall, which means we can safely say that thousands of people attended and enjoyed them. For example:

Money was raised at a previous Pudding Club (big success) to finance an alternative event for local refugees over Coronation weekend in 23.

Lots of 10th Anniversary 'Hall For All' events in Sept 23 (Parties, Football Panel, Local History, Music Quiz, Gershwin Evening, etc.) raised over £10k for the "Feeling Flush" campaign to replace our below par toilet block.

As ever the 'Great Get Together' (GGT) street party in June attracted huge numbers, including numerous volunteers, and again was a triumph of collaboration and cooperation with our local GGT partners i.e. the pub(s), Joe's Cafe, Port Hall Stores, St. Luke's etc. The day included a whacky Dog Show which will return this year!

We hosted a photographic exhibition 'Practices of Hope and Solidarity' throughout February, and during the year other events included: a Community tea party; a Halloween party for children; a community Craft Fair; a fundraising gig by The Kites; Kids winter clothing swap; another Pudding Club; Xmas jumper swap; a community social in December, and more.

Our volunteers put together two big fundraising meals early in 24: Mexican Cantina and Indian Thali Delights. Both of these raised money for a new event to support refugees. Alas, we've recently had to cancel this as the MEP have concerns regarding current government policy to detain refugees and send them to Rwanda. Instead, the money raised will go to the MEP for an event of their own. We felt this was the right thing in the current climate, and it reflected our social justice ethos.

Building

Our big project this coming year is the toilet block, delayed due to the Covid period, which has meant re-applying for planning consent and adjustments to the specification. The project will cost ca. £82k. for which a grant application for ca. £72k has been submitted to the Veolia Environmental Trust. The decision is imminent, so fingers crossed. The new block will have four 'Universal' cubicles, each with its own washbasin etc, and increased accessibility. The new building will be better insulated, and a new ramp will enable improved access to the rear yard/garden. We're indebted to our architect Manolis Datseris for the additional work he's undertaken, and to the Society's secretary for managing the grant application.

Meanwhile the Building Team continue to try and address the burgeoning amount of maintenance and improvement tasks that need doing. As ever, plans are in hand to tackle the work whenever opportunities present themselves for handy volunteers to access the building.

It's worth noting that during the last year we've been able to obtain improved rubbish and re-cycling arrangements from B&HCC, whilst still being able to use Magpie for some items.

Finances

Our finances are generally good. Nevertheless, in order to cope with much higher energy costs, we had to increase hire fees slightly for the first time in several years, protecting our core hirers as far as possible.

Energy costs are now slowly coming down, though we need to carefully monitor consumption as our VAT bill jumps from 5% to 20% if we go beyond certain usage limits, which happened for a couple of months last winter. We are about to have a free energy efficiency assessment via a government scheme that may lead to a capital grant for energy efficiency measures.

The toilet block will cost us ca. £20k even if our grant application is successful and there are no cost overruns. We've already spent just over £3k on preparatory activities (planning permission, archaeology report, structural engineers report, etc.). We're putting in the £10k matching funds raised by 'Feeling Flush' and, if we get the grant, another compulsory £7.2k to offset Veolia's landfill tax burden; also, we're making sure that we've got reserves to cover a modest cost overrun if that proves necessary.

We're immensely grateful to quantity surveyor Andrew Dewick for providing his services for free.

Looking To The Future

We've improved our setup for recruiting and supporting volunteers so we should be able to keep running our events and taking care of the 'backroom' tasks. For example, local paramedic Flora Schnider who has held several CPR and defibrillator training sessions to improve our first aid capacity, has agreed to provide periodic general First Aid training for our Event leads in order to be ready if needed during our own events in, or around, the Hall.

Recently we have formally welcomed Kate McAleenan and Jan Archer onto the Management Committee.

We're always keen to know what shareholders think we should be doing more of, or indeed less of, so do get in touch.

Many thanks to our Manager Susan Corlett and Cleaning Contractor Clare West, both of whom do an exceptional job.

And special thanks to all our volunteers, many of whom are not yet shareholders, who undertake so much, from cooking and baking to gardening; building and design work to looking after the website, mailing lists, and social media; inspecting the Hall each night to setting up audio-visual equipment; leading events to running the bar; putting out chairs & tables (and clearing them away again) to hosting the Fri-

day Friends raffles; and many, many other tasks. There's so much more to the Hall than first meets the eye and it wouldn't happen without you.

Directors

The following people served as Directors during the year:

Robin Bailey – elected 25 June 2021, last re-elected 14 June 2023.

Jo Camplisson (Treasurer) - elected 6 Oct 2016, last re-elected 14 June 2023.

Rosie Dewick – elected 25 June 2021

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

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

Co-Opted Management Committee Members

Nell Killick & Alexa Povah (joint Bar Managers)

The Hall Manager (Susan Corlett) reports to the management committee and attends meetings as required.

Dave Fellows – Chair of the Management Committee

(on behalf of the Directors)