
Fawkham Village Hall - Annual Report for 2023

The Parish Council became the sole trustee of the village hall charity in November 2019 following the retirement of the previous Management Committee.

The hall continued to have a good usage of regular hirers and plenty of ad-hoc bookings until the hall had a major structural issue which forced its closure from November 2023, which is ongoing at the time of this report.

Structural Issues

Following storms in November, structural damage was found to the rear wall of the hall. Investigations were conducted by structural engineer appointed by the insurers which concluded that the cause of the problem relates to the method used when replacement windows were installed in 2017. Unfortunately the same issue was found, albeit to lesser extent, with the replacement windows installed to the front wall in 2010. This was confirmed in a report commissioned by the Trustee to ascertain what work was required to repair the damage. The insurers declined to cover the cost of the work as it relates to poor workmanship. The window installation business was contacted but does not have the required insurance policies in place against which to claim.

Discussions were required the insurers to make sure the hall could be reinsured following repair work. This necessitated the instruction of a Building Surveyor to prepare drawings of the work required, and the application for a Building Notice to SDC's Building Control. Three quotes were obtained for the repair work and a supplier selected.

The £11,250 (excl VAT which will be reclaimed) cost of the repair work were met by a £5,000 grant from KCC secured by David Brazier, our local member, with the balance met by CIL funds from Fawkham Parish Council. Associated costs for engineer's and surveyor's reports, building control application and the initial work to ensure the hall's stability through props, etc were met from the hall's reserves. These costs totalled £7,104.

The Trustee worked hard to ensure that the hall could be reopened as quickly as possible, and provided regular updates to the community. The hall reopened on 29th April 2024.

The Trustee would like to thank LSI Interiors for the top quality repair work the firm has done in the hall and for being so flexible around dates for doing the work. We would also like to thank South Place Construction for responding quickly to the request for help with ensuring the temporary structural integrity of the hall following the discovery of the issue.

Refurbishment/Repairs/Maintenance

Extensive internal refurbishment took place during 2020. The main hall's walls, dado rail and skirting were refreshed as part of the repair work in 2024, at a cost of £850 (included in total above). External redecoration was undertaken in 2021 when the hall's exterior was repainted.

The heating controls for the infra red heaters were altered during the structural repairs to make them easier for users to operate, with two sets of switches installed by the main door. This cost was additional to those above. Some other electrical works were needed and carried out following the annual electrical inspection in 2023.

The hall continues to regularly receive great feedback on its fresh appearance and facilities so it is important to maintain this.

The hall's curtains need replacement following the structural repairs, due to changes to the window spacing, and this is currently in hand.

The annual fire inspection was also undertaken in October 2023 and necessary equipment replacement was made.

Water Meter Reading

There have been continuous issues with the reading of the water meter for the hall, which is situated close to the road in the verge, and becomes buried under mud due to vehicles being driven over it. The supplier, Everflow, state they cannot carry out a meter reading due to the access to the meter continually being blocked by the mud upon and in it. It is not safe for the Trustee to access the meter to read it. KCC were requested to add an additional bollard to protect the meter but were unable to help. An attempt was made to mark and protect the location of the water meter. Photos and detailed information was sent to Everflow and they are now in contact with South East Water to try and find a solution to this.

Website

The hall has its own pages on FPC's website, covering information about the hall and how to hire it, plus the regular clubs and classes which use the hall. This can be found here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/village-hall/>.

The Clerk prepared a short video tour of the hall as a way of saving money, instead of showing potential hirers round the hall. This is now available on the website and emailed to ad-hoc hirers when they ask to view the hall. This can be viewed here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OBNd-45BYqU>

Policies and Procedures

A number of amendments/additions were added to the regular hiring agreement including the maximum capacity for the hall which was calculated by the Trustee to be 160 people. The safeguarding clause and the need for public liability insurance for all hirers has also been looked into and this task continues, following which the booking form will be updated to reflect any changes.

A risk assessment was carried out in June 2023. Following the hall risk assessment a number of action points were identified. New signs were created and put up by the Clerk by the kettle to warn users of the risk of using hot appliances and a new kettle was also purchased. Old light fittings were removed from the storage cupboard and signs were also placed on the doors ensuring chairs were not stacked higher than 8 per pile. A sign was also placed on the wall to ensure the ladder was stored safely horizontally on the floor to avoid any injuries.

The hall is insured for buildings, contents and public liability with Hiscox Insurance Company Limited. This insurance policy expires on 29/05/2024.

A Policy relating to the hall has been included in the draft Neighbourhood Plan. This aims to ensure protection from the loss of the village hall unless it can be demonstrated that demand within the locality for the facility no longer exists and that suitable alternative provision is made elsewhere. This policy received strong support during the public consultation on the draft Plan conducted in the summer.

Accounts for 2023

The income and expenditure accounts for 2023 show that income did not exceed expenditure due to a large structural invoice at the end of the year when the structural issue began. The hall had a year end balance of £20,957, some of which will need to be used to reopen the hall, as explained above.

Review of Prices

Hall hiring prices remain competitive and are reviewed annually at each AGM. A reduced price is available for Fawkham residents. Full details can be found here: <https://fawkhampc.org.uk/village-hall/>.

Regular Hirers

A number of different clubs and classes were running at the hall prior to its temporary closure, and it was in use for a total of 11 hours 45 minutes (most term time only):

Adult Dance classes
Children's weekend dance classes
Furniture Restoration
Karate

Unfortunately, due to the temporary closure, both dance hirers have found alternative halls and won't be returning. The Clerk is advertising to seek more regular hirers now the hall has reopened.

Online Booking System

The Trustee has investigated the use of an online booking system, the monthly cost of which would be offset by savings on the cost of the Clerk's administration time which is currently charged to the hall. This would also provide a user-friendly experience for bookers who could immediately check whether the hall is available on their desired date and time. The system is due to go live following the hall's reopening in spring 2024.

Forecast Income and Costs for 2024

Income from regular hirers forecast for 2024 is very dependent on finding new regular hirers following the completion of the repair work. If an equivalent amount of regular hirers are found it would be around £6669 with additional income from one-off bookings for parties and events.

The running of the hall cost £6294 in 2023 and we expect that to only increase a little in 2024, now that the electricity prices have calmed a little. The trustee endeavours to retain a healthy surplus and will continue to take steps to secure as many regular hirers and ad hoc bookings as possible.

Laura Evans
Chair of Fawkham Parish Council,
sole trustee of Fawkham Village Hall registered charity number 802536
May 2024