ANNUAL GENERAL REPORT

for

ASHWICK & OAKHILL VILLAGE HALL

&

RECREATIONAL GROUND COMMITTEE

Wed 24th May 2023

Ashwick & Oakhill Village Hall and Recreational Ground Committee

Report of the Trustees for the year ended 31st March 2022

The trustees presented their annual report and audited financial statements for the year ended

31 March 2023

Reference and Administrative Information

Charity Name: Ashwick and Oakhill Village Hall and Recreation Ground

Charity Registration Number: 249510

Principal Office: The Village Hall, Zion Hill, Oakhill, Radstock BA3 5AN

Board of Trustees:

Andy North (Chair)

Kim hare (Vice-Chair)

Caroline Ambrose (Treasurer)

Chris Scott (Secretary)

Andy Scott (Lettings Secretary)

David Thorley

Martin Rymes

Tim Ambrose

Laura Rogers

Kate Simons

Auditor: David Hirst

Report of the Trustees for the year ended 31 March 2023

Structure, Governance and Management

Ashwick and Oakhill Village Hall Committee is a charitable trust registered with the Charity

Commission under charity number 249510.

The charity trustees are responsible for the general control and management of the charity. The

trustees give their time freely and receive no remuneration or other financial benefits. The trust

meet as a body every month and are responsible for all decisions in relation to the

running of the Village Hall and community facilities and activities provided by the charity.

Our aims and objectives:

To develop and encourage the use of the Village Hall and Recreational Ground by promoting its facilities to the local and wider community. To promote opportunity for all, lifelong learning, family wellbeing, pleasant neighbourhoods by community cohesion and involvement. To regenerate the facilities as required and improve community spirit by doing so.

**Chair’s Report** (Andy North)

In preparation for writing this year’s Chair Report, I re-read my report for 2022. Last year I said it was a “fantastically successful year – one to be proud of…” and I’m thrilled to be able to say that the last 12 months have been just as successful, if not more so.

But before I go into the reasons why, I’d like to take a moment to recognise the loss of Bryan Wells from the committee due to ill health and his move to a care home in Evercreech. It has been said many times before, but it seems fitting now to say here that the Village Hall as we know it only exists because of Bryan’s foresight, dedication and perseverance over many years of hard graft and effort. He was well known to beg, borrow and even steal from skips to make the building a reality against a backdrop of minimal support and funding. Even when it was finally built his determination to develop, improve and make it a valuable community leisure asset for all is something he/we all can be proud of. I’m also particularly happy to say that the many improvements and changes we have made over the last few years as Bryan’s health deteriorated since the beginning of the Covid pandemic have all been well received by Bryan and he is happy in the knowledge that his legacy will continue to grow and support the community for many years to come. On behalf of all the Trustees and the charity itself, we thank Bryan and wish him all the very best and a long, happy “retirement”.

2022-2023 has seen a huge shift in village hall operations and we have gone from a building footprint of which only 30-40% was being regularly utilised, to now 100% of it being used with intention and purpose. Also, thanks to the new café patio area with serving hatch from the kitchen, we can also consider this area to be an extension to the building facilities – so you could argue we are now using 125% of the footprint! Clearly, this is all down to the huge transformation of what was an abandoned garage, a mis-used storeroom and an under-used ‘Home’ and ‘Referees’ changing rooms into a new, modern kitchen alongside a large, attractive internal café seating area, now affectionately known as the ‘Oakleaf Community Café’ which was officially opened in Dec 2022 by local author Cate Ray.

Little did we know that the hard work was only really beginning to start! Whilst we had a vision of re-purposing the space into a community café, we had not really detailed a plan of how we were actually going to get it up and running and then operating it as a going concern. But with huge efforts, dedication and professionalism it has been achieved – and not by a small margin either. The team have even achieved a maximum Food Hygiene Level 5 award after only 6 weeks after opening!! (The inspector was very impressed!). The Café now opens on Wednesday and Saturdays, 09:30-12:30 serving barista coffee and a wide range of other hot/cold drinks, hot sausage/bacon butties, delicious homemade cakes, packaged cookies, ice creams and much more. This is being operated by a lovely team of volunteers who sign up to shifts via the online Three Rings volunteer website which we have also invested in. The team are also planning to extend the opening hours over the coming months, but this will require additional volunteers – work in progress. To be honest, I am only skimming the surface of what has happened with the cafe and I suspect some trustees reading this will be quick to point out the many other challenges, hard work and achievements that have happened in the last 5 months alone, let alone the project management of the builders etc – to this end, I apologise, there are far too many things to mention here and I must move on! Before I do so, I should note here that the café is returning a good profit, providing people with new skills; Duke Of Edinburgh experiences for teenagers; a welcoming meeting place and social/community hub for all ….. sorry, couldn’t resist squeezing that all in.

It is no secret that I announced in 2022 that I was going to step down as Chair this year due to increasing work and family commitments, but when I witnessed the passion, drive and enthusiasm of the committee, the trusteesof the charity, and I saw the physical improvements, teamwork and desire to keep going by others, I changed my mind. What has been achieved over the last 12 months by the team must not be under-estimated by anyone (but probably will be) and I’m genuinely proud to say I’m a part of this team that has made a positive step-change for the future of these facilities, all with the aim of trying to enhance community spirit and improve village life.

Village Halls and Village Hall Committees generally have a rather negative stigma attached to them and they are often perceived to either be overly protective and fussy about “their” facilities, or they operate much like that in the Vicar Of Dibley! The Ashwick & Oakhill Village Hall Committee are definitely not like either of these – whilst our monthly meetings have a formal side to them with an agenda and minutes as per Charity requirements (yes, don’t forget we are a registered Charity # 249510), they are deliberately kept open, relaxed and interactive. None of us want to use our spare time pushing pens and arguing over things that are unimportant to us or the community .. that is not to say we don’t often have healthy, heated debates! Aside from the monthly meetings we are also extremely active via WhatsApp messenging and have multiple chats (different topics) on the go at any one time – this is how we interact and keep the conversations alive – we don’t have to wait until the next monthly meeting!

A good committee, meet regularly, follow their governing document and maintain the facilities to which they are accountable for. A great committee are so much more and have a desire to do all the above and more, they want to be innovative and make a difference. This committee is a great committee and has so much to shout about. It feels like our enthusiasm is starting to transmit into the community and people are now starting to interact, respond and dare I say it, even get involved which is wonderful news.

Not only am I witnessing this on a weekly basis in the café via our volunteers, but also in our customers in the way that they are talking about us, commenting about us on social applications, either directly or indirectly. We have a ‘Friends Of AOVH’ chat group that we can call upon when we need help and a ‘Maintenance Crew’ chat for the less frequent, but more physical tasks. These were of particular help when it came to Queen Elizabeth II Platinum Jubilee party that was put on in a marquee on the Recreational Field June 2022 in collaboration with Binegar. This was a large event which required much funding, support and help from the community – it certainly appeared to be a big success and a memorable tribute to our longest serving and now recently departed monarch.

There is so much more I want to say about the last 12 months, and to repeat, so much has happened. I am lucky to have such a strong committee of 10 Trustees for which I feel incredibly honoured to work with. Their hard work, commitment and prolonged efforts are a credit to them and the community. I’d like to particularly mention the following:

* Kim Hare – As Vice Chair Kim continues to be a massive support to me and the wider team despite her increasing work commitments. If she can help, she will. She is articulate, considerate, responsive and can always be relied upon to find another angle, consideration or line of approach to ensure we are fair and function effectively as Trustees and as a committee. Kim also continued to ensure we had a substantial and valuable monthly update in The Beacon which is incredibly important considering it landed on 800+ doormats every month before it’s demise in Dec 2022. Luckily a new parish magazine is due to start later this year – The Phoenix!
* Caroline Ambrose – As Treasurer, Caroline has, and I’ve used this word previously, been an absolute powerhouse in the setting up and maintaining the running of the enormously successful Oakleaf Community Cafe. She is the reason the café opens every week and why we achieved a Food Hygiene Level 5 – there is no doubt of that. In addition to this Caroline has continued to apply for and achieve many grants and essential funding for so many areas of the facilities. In total she has attained (with much help from Tim) over £85,000 within the last 18 months – incredible.
* Tim Ambrose – Tim has held many unofficial roles over the last year thanks to his keen eye for detail and desire to get the right outcome which has proved so invaluable in so many areas. To list but a few: Project Management of the café building works from start to finish (this took many months and involved meetings with builders, carpenters, electricians, plumbers, suppliers etc); café furniture builder; making money for the charity via his plant sales at events and/or privately; Christmas Market alcohol sales; investigation, purchase and relocation of the hot water tank and boiler; café cook, barista and so much more. Tim is not afraid to challenge and ask the difficult questions which has resulted in some excellent outcomes to benefit all.
* Martin Rymes – As Facilities Lead, Health & Safety Lead and Fire Safety Lead, Martin has donated many hours in all weathers to ensure the ongoing maintenance of the building and its facilities that directly impacts the safety of users. He has also ensured the building and recreational field is maintained, secure, safe, uptodate and has maintained the playground equipment (a never ending task) to meet RoSPA guidelines plus so much more.
* Andy Scott – Andy has been very active and further to transforming the booking process and maintaining the Bookings Policy and T&C’s to meet with ever-changing requirements, he has also produced much professional quality signage in and around the café and facilities, built much needed bespoke kitchen shelves and assembled café furniture. He is also a regular Lead volunteer and cook in the café. His role often requires him to meet potential hirees at the hall which can be critical to ‘winning’ a booking! Andy also controls the heating (via Hive) to ensure the building is warm when needed and reducing any wasted energy at other times. He has also supported all of our events in one manner or another.
* Chris Scott – Being secretary is an often mis-understood role in a committee like ours - Chris has been a huge help to me and minutes are always very promptly produced and published – not an easy task. Chris has also helped at multiple events and is a regular in the café kitchen!
* David Thorley – David continues to be a font of knowledge that often provide a strategic steer to challenges facing the committee with well-considered and sound reasoning. His initial drive and persistence in the early days of what was the rejuvenation project (aka café building works) and its architectural and building control requirements is what got us moving in the right direction in the first place. He is a remarkable individual and difficult to believe he is an octogenarian - noone quite knows how he manages to run a sheep farm, Chair the Local History Group, be a Parish Councillor, be on the Patient Participation group and still give us his undivided attention on the VHC!
* Laura Rogers – Laura is our Safeguarding Lead and also looks after the cleanliness of the facilities to ensure it is always clean and welcoming. With her links to the school, Laura is able to assist with getting our news into their parent communications – an important marketing tool for us!
* Kate Simons – Kate is our newest trustee and brings with her a wealth of knowledge from her teaching and deputy-head background which has been very helpful in a number of challenging conversations. Kate has also quickly got involved with supporting the café and at events.

All of the team’s incredibly efforts continue to put us in a strong position to deliver our plans for the next 12 months and to develop our recreational facilities for future growth to become a more widely used resource for the benefit of the community, run by the community.

**Last 12 months:**

Below is a list of some of the key activities (in no particular order):

* Ukranian Drop In Sessions to support the visitors in and around our community.
* BBC News visit and broadcast relating to the above!
* Fundraising (predominantly grant applications and a little event fundraising)
* Completion of all building works and installation of doors, specialist flooring, new kitchen cupboards, purchase of catering equipment, café seating area and new storeroom etc.
* More fundraising … (think you get the picture now…)
* Resiting of water tank from old garage to changing room.
* Purchase and re-siting of new boiler into the remaining ‘changing room’, decommission and removal of old boiler from old kitchen)
* New fire safety alarm
* Installation of remote HIVE heating controls and thermostatic zoning to focus when/where heating is needed within the building thereby reducing energy usage by heating everything!
* Creation of operating plans for the Café
* Initiation, engagement and management of a café volunteer team
* Implementation of Three Rings online rota system for café.
* Completion of an environment energy audit to establish potential energy improvements.
* BookCrossing Zone established in café and online.
* Playground equipment maintenance
* Events:
	+ Easter Event
	+ Platinum Jubilee Dance Party
	+ Christmas Market
* …and many more.

As you will agree, this is a long list of significant achievements considering that most of the committee work full time and/or have other major personal commitments – Unfortunately this is often overlooked and not understood by the wider community. Without these people we would not be able to meet our aims and objectives and the hall and field would fall into disrepair.

The trustees of the Committee would also like to thank the following individuals/companies who have helped and supported us over the last year (apologies to those I have missed, there were so many!):

Ashwick Parish Council

Hancox Aggregates

Abi Powell Anna Kinght Anne Burgess Antonietta Russo-Walker

Cami Todd Cath Booth David Hirst David Schwartz

Dawn Davies Di Marshall Elaine Green Elizabeth Devon

Fay Clarke Gary Milton Gary Pryer Hannah Noel

Ian Hopson Jackie Bally James Lewis Jane Tobiasson

Janis Thomson Joe Harvey Nimmo Justin Sargent Katharine North

Kirstie Milton Kingsley Baxendale Kirsty Baxendale Lizzie Lewis

Lynne Parsley Martha Sparkes Nicki Solmon Nicola Fitzgerald

Paul Garbit Phil Brown Philp Belben Sally Sargent

Sarah Dalwood Sarah & Rob Westell Steve Parsley Sue Moysey

Wayne Nutt

And of course, all our “Friends of AOVH”

Our immediate focus following the 2023 AGM and the election of the new committee and the Trustee Roles (Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Secretary, Bookings) will be to confirm plans for the coming year.

**The next 12 months**

Below is a list of some of the key activities that need to be undertaken (in no particular order):

* Installation of new outdoor gym equipment.
* Re-paint the external walls of the main village hall building (August)
* Work with local artist to create community project to paint a mural on an external wall
* Achieve Hallmark Level 2 and 3 accreditations
* Community Survey to check we are meeting the needs of local inhabitants.
* Being Phase 2 of rejuvenation plan – Extension for changing rooms.
* Building roof repair and improved loft insulation (circa £13-£15k required)
* Increase hall usage by proactively looking for and attracting new groups, activities, societies etc but at the same time ensuring availability for adhoc requests by local inhabitants.
* Update/replace BMX track
* Investigate options to implement to setup a Youth Group for teenagers
* Investigate options to improve outdoor leisure equipment for juniors

If I am re-elected as Chair, I have a clear vision for the next 12 months.

1. Extend the Community Café opening hours
2. Achieve Hallmark Level 2 and 3 accreditations
3. Increase VH usage and hire potential by 25%
4. Improve/update outdoor leisure equipment
5. Fundraise for Rejuvenation Phase 2

The combined objective of the above is to ensure the longevity of the VH as a going concern and its value to the community thereby improving village life and increasing community spirit via engagement.

**Fundraising** is always going to a key activity for the Village Hall and this year will be no different. We need to generate new ideas and opportunities to increase income potential via local activities and in the search for government/parish/corporate funds and grants. We can no longer simply wait for bookings.

Whilst the holding of our regular and popular events (Easter Egg Hunt, Village Festival, Halloween Disco, Beer & Carols, Christmas Market etc) need to continue we also need to be looking at new and exciting opportunities to really make our VH a more appealing facility for all to enjoy for many more years to come.

List of ideas/opportunities in planning:

* Local, small band music venue
* Exhibitions of local talent – eg. Art Gallery, Craft Fayres
* Community Cinema - Moviola

**Use of Volunteers**

Volunteers are a critical resource in our community work. Volunteers are involved in most of

our community activities and we now have 10 trustees regularly giving their time freely. One of our

objectives is to increase community engagement and involvement in the Village Hall. Although we have been restricted in our events and activities this year due to the focus on building and operating a Community Cafe, we have increased awareness of the charity and its continuing needs and have a larger group of volunteers on our list!

**Community Involvement**

Wider participation of the Community and collaboration with other community organisations such as the Church and School are significant ways to improve the community spirit of the village. The Village Hall is committed to continue these relationships and has worked closely with these and other community groups, clubs & societies over the last few years. Whilst the VHC must ensure their events cover running costs and where possible generate a profit for investment in the facilities, the priority is a wider community involvement and engagement rather than to generate a profit.

It is hoped that we can soon encourage members of the community to organise and run events at the VH again with the support of the VHC. We also intend to extend the type of events offered and increase the accessibility of the venue to provide wider interest and benefit. We are actively in discussion with local talents and community groups for new ideas and to identify areas where continued improvements could be made. We are aiming to publish a community survey in 2023.

**Communication and Engagement**

The Village Hall has tried hard this year to maintain regular communication with the community and has used multiple methods to reach as many as possible. For example, monthly updates in The Beacon Parish magazine; the ‘Friends of AOVH’ WhatsApp group; VH facebook page; Village Life Facebook page and Instagram. We have also invested time and money in the development and professional printing of flyers on a couple of occasions to improve impact, perception and response from the community. In addition, we maintain our pages on the Ashwick Parish website and use posters on local notice boards and word-of-mouth to advertise events.

**Current Clubs/Groups/Activities**

Despite the best efforts of the charity and remaining clubs/societies, we are experiencing a serious decline in these and a lack of interest and/or enthusiasm from the community to engage or start new opportunities. We are hearing of similar stories from other community buildings across Somerset and appears to be a growing trend due to a shift in the use of general interest and use of leisure time by the population as a whole. However, as a community charity, and with the opportunities we ow have to engage with the community via our Oakleaf Community Café, we are starting to explore the opportunities to directly influence local inhabitants to progress their ideas and interests via a more generic Community Social Club. We don’t currently have a strategy or an approach for this at the time of writing this, but it will likely have sponsorship by an existing club that has registered its interest due to its likely demise and consequent closure. The charity trustees consider the activities they provide a real and tangible benefit to their immediate users and the wider community. The hall and recreational ground provide a valuable educational and recreational resource to all in our local community. So, in the next 12 months we will be attempting to increase the use of the facility and extend its use to a wider number of the community

**Chair .. Last words**

As Chair of the AGM I would like to take this opportunity to thank all of the Village Hall Trustees for their support, effort and time over the last year. It has been an absolute privilege to work with you and to see what we have managed to achieve yet again.

The volunteers who give their time to the community are a phenomenal and committed group, without whom, local community events and activities like we have had this year (and the mountain of other work behind the scenes!) simply would not take place. Thank you!



Andy North

**Appendix A – Audit Annual Account**

