

LAVCH Members Meeting

1st October 2021

Salesbury Hall

1. Members Present:

NAME	ORGANISATION
Annette Patterson	Salesbury Memorial Hall
Wendy Long	Salesbury Memorial Hall
Audrey Pickup	Salesbury Memorial Hall
David Kay	St John's Old School Charity, Hurst Green
Peter Pemberton	Goosnargh VH
Simon Kirkman	Catterall VH
Teresa Taylor	LAVCH Trustee & Treasurer
Eileen Murray	Grimsargh VH & LAVCH Trustee

2. Introductions

Each representative introduced themselves. David is new to the group and so explained that their charity runs a community hall, which was once the village school. Post meeting note - for those curious – see https://www.hurst-green.co.uk/?page_id=153. Looks lovely!

Have received a number of apologies and also some emailed input/queries – which will be included later.

3. Previous Meeting Notes

All who attended reported received and OK. Eileen did note her ongoing concerns as to emails getting through to people – as she's still not got to grips with Mailchimp. Emails are sent out in batches, to try to ensure they don't get blocked by aggressive spam filters – also sent Bcc – but not sure what the impact of that is on spam filters.

4. Review of Online Meeting on Energy/Heating/Lighting for the Future

All who attended thought it was a useful event. It was noted that it was particularly useful how the suggested measures were broken down in to short, medium and long term actions.

Salesbury have now had a Hive controller installed for their heating – with 2 separate zones.

A number also expressed interest in smart valves – radiator valves that can also be programmed (remotely) to control specific rooms to set temperatures.

Grimsargh are interested in getting in the consultant Kate mentioned – Alastair Muir - to carry out an audit of their premises, to provide guidance on the potential cost benefit of various actions that could be taken to reduce energy usage and therefore costs. Eileen looked him up and his website is: <https://amuirsurveying.co.uk/>. The website states he

covers all the North West “and beyond”. It might be a more worthwhile trip for him to come down here to visit a couple of halls. Eileen will make enquiries as to his costs, etc. Anyone interested – let her know.

5. Review of the Online Meeting on Charging Structures

Simon reminded us that he’d asked for this, due to most of the committee standing down, leaving him and a few others needing to virtually start again from scratch. We had a reminder of current charging rates:

Goosnargh: £20/hr, though community groups get (variable) discounts

Catterall – available on website: <https://catterallvillagehall.co.uk/bookings/>

Grimisargh – available on website: <https://grimisarghvillagehall.co.uk/facilities-and-hiring/>

Salesbury – available on website: <https://www.salesburymemorialhall.com/programs>

St John’s Old School - https://www.hurst-green.co.uk/?page_id=153

However – many reported variances or exceptions to their standard charge rates. It was noted that there could be questions of fairness and transparency, if rates aren’t documented, but each committee is responsible and make their own decisions.

Simon did raise a specific issue in respect to deposits – with some hirers stating they could not afford them – even if the money is only out of their account for a few days. He advised they ask for £100 for every booking.

Annette advised that they require a deposit of £100 for adult parties and children’s parties with a large number of adults attending and listed three instances so far this year, where monies had been withheld from deposits:

- Damage caused to the Bowling Green – walking on in high heels plus things thrown around and out of windows
- A mat stuck/glued to the floor
- Burn on the floor

Eileen advised that Grimsargh ask for:

- £50 for any booking (not our regular users) of main hall or small hall except:
- Adult/family parties and events using full facilities – where it is variable from £100 minimum, to £200 as a general maximum

and outlined how expert Sian is at enforcing these deposits and withholding monies or threatening to, until things are cleared up.

Some/most thought it a significant risk not to require a deposit. Post meeting note – Grimsargh’s hire agreement make clear that the hirer’s liability is not limited to the value of the deposit. In one instance (only) we have had to make a hirer pay for considerably more damage than their deposit covered.

Annette outlined an issue they have at Salesbury, where two groups lease land for use – one football pitches and the other a bowling green. Each currently pay the same amount - £660/year, though the land areas are quite different – football pitches about three times the size of the bowling green. The football club have a lease, due for renewal in 5 years' time, which includes a clause whereby the charge should be increased in line with "inflation" (RPI) or £25, whichever is the greater, which hasn't been implemented since 2016, due to the new committee not having sight of the lease and being unaware. The football club are accepting that the charge should be increased, in line with their lease terms. The bowling club do not have any lease, have been in place since before the second world war, are not keen on a lease and don't feel they should pay any more than they currently do. The question was asked as to whether any have similar issues.

Members of each club are Trustees – and there were discussions as to whether they should be present when these matters were discussed at a committee meeting. The consensus was that they could present their cases, but should not be in the room when the issue was discussed, thereafter.

Eileen did report Grimsargh have anomalies in some rates for long established community groups, but have agreed that, going forward, all community groups would get a 33% discount.

One suggestion was to immediately increase the football club charge to what it would have been, had the lease terms been followed and continue to do so. The committee to decide what a fair rate was for the bowling club – relative to the football club & let their charge sit at the current rate, until the index linking of the football club "catches up" and then apply an index linked increase to the bowling club, in the same manner.

There was general agreement that a lease for the bowling club would be a very good idea – for both parties.

Pat Hastings of Broughton PC supplied the following update on how things are progressing on their Toll Bar Cottage meeting rooms – details of the venue can be found here: <https://broughtonparishcouncil.org.uk/toll-bar-cottage/>

"Our Experience: At this time we are not "charging". We accept donations for usage. We currently have two agreements for craft and art displays and a form for usage that includes a risk assessment.

Once the charity is set up there will be a "license" between the Parish Council and charity for use of the cottage, this includes the right of the PC to have the cottage as the PC office and address and use the meeting rooms when needed.

The craft/art & usage agreements will stay. The usage will have a scale of fees dependent on category (1) community, (2) private/individual & (3) commercial based on sessions - morning/afternoon/evening. The fees scale will be based on the running costs of the cottage which are approximately £7 an hour.

This is being set up as part of the “package” of support and advice from the solicitors setting up the charity.”

David noted that he strongly recommended the Toll Bar Café and a number said they fully intended to visit it soon.

There were other discussions about Trustees and their roles – especially when they are also representatives of groups. It was clear to all present, that the over-riding issue, is that in committee meetings to do with the running of their hall, their duty must be to put the interests of the hall – the charity – as the key priority.

It was also noted that Trustees cannot be given any preferential terms for hiring the hall.

6. Constitution

The group discussed the two versions of a possible new Object for LAVCH, proposed by Peter and agreed to endeavour to proceed with the shorter version:

‘To encourage and facilitate the sharing of knowledge, operating procedures and ideas among charitable village and community halls to assist in delivering best practice for their own charitable objects’.

LAVCH Trustees (Sian, Teresa and Eileen) to now look at the Charity Commission’s “Model Constitution” for our type of organisation and see if it fits our purposes – as they do like it when the model is used. It was suggested we endeavour to cut it down to only the essentials. An example was given of ensuring that it does not include any requirement for accounts to be audited, if not necessary. Teresa reported we do get our accounts checked over – but it was agreed that nothing not considered a requirement would be included – no point restricting ourselves or committing to anything unnecessary.

While on the subject of auditing or “looking over” – Peter asked who others used. Simon reported theirs was Towers and Gornall in Garstang who do it for free – due to there being a relationship with them. It was noted that some accountants with Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) goals will do such things for free.

7. Topics for Future Discussions/Agenda Items

In line with the above proposed Object the idea here is to develop an ongoing list of things we can share knowledge and build expertise on – as agenda items for future meetings.

Some suggestions:

- booking systems – this was actually the subject of a specific query from Dorothy Walmsley from Kirkland and Catterall Memorial Hall:

“We are looking to implement an online booking system, but need to be able to vet potential hall users, i.e. people who have left the hall dirty or damaged the hall previously, etc. I’d be interested to know how others deal with this.”

So – we debated this one today too:

A number of systems are known to be available:

- Hallmaster: <https://www.hallmaster.co.uk/> – designed specifically with the needs of village/community halls. Simon would have gone with this, except his bank pushed for a different system – see below. Eileen is interested in this – and was part way through a trial when Covid struck and it was suspended. Both Hannah and Ruth from Community Futures have had a training session with them. Seems they are very supportive and will give Zoom training to any hall that needs it. Might be worth asking if they would give a Zoom demo to LAVCH halls? Eileen to pursue.
- Lemon: <https://lemonbooking.com> - have cold-call emailed both Peter and Eileen. The system looks very good – again tailored very much to the needs of village hall type businesses. Eileen did send them an email query and was a little put off by it taking three working days to reply – raising a query over responsiveness of their support.
- Simon is implementing FreeAgent for his accounting software, linked to Appointedd booking software – as pushed by Natwest. He assessed a variety of packages and is very happy to talk through the pros and cons of each.

In answer to Dorothy’s query – it is definitely the case with Hallmaster (and believed so with others too) that they all enable “booking requests”, rather than allow someone to actually make the firm booking (and pay). This enables the bookings secretary to still be able to decline – or decide that a discussion is required with the enquiring hirer – so there is no loss of control.

Back to other discussion/agenda item suggestions:

- “How do you attract bookings” – which can incorporate use of Facebook, website, Google and other methods of marketing the hall for hire.
- Learning from some hall’s experience during Covid, where a substantially new committee found themselves with little or no access to key documentation/data – such as lease agreements, hire charges, utility companies, etc: “How secure and also accessible are your hall’s documents?” – accepting that traditional methods are entirely valid, as well as online or “cloud based” systems....
- Training – there was some discussion on Trustee training and it was agreed to approach Community Futures, with a view to them doing a session on:
 - How to recruit)
 - How to specify) New Trustees
 - How to train)

They/Denise can go through all the key points and others can share their experience of how they have gone about it – tips for success, etc.

- Premises licences – quirks and requirements. This got discussed a bit during the meeting – with reference to odd exceptions for New Year’s Eve parties, “grandfather rights” and other oddities.

Post meeting note: Will seek views of the membership on priorities – in view to our next Zoom meeting and also the agenda for our next “in person” meeting in April. Perhaps the CF training might fit well as a session at that April meeting.

8. Open Forum

Recommendations for Services – during a previous meeting, Simon had recommended a firm that had quoted for re-surfacing their car park. He showed the meeting pictures of the now completed job. This reminded us that we had previously discussed putting a page on our website for “Recommendations from Members” – so Eileen will endeavour to get on with this – putting: What it is, who recommended it, a date and any other comments.

Another one to note: Barton IT Services - <https://barton-it.co.uk/>. Grimsargh have now engaged Mark for IT support – initially to solve an issue with Dropbox capacity – and he advised that charities can apply for free Microsoft 365 accounts – 10 seats. This includes 1TB of cloud storage **per person**, compared with the 2.5GB that comes with a standard free Dropbox account. This gives the full MS Office suite, Word, Excel, Teams and Outlook. Peter also reported that MS365 licences can legitimately be purchased for relatively small fees. There was a little discussion about the provenance of such licences, though it is accepted they are not illegal, but they’re not available from Microsoft.

Village Halls Podcasts – Simon drew the group’s attention to this service – the title of which is pretty self-explanatory and gives an interesting 20 minutes of listening to other hall’s experiences. You can sign up for the podcase, via an app, or get a link emailed to you when a new one is available: <https://thevillagehallspodcast.com/>

Successful Grant Applications – discussed during the meeting, but recorded here - to put out a request for any member hall to provide information on any successful grant application. While there are sources of information on ALL/MOST grants available, such as the RSN Rural Funding Digest: <https://www.rsonline.org.uk/category/rural-funding-digest>

They can appear daunting with long lists of grant providers – many of whom are unsuitable for village halls.

Will do!

Identifying “Active” Member Halls and Attracting New Ones

During the meeting, it was agreed to sift out those halls that are completely “inactive”, but listed in our database, to remove from future routine correspondence.

Database to be edited, as required, to indicate “active” and “inactive” halls and circulated to all – with each person (or hall) present agreeing to try to attract one new member – bring an “inactive” member to the party – or find a hall not yet listed. Teresa gets a pass for inviting David to this meeting! Perhaps some of those not present today might also try to do the same. Personal contact is always much more likely to get a successful result than random emails.....

Easy Way of Saying the Group Name

Bit of a casual one – but Eileen noted how clumsy it is even using the acronym “L” “A” “V” “C” “H” to describe the association – and it would be good to find an easier name/way to say it. Annette and Wendy said they call it “Lav-chu” – brilliant – sounds gloriously northern & will endeavour to adopt that from now on.

9. Date, Time & Venue for Next Meetings

Post meeting addition: We have previously agreed to have two Zoom (or Teams) meetings in between our two physical meetings – about two months’ apart. Mondays were identified as the best for most – with the second Monday in the month initially proposed – but later found to clash with at least one Parish Council meeting.

Would 5th December work for most for a Zoom/Teams meeting? Let Eileen know.

Please also “vote” for your preferred subject matter for that meeting – from this list in Item 7 above.

Next physical meeting – which will also cover the (relatively minor) requirements for our AGM. Tentative proposal is to see if we can have that session with Denise of Community Futures on Trustee recruitment / spec / and training on that day. Saturday 1st April proposed – will ask what halls would volunteer to host. Both Grimsargh and Salesbury would be available – but nice to share! Note – LAVCH does pay the going rate for the hosting hall. Eileen would also like to suggest that we invite others to chair the meeting – and perhaps someone to also take notes? This is to further encourage idea of it being a member-owned club.