

LAVCH AGM & Members Meeting

Held at Samlesbury War Memorial Hall Saturday 13 April 2024 9.30a.m.

Present: Eileen Murray (Chairman), Teresa Taylor (Treasurer), Anne Huson (Grindleton Pavilion), Sian Middlebrough (Grimsargh V.H.) (LAVCH Trustees), Denise Partington, Ruth Abram & Joe Hannet (Community Futures)

Halls also represented: Samlesbury W.M.H., Salesbury V.H., Parbold V.H., Whittle-le-Woods V.H., Catterall V.H., New Longton V.H., Hutton V.H.

Apologies: Bilal Bham (LAVCH Trustee), Hoole V.H., Barton V.H., Ribchester V.H., Knowle Green V.H.

Annual General Meeting of the Charity:

Chairman welcomed all, thanking Samlesbury for hosting & encouraged all to look around, including Community Garden.

The Treasurer then presented the accounts for the year to 31.03.24, explaining these were with the Independent Examiner but foresaw no issues. Due to the problems with RBS & Natwest, the bank account balances had all been transferred to the new account at Lloyds although it had not been possible to formally close the RBS account, it had a Nil Balance.

A proposal was put that membership fees for the current year remain at zero, this was passed unanimously. The accounts were then approved without any queries & would be added to the website & submitted to Charity Commission as soon as examination was completed. The Treasurer was thanked for her work.

The Chair then gave the annual report – see Appendix A.

Appreciation was expressed to the Chairman for all the work she does for the Association.

Appointment of Trustees & Officers: Members had been notified that Karen Durkin had stepped down. There had been one nomination for a new Trustee & **Simon Kirkman** was unanimously approved to be a Trustee of the Charity. The other Trustees (**Bilal Bham, Anne Huson, Sian Middlebrough, Eileen Murray & Teresa Taylor**) had agreed to continue in their roles. **Chairman: Eileen Murray was approved but** gave notice of her intention to step down at 2025 AGM from the Chair. **Treasurer : Teresa Taylor was approved.**

There being no further AGM matters for discussion / resolution, the Annual General Meeting closed at 10.20 a.m.

Community Futures: Denise Partington gave a presentation on the future of Community Futures & its collaboration with LAVCH past, present & future (See slides in Appendix B). She explained CF membership had seriously declined pre & post Covid. Engagement with CF members was an issue, especially those other than Village Halls. The pandemic had meant a refocus on Village Halls & communities, however connectivity in rural areas is an issue.

Community Futures is proposing to change governance structure, moving from Registered Charity status to Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Their Trustees have approved this, but their members have not as yet.

A number of village halls have gone down this route, with assistance from CF. CF has provided huge engagement during & since Covid, with support from Action with Communities in Rural England (ACRE) in order, with funding, to help Village Halls through the “Connecting Communities in Lancashire” initiative (CCiL). Funding has come from Lottery, which has supported a project Ruth Abram is working on, but this

funding is finite. Denise therefore considers the future structure for CF & LAVCH to be a vibrant network, peer support being the way forward. Village Halls have learned so much e.g. heating solutions, new governance that they can share, whilst CF has strategic rural influence so can be more responsive to needs.

Denise went on to explain the new Membership structure for CF which is detailed on CF new website: [Members - Community Futures](#) Associate Membership will be free to support any through governance issues, sharing success & issues in rural communities. Full Membership will currently cost £120 / year (which may fall) & full members will be able to better engage with CF including appointment of CF Trustees, who in turn set CF objectives. She agreed that there had been poor take up so far, but this will be reviewed after a year. CF wish to protect its relationship with LAVCH, however their current role has changed. This includes that CF no longer has the funding resources to offer training. They are happy to provide training resources to LAVCH and on their new website and will give training advice.

It was reiterated that LAVCH members are not qualified to give any advice, however can always share their experience & discuss options. Community Futures are qualified & can also seek formal guidance from ACRE.

There was a concern expressed that CF full membership fees may not be justifiable when advice can be free. Those who have support from CF with governance matters are asked to share their experience with others, giving peer support rather than advice, but some may be wary of doing so. It was acknowledged that some Halls may need to change their structure in order to facilitate change of lease & consider the personal liability for Trustees. Many Halls have old Constitutions possibly dated 100 years ago which should be amended. Denise remains happy to advise & her contact details are **01772 717461** or E: denisep@communityfutures.org.uk

Village Agents Project: Denise then moved on to explain this as “Daughter of CCiL”. The project is aimed at rural communities where isolation & social deprivation are major issues. It is a pilot project & designated to work with communities in Hesham & Overton / Waddington, Gisburn & Slaidburn / Bickerstaffe & Newburgh / Nether Kellett – areas selected to give a broad range across the “Indices of Multiple Deprivation” (IMD). The basis is to assess how easy it is to live in these communities & help to solve the problems relating to lack of access to services e.g. health, shops, banks, post office. The structure has proved successful in Somerset, with a 5 year grant from Lottery but now funded by the Local Authority, as it actually saves the Local Authority time & money. The support is provided by local volunteers who are paid at least expenses for what they may have been doing without any remuneration for some time e.g. taking a neighbour by car on a hospital visit.

The pilot aims to identify the actual needs in particular communities, CF to kick start the projects through an 18 month Lottery funded project which will provide the evidence of need. The process is via mapping (plotting what is there), making connections (rural coffee morning to meet volunteers) and marketing (spreading the word). CF has a new integrated system for data collection, giving a new opportunity to collate all the information they have. The project has started, with Ruth, Denise, Joe & Stephanie delivering on the project. Contact has been made with Parish Councils & some feedback given. Concern was expressed that existing volunteers will not welcome the constraints a structured format may dictate, and feel obliged to carry out the role, however Denise emphasized that payment was to ensure that volunteers, acting as paid staff by CF would not be out of pocket, especially now many may be struggling due to the cost of living crisis.

Joe Hannet then explained the **Rural Housing Enabler Project** – an initiative from Department of Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (DEFRA) via ACRE looking to consider new housing in rural exception sites to potentially build 1 or 2, but no more than 10 houses where there are less than 3000 inhabitants & a demonstrated need for minor development e.g. an employer who cannot recruit locally due to lack of

housing. The property would be brought to market by a Housing Association. March 2025 has been set to establish the structure with Planning Officers & Housing Association, an unrealistic target. Partners for this are Calico Housing / Housing Justice/ Lets MAD / Community Futures / ACRE / Fylde Borough Council / Ribble Valley Borough Council / Lancaster City Council / Wyre Borough Council & Preston City Council. CF needs to work with Parish Councils so they understand the project & Joe, as main contact E: joeh@communityfutures.org.uk is happy to talk with them.

Community Resilience Joe then explained the situation for rural communities in an emergency situation e.g. flood. Emergency response speed by CAT1 (Police, Fire Brigade, Ambulance etc) and CAT 2 (Red Cross etc) is determined by population size affected, therefore rural areas will be responded to later. There is a National Consortium for societal resilience which seeks to address this, for business but also for communities. (Can a business or village keep going after a flood?) CF wants to take a partnership approach. Joe has given presentations to youth groups including consideration of the future for youth should an emergency happen and what they could do to protect against this. It has become clear that, again volunteers are the ones who will be expected to carry out this function and therefore planning for it would be prudent.

All then had a refreshment break when Denise, Ruth & Joe left the Meeting

Document Storage: It was noted that most Halls present use a form of Cloud based storage. Anne Huson explained how Grindleton Pavilion moved towards the use of Dropbox, following earlier loss of information stored on a work computer. They have chosen to go with the paid version, costing about £95 a year. [See Dropbox pricing plans here](#). This gives a large amount of data storage and enables specified permissions to be set. For example, a bar manager could have access to all the files relating to the bar, but not lease agreements.

Dropbox Basic is still free to use for 2GB storage. Members were shown how in practice the separate folder structure can work, ensuring access is restricted to the folders permitted e.g. no Trustees own personal information is shared with fellow Trustees.

Members noted that LAVCH uses Dropbox Basic (accessible by all Trustees).

There is a back up for any accidental deletion of files – 30 days for the basic, free version and 90 days for the paid account.

Several Halls do not use Cloud storage & are aware of lost information, or what may be in a cupboard / filing cabinet but is not accessible easily. All noted that trust is essential for any system to work.

Catterall VH stores all its final approved documents on its own website, whilst their finances are stored in Free Agent (banking / invoice software)

Another alternative is to consider Microsoft 365, but apply for their Charitable Organisation Grant (free for Charities [Compare Microsoft 365 Nonprofit Plans | Microsoft 365](#))

Grimsargh VH uses MS 365 & explained that it is similar to Dropbox, in the set up of folders, with permissions, etc and comes with 1TB of storage per person. In addition, it comes with a host of additional applications and features – which Grimsargh admitted weren't all used to their best potential!

Members were reminded that Mark Carter at Barton IT Services has been recommended and gives a professional helpful service.

Open Forum

Anne Huson highlighted the Rural Prosperity Grant for England (awarded via Local Authorities) whereby Grindleton Pavilion has just been approved for 40,000. [£433,000 Capital Grants Boost for Rural Communities – Ribble Valley Borough Council](#). Other local authorities should have information & currently may be short of applications. There is a limit of one application per parish so may need conversations within parishes.

Key safe – it was brought to Members attention that some insurers are unhappy with the use of keysafes, due to potential misuse & Hall access. Note was made of interactive whiteboards at Hall, bought from ex schools contract base at Soft Sell in Blackburn [IT Company Blackburn | Soft-sell IT Solutions | England](#)

Safeguarding Policy - Discussion on the need for this, noting all Halls are different, but it was suggested that, if a Hall is running an event for large numbers (including young people & vulnerable adults) then a Safeguarding Policy would be at least advisable. Community Futures have templates & will share these. Charity Commission now asks if the Charity has a Safeguarding Policy, and therefore Hall Trustees may need to provide reason why not.

Charity Commission My Account Issues - Several Members have already found problems setting up, then using the new CC My Account whereby each Trustee who needs access must have a personal account & making amendments is proving difficult.

BBQ's in or at Halls Most Members present only allow BBQ's by outside caterers, with their own insurance, in vans for safety reasons, similarly limits on the use of Deep Fat Fryers at Halls.

VAT on Energy Bills One Hall is being charged 20% VAT on energy bills, all others agreed 5% is the norm It was noted that ACRE has a useful presentation on line looking at energy systems:

[Press Release: Net Zero design guidance published to mark the start of Village Halls Week - ACRE](#)

Bank Account Interest – one hall noted that Tide are currently offering 4.33% interest on business banking accounts

Banking Hubs – it was brought to members attention that these are being set up in some communities where 5 banks may share 1 premises on different days.

On Line Meetings suggestions

- Door security systems – including on line authorisation & other methods (physical keys as well as keycodes)
- “Smart” heating controls - HIVE [Smart Home Systems with Hive Smart Home Technology | Hive Home](#) and other similar systems are used by some personally and also by a number of halls, to cut heating bills.
- Booking systems – there had been an online session previously demonstrating various systems, but it was felt feedback from users of “Hallmaster”, which appears to be the most popular would be useful.
- On line ticketing for events, how & if to use such systems

Next Physical Meeting Sat 09.11.24 at Longridge Civic Hall 9.30am start

AGM 2025 at Parbold VH Date in April TBC, with optional lunch

Chairman then thanked all for their attendance & input, closing the Meeting at 1.02 pm

APPENDIX A

Lancashire Association of Village and Community Halls

Chair's Report for AGM – April 1^{3th} 2024

It has been so lovely to see the association continue to grow throughout this past year. This time last year we had **36** active member organisations and that is now **57**. We had **45** members in the Facebook Discussion Forum last year and that is now **65**. This all increases further the pool of experience and knowledge that we can all share and build on – and that is our strength. So thank you to all those who have spread the word among your contacts and to Ruth and Denise for spreading the word through CF's members and helping to enable us to grow so fantastically.

We've again had a few lively and informative online meetings on banking, insurance and HR matters. After our last AGM – Denise lead a brilliant discussion on the role of Trustees – giving us all cause for thought and some very useful pointers on ways to try to attract the best trustees, retain them and also best practices for our roles.

Our autumn physical meeting was extremely well attended and Elizabeth Morgan, the new head of Lancashire Environmental Fund gave an excellent presentation on what they do and was able to answer a number of key questions some of us had on applying for grants from them to fund our projects.

We've had some great contributions to online and physical meetings from our members, being prepared to demo systems and procedures.

Our Facebook Discussion Forum continues to provide an excellent media for many of us to throw out there a wide range of different queries and conundrums and the vast majority are responded to with helpful experience and different views.

We were thwarted in our attempt to update the constitution when the Charity Commission considered the objects in our revised version “too general”, but we did agree a new version last physical meeting, but have had a bit of an admin hiccup trying to battle through the new “My Charity Account” set up. We will persevere.

We did, sadly lose Karen Durkin as a trustee – as she stepped down from her role on her hall's committee. Thanks to our remaining trustees for their contributions to our behind the scenes discussions and debates. I know they won't mind if I give a special thanks Teresa – for once again getting our annual reports and accounts prepared and last year's submitted, together with getting Anne set up on the banking mandate.

I am hoping to recruit **at least** one more trustee at this meeting. The existing ones will hopefully confirm that it is not a particularly arduous role, apart from the Treasurer and we do have some fun discussions along the way.

And finally, thanks to you all – our members, without whom there would be no discussions, no debates, no banter, no Association – thank you! 😊

Eileen Murray

Appendix B

MEMBERSHIP

Denise Partington

REVIEW FINDINGS

- ▶ Members - who are they?
- ▶ Engagement at AGMs
- ▶ Member duties
- ▶ Lack of engagement from us
- ▶ COVID-19

OTHER FACTORS

- ▶ Change to governance structure
- ▶ Village Halls
- ▶ LAVCH
- ▶ Increase in rural projects, strategic influence and services

MEMBERSHIP 2024.25

- ▶ Associate membership
- ▶ Full membership
- ▶ Increased engagement and feedback from all.

2 types of membership

- ▶ Full. For people, organisations and groups that want to help govern the charity.
- ▶ Associate. For people, organisations and groups that want access to information about all things charitable, to promote their own work and engage with us and other associate members.

Relationship with LAVCH

Through CCoL:

- ▶ Information and support specific to village and community halls
- ▶ Governance support

Future:

Continue to support the sustainability and growth of LAVCH

VILLAGE AGENTS PILOT PROJECT

Denise Partington

What's the problem?

Why a Village Agent Scheme?

- ▶ Tried and tested local solution
- ▶ Developed specifically as a local rural service
- ▶ Delivered by paid local people
- ▶ Cost effective

What is a Village Agent?

A paid employee of the scheme who can:

- ▶ Help to solve individual problems relating to access to services
- ▶ Help and support unpaid carers
- ▶ Support people who live alone
- ▶ Help to resolve cost of living crisis problems
- ▶ Work collectively with community volunteers
- ▶ Identify and meet needs specific to the community

The Pilot Project

- ▶ NLCF Funded for 18 months.
- ▶ Research and development
- ▶ Target communities
- ▶ Evidence for full scheme

Targeted Communities

- ▶ Heysham and Overton
- ▶ Waddington, Gisburn and Slaidburn
- ▶ Bickerstaffe and Newburgh
- ▶ Nether Kellet

So Far.....

- ▶ Mapping
- ▶ Making connections
- ▶ Promotion
- ▶ Data collection

Appendix C

A Rural Housing Enabler Service supported by DEFRA.

To support small developments of 100% affordable homes.

On “Rural Exception Sites”.

Communities of less than 3k people.

Real community engagement, impartial and independent.

Bringing experts together to do their jobs, not replacing them.

1st job was to set up a Rural Housing Partnership.





Community Futures



Ribble Valley
Borough Council

www.ribblevalley.gov.uk



Community Resilience

NATIONAL
CONSORTIUM
FOR
SOCIAL
RESILIENCE

The Lancashire Resilience Forum (LRF); a partnership of CAT1 and CAT2 Emergency Responders.

It has a sub-group concerned with Community Resilience.

Community Resilience is a very wide-ranging concept.

In Lancashire, the LRF is considering its approach to supporting Community Resilience and would like to take a partnership approach.

Do Community and Village Halls have a role already, do they want to be involved? Example in Wiltshire, and BRT project.



**Lancashire
Resilience Forum**
Preparing for emergencies

