

**Minutes of Annual Meeting of the  
Educational Foundation of Abigail Bailey and Ann Levett  
Held on 18<sup>th</sup> January 2024 at 14:00**

**Participating:**

Melvyn Wooding (Chair), Raymond Dyer, Andrew Seaman, Arthur Wright, Sharen Hegarty (Trustees) Rev. Louise Bishop, Adrian Dale (Clerk), Janet MacMillan (Bookings Secretary), Rachael Maywood (Head Caretaker)

**2024.1 Welcome and introductions**

The Reverend Louise Bishop was welcomed to her first meeting and introduced to all the members of the Foundation.

**2024.2 Installation of a new Trustee**

The Reverend Louise Bishop was installed as an ex-officio Trustee of the Foundation by virtue of her taking on the benefice under the terms of the [Governing Document](#). She signed her declaration and the Clerk was instructed to notify the Charity Commission. The [Trustee Register](#) has been updated.

**2024.3 Approval of the Annual Accounts and Trustees' Report 2023**

The Clerk presented the [Annual Report and Accounts](#) which had been independently examined by John Eldred, Church Treasurer. The Village Hall made a small operating loss, but School House had the best operational surplus on record. This surplus was offset by the unexpected cost of the chimney restoration. Overall the Foundation's reserves decreased by **£8,857**. A grant application has been made to cover a proportion of the cost of the restoration project. If successful, this will restore the reserves.

Andrew Seaman expressed concern by email that the Village Hall might be overly reliant on the Ballet Academy for bookings and wondered whether we should adopt a new marketing strategy to attract new clients. The Clerk updated the meeting on the position:

The Ballet Academy is indeed our "anchor" client that covers our overheads, and has been so for many years. This is not unusual for local village halls. Stanwick and Newton Bromswold both host pre-school classes.

The Ballet Academy drives a large number of private functions in that most of our children's parties originate from there. We have no shortage of party enquiries. 3 parties have happened already this year and we have had to turn down another two enquiries as we were already booked out. The Nene Valley Astronomers are still going strong twice a month, and we have two gamer weekends coming up. We also have a new monthly booking on a Saturday morning for a new branch of a world-wide evangelical church – the [E3 Church](#).

However, we do have four problems:

- 1) We can't hold adult party functions in the evenings. They have proven to be too disruptive for School House tenants and for the Woodlands next door. This is not a new problem. Minutes from the 1970s contain complaints from School House tenants about noise from Village Hall functions. The difference now is that our tenants pay a premium rent of £1,285 a month and are entitled to "quiet enjoyment of their tenancy". The children's bedrooms are immediately adjacent to the Hall and vibrate when loud music is being played. They can already hear the ballet classes every evening, but these finish by 19:10.

- 2) We are now short of day time bookings. The ballet academy dropped its Monday, Tuesday and Friday morning classes when the cost of living crisis hit. Pre-school demand shifted to the free nursery places on offer in Raunds and Higham. After the pandemic, Pilates, tai chi and yoga didn't properly restart. Tai chi attracted mainly retired clientele and they didn't want to go back to classes, so the session folded. Pilates and yoga attracted mainly women, some active retired and also young mothers. There are not enough of either group in the village itself, and we relied on Raunds and Higham to provide the numbers. Unfortunately, the teachers of these classes both took full time jobs as soon as lock down ended as they needed guaranteed income. There are well established yoga, keep fit and Pilates classes in the local towns. Our only unique selling point as a venue is that we have better parking. However, if attendees need to walk to their classes, that doesn't help. We did have a new baby class start mid-year last year on a Wednesday morning. That is going well.
- 3) We also lost the Chelveston Chorus after the pandemic. The members were all retired and most didn't want to go out again in the evenings. There is a similar risk for the Women's Institute. Their numbers are falling, and the existing members are all 70+. They are actively discussing winding up and folding into the Free Spirits Group – who are largely the same people anyway. They meet monthly on a Monday afternoon.
- 4) The Church has emerged as a viable venue for Village functions, the quiz, knit and natter, monthly tea sessions etc. The Village Hall can't accommodate the quiz as the preparations clash with ballet. There would also be disturbance for the tenants as there was for the last Entertainments Committee function, the murder mystery. The Church is also more cost effective as they only charge energy costs, with no hire or cleaning fees. Many of the attendees are also Church members who are willing to lend a hand in the setup and clean up.

It was agreed to discuss the issues again later in the meeting.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to approve this report and the Clerk was instructed to submit it to the Charity Commission.

#### **2024.4 Volunteer Roles and Contractors**

Adrian Dale was confirmed in his role as Clerk to the Trustees and Janet McMillan was confirmed as Booking Secretary, both volunteer roles. Adrian is an authorised signatory to the Unity Trust bank account, and Janet is authorised to access the account and set up payments. She is not a signatory on the account. Both are covered by the Foundation's insurance policy with Ecclesiastical Insurance.

Rachael Maywood was confirmed in her contractor role as Head Caretaker, supported by the Assistant Caretakers (also contractors) Maxine and Joe Routledge. All are covered by a separate insurance policy taken out by the Foundation.

#### **2024.5 Foundation Property Strategy 2023-2033**

The Clerk presented the draft [Property Strategy](#). The purpose of the strategy is to create a "road map" document that will guide investment decisions and will help our funding partners work with us to ensure the best outcomes for the community, given the funds available.

In 2024 monies, the Foundation received £227k in grants in the period 2010-2022 and spent £412k on improvement projects for the two properties.

The draft strategy estimates that expenditure from 2023-2033 will be £286k, requiring grant funding of £193k.

The meeting discussed the overall goals for the properties:

1. To ensure that the Village Hall remains a well equipped and attractive venue which attracts a wide variety of week day classes, clubs and societies. These would have subsidised hire fees to meet our charitable purpose.
2. The Village Hall would also be available for unsubsidised, private hires (mainly at weekends) with hire fees comparable to other local venues.
3. School House would be maintained to the highest standards to attract premium rental returns. These returns underpin the building maintenance and development costs of the Village Hall, allowing the Foundation to subsidise educational and recreational classes.

### **Village Hall Priorities**

It was noted that the Village Hall extension and garden were still in excellent condition with little deterioration since the extension was built in 2014. However, there are problems elsewhere:

1. The main Hall has ceiling damage resulting from the cluster fly infestation. The ceiling has not been decorated since 2007. There are unsightly, unused wires across the ceiling and some of the plasterwork is failing.
2. Some of the car park lighting is failing, and the access track will need some maintenance in 2024.
3. There is a rabbit and mole infestation at one end of the paddock.

All of these issues detract from the immediate attractiveness of the Hall.

Three longer term issues were identified:

4. The paddock surface is unusable from October – April each year.
5. The Hall floor has signs of a woodworm infestation.
6. The Hall needs insulating and a new heating/cooling and ventilation system.

These issues do not affect the immediate viability of the Hall as a venue but will need to be addressed in the longer term.

The meeting discussed the proposed projects for the Village Hall.

### **Project V1 – Improved ceiling access and redecoration**

This project should go ahead at Easter 2024.

### **Project V2 – External garden/car park lighting repair/refurbishment**

This project should go ahead during the spring of 2024.

### **Project V3 – Paddock rabbit fencing and mesh surfacing**

Rabbit fencing should go ahead during the spring of 2024 and the surface should then be rolled to consolidate the trenches that have been dug. However, the proposed reinforcing mesh will not be installed at this stage. Even with grant funding, it is a major project. It will be reassessed in 2025.

### **Project V4 – Insulating, ventilating and heating/cooling the Village Hall**

This project would also address the woodworm in the floor and failing plasterwork above the door going into the corridor. It has major cost implications and would require a 3-4 month shut down. It is clearly an important long-term goal and could attract significant grant funding. However, reserves need to be accumulated to achieve the matched funding. In the interim period, ongoing investigations will be needed, particularly to determine whether the floor can withstand the scaffolding and the phasing of the works. These investigations should continue.

## **School House Priorities**

It is now 6 years since the major School House refurbishment, but it is still in a good state of repair. Indeed, following the chimney restoration, it now looks even better from the outside. Whilst the surface of the left hand chimney is not ideal, it does not significantly detract from the property's appeal.

In 2020, the Government had warned landlords that properties would need to reach EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) level C by 2025 (for new properties) or 2028 (for existing tenancies) in order that they could be legally rented out. School House has an EPC level E and would have failed this target. Projects were therefore explored to improve this level.

However, during the Autumn of 2023 (whilst the strategy was being completed), the Government indefinitely delayed the change in minimum EPC levels for the rental market. Representation from landlords had pointed out that large numbers of properties could not be improved, and would simply be removed from the market. There is now no date for the proposed change and no indication that a Labour Government would bring forward legislation to achieve this in its first term.

The meeting discussed the revised priorities:

### **Project S1 – Restoring the gable end chimney**

This project had been included in the strategy during the early drafts prepared during the summer of 2023. Events overtook us and the project had to be brought forward for immediate completion in the Autumn of 2023. The project is now awaiting retrospective grant funding.

### **Project S2 – Energy improvements to School House**

The meeting concluded that a project to insulate the internal walls of the property would be impractical, leading to a noticeable reduction in the size of the rooms. This would detract from the rentability of the property. There was also doubt as to whether 50mm of additional insulation would have any noticeable impact, given the thickness of the walls.

Attention turned to the windows. These are 30 years old and some sashes have warped, requiring the installation of draught excluder. They will need replacing soon and the opportunity could be taking to install triple glazing.

Solar PV was also discussed but is not practical as School House has the wrong orientation and is heavily shaded by the Village Hall and trees.

The meeting agreed to replace the windows at the next tenancy change.

### **Project S3 – Restoring the left hand chimney**

The meeting agreed that this was desirable but not urgent. The proposed timetable of 2030 is appropriate and would give us chance to accumulate reserves specifically for this project.

It was unanimously **RESOLVED** to update the strategy to reflect the discussions and to begin work on the 2024 priorities for the Village Hall.

## **2024.6 Proposed 2024 Foundation Budget**

In the light of discussions, the draft budget presented was [revised](#) to exclude the mesh reinforcement of the paddock. Re-gravelling of the car park track was moved to the project section of the budget from maintenance for completeness. If the Foulger Trust application for the refurbishment of the gable end chimney is successful, then the end of year reserves should increase by approximately £12,200. Without the Foulger Trust

grant, the Foundation will break even. This budget assumes a 9 month tenancy but excludes any associated costs of reletting as these would be drawn from reserves.

## 2024.7 Any other business

Sources of grant funding were discussed. The Foundation has twice been unsuccessful with the Heritage Lottery Fund. We could not demonstrate that we are a deprived community in need and could not guarantee to boost access to disadvantaged groups.

However, we have been successful with local funding bodies (The Foulger Trust and the WindFarm Trust and have a good partnership with them. We were also successful with BIFFA who funded the bulk of the Village Hall extension in 2014, along with East Northamptonshire Council. This application was successful as we could show that the venue would become part of a network of community venues in the district. This application promised to boost access for children from the surrounding district and access for the elderly. We were very successful and attracted the local branch of the U3A for their main meetings. However, their numbers increased very quickly and they out grew us. They have moved to the Salvation Army Citadel in Rushden for their main meetings, and to various venues in Rushden and Higham which are accessible by bus.

Andrew Seaman explained that the criteria for the Heritage Lottery Fund change all the time, and that it is now more likely that they would consider renewal and repair projects that would make a heritage building fit for a new generation. He suggested that we should work with Jane Seaman on a long term funding plan.

The marketing of the Village Hall was discussed. We get many referrals through the Ballet Academy for children's parties. We also get over 500 page impressions a month from Google with people looking for local venues. We do have a Facebook presence managed by Rachael, who is active on many of the local community forums. Janet explained that we are very flexible with our bookings and always aim to offer alternative slots when a requested slot is already booked. We already have 4 gamer weekends booked for the year, and one family that has booked a Christmas event for the next two years.

Louise suggested that we could also strengthen our links with the Bede House in Higham Ferrers, part of the Church. We could have a reciprocal arrangement whereby we do cross referrals whenever we are unable to accommodate a function. We have a similar arrangement with Saxon Hall in Raunds, where one of our Assistant Caretakers, Maxine, is the Head Caretaker. It works well for Raunds families who can't get the booking they need at Saxon Hall.

Rachael raised the question of storage for little used items such as display boards, ladders and the café tables. She wondered if it would be possible to find a storage location for these, even if outside.

The meeting closed at 15:30.



Adrian Dale (Clerk)



Melvyn Wooding (Chair)