

Lancashire Association of Village & Community Halls

Members Meeting 9th November 2024

Longridge Civic Hall

Members met at 9.30am for start at 10.00am

Present

LAVCH Trustees

Anne Huson – Grindleton Pavillion

Bilal Bham – Catherine Beckett Community Centre

Simon Kirkman – Catterall Village Hall

Eileen Murray – Grimsargh Village Hall

Members

Jean Hill, Claire Eccles, Andy Leonard – Longridge Civic Hall

Niall MacFarlane - Hurst Green Memorial Hall

Peter & Barbara Higham - Whittle-le-Woods Community Hall

Audrey Pickup - Salesbury Memorial Hall

Chris Shelstone - Freckleton Village Memorial Hall

Alan Tomlinson - Ribchester Village Hall

John Greaves - Samlesbury Memorial Hall

Paul Hunt – Chipping Village Hall

Anne & Martin Peet – Croston Old School

Apologies: Teresa Taylor, Sian Middlebrough, Brian & Ann Chiverton, Andy McLaughlin, David Chedd, David Proctor, Bernard Kershaw, Steph Hornby, Sue Wright, Roger Perry, Ann Boocock

Introduction

Eileen opened the meeting and thanked Jean, Claire and Andy from Longridge Civic Hall for hosting. She then reported that the membership had now swelled to 70 halls, for which all the contributing trustees and members are to be congratulated for spreading the word

Use of Social Media for a Community Building

Bilal talked the group through the different elements of social media that can work for a community hall. Facebook is perhaps the one most suited for the typical demographics of our users – and a Facebook Page is the best platform within that for a village/community hall. Members were strongly advised to invite people to like/follow the page to increase the likelihood of them seeing posts and hence knowing what's going on. Having a Facebook Group (LAVCH Discussion Forum is a Facebook Group) can also be beneficial – and they work slightly differently, engaging with people differently. For example, posts within a group will always be shown in a member's feed, whereas posts within a page will depend on the follower's rate of interactions with that page.

Instagram is much more visual and posts between Facebook and Instagram can be "linked" so posting to one, automatically posts to the other.

In all platforms, the use of “hashtags” - # - can be hugely useful in increasing reach. If you put # in front of something, it becomes searchable. For example – Croston Old School – in a post about weddings on their own page, they will add a hashtag for not only weddings, but local wedding companies too. So anyone searching for a wedding company, will also bring up their posts about weddings. You can see the effect of hash tags by (for example) searching by “village life” in Facebook, vs “#villagelife”

Bilal also strongly recommended that any post has three key text elements:

- Background
- Reason for posting
- Call to action

Plus, of course a good image!

There was some discussion about the admin of a Facebook Page. It was agreed having a number of page admins was important, so that if one steps down & leaves the group, the page isn't at risk. Putting it clearly – if a page has (say) two or more admins and one deletes their Facebook account, the page will continue to exist – provided the right level of admin permission has been given to the surviving member(s).

One attendee reported an issue with scam posts – where someone commented on a post on their Facebook Page – where the original post was advertising an event and the scam comment was advertising tickets for sale – resulting in fraud. It was noted that it is possible to restrict the type of comments/commentors (?) on a post and/or turn off comments completely. To do this – you need to be on the page and acting as the page profile – go to the post and click the three dots, top right. Select “Who can comment on you post?” and there are the following options:

- Public
- Established followers (people who have followed your page for more than 24 hours)
- Profiles and pages that you follow
- Profiles and pages that you mention

The last of the four, will effectively turn off comments completely.

It was agreed there is a good deal of scam activity and fraud, we all need be wary of.

Making the Most of our Facebook Discussion Forum

Eileen quickly showed the group how to search the LAVCH Discussion Forum to find specific content. While some Facebook Groups do try to dissuade members from asking questions that have been asked (numerous times) before, it isn't something we mind – as our circumstances can change – such as hire terms and conditions to get altered and energy companies change their terms too. However – the search function can just enable members to look to see what sort of things have been asked on a topic before. See the document attached at the end of the notes – which will also be uploaded in to the group.

Improving your Google Rankings – and a whole lot more besides....

Simon showed the group a sign he had ordered that could be displayed in a foyer, or elsewhere and, using NFC technology (Near Field Communication - what enables phones to be used as bank cards for payments) take a person directly to (for example) the hall's Google review page. See below – the sign at the top of the photo with “Tap here” and “Google” on it.



Simon continued to go through the other clever means for enabling people to go directly to a variety of digital locations, such as a hall's booking page (QR code on the bottom right of the calendar in the pic) or the hall's WiFi (QR code and also a NFC tag right side of pic). He also showed the roll of NFC tags he purchased (below the Google sign in the pic). Simon went on to demo how he used an app to programme and re-programme the NFC tags. The tags themselves cost a few pence each. So NFC tags can be used in similar ways to QR codes, but NFC tags do require the phone to be just a few centimetres, max from the tag, whereas QR codes can be read from some distance. Both offer exciting ways to enable customers to access a variety of digital features – web page, google review page, Tripadvisor page, Facebook page, etc.

Post meeting note – Simon would like to add that it is probably best to lock the tags once written and checked, so that nobody can edit them. This is an option in the app.

There are lots of links for the items Simon demonstrated at the end of these notes.

Update on VAT on Fuels for Charities

Eileen admitted to making an error at the previous meeting when she stated halls/charities should only pay 5% on their fuel. In fact, it depends on any one of three things:

- How much “business use” the hall carries out. If non-business use is 60% or more, then it all enjoys the lower 5% rate, otherwise it is apportioned accordingly.
- How much fuel is used – with a monthly cap for each different type of fuel, below which the lower 5% rate is enjoyed

- Whether run by a Parish Council – who can claim back all the VAT.

The rules are explained excellently in the [ACRE Information Sheet 26](#) which has been shared in to the Facebook Group and also will be attached with these notes. It outlines ways in which to increase the amount of income qualifying as “non-business” use.

One thing that is of concern, is that the amount allowed for electricity is comparatively small, at just 1000kWh, compared with, for example, gas, at 4,397kWh. Halls striving to lower their carbon footprint and therefore installing electrically powered technologies (heat pumps, etc), may struggle to keep total usage for both light and heating below the 1000kWh allowed. Eileen is endeavouring to get a response from ACRE on this, though accepts it may require mass lobbying by halls and our supporters.

Door Entry Systems

Members were asked what they used and there was a pretty comprehensive range:

- Traditional lock and key
- Keys stored in a key safe, with codes changed every so often (defined period)
- Key fobs – which may (or may not) also disable alarms
- Entry code – which can be fully programmable, enabling lots of functions such as only being “live” for a few hours, specific for a particular user, etc

John from Samlesbury have the latter and Simon showed a similar system that he is looking at, with a view to purchasing – [available on Amazon for about £200](#). It is battery operated and either uses the WiFi or can be programmed, using Bluetooth, though that loses the ease of use associated with WiFi and remote programming. He did note, however, that door installers for the new doors he is also looking at said such a device would invalidate their warranties.

Review of Community Futures Membership

CF had a high quantity of content at the previous meeting, so it was agreed they would not attend this event. During the last session Denise had advised they were planning on a 2-tier membership structure, with the price for full membership being £120 a year and associate membership free. She also reported that there was no longer the funding or resource available for the levels of support that had been previously enjoyed – governance advice, trustee training, etc. In an update since the last meeting, Denise had advised that take up of full membership had been very low and they were instead having just one tier and it being free. That tier would give members access to their website, with that enabling the list of ACRE Information Sheets to be obtained and copies requested - free of charge.

One big of advantage we saw in Community Futures, is they can be described as experts and give advice, which LAVCH members cannot.

Open Forum

A variety of issues got raised and discussed:

- Hire charges – the range of different charges among the halls present was quite remarkable, from £12 an hour up to £1,800 for a 3-day wedding. Even the hourly charges had dramatic differences. It was noted that comparisons were not so much needed between village halls, but between different venues within a particular area. One report that particularly stood out, was today’s venue, Longridge Civic Hall that has considerable increases in the hourly charge rate, depending on the number of attendees at an event – enabling fees of up to £60 an hour for an evening

function. The logic is clear to see, where that impacts the amount of clearing and cleaning likely to be required, or the level of damage/abuse likely to occur...

- Electrical items – do people insist anything brought on site has been PAT tested and also check to see? Variety of responses from “yes, everything” to “no, nothing”!
- Noted that halls do legally have to have a full electrical wiring inspection, every 5 years, though Andy advised it can be reduced to 3 years, if a building is very well used. Costs ranging from £500-£800.
- Bouncy castles – again discussed who allows, who does not, insurers who insist or **strongly advise** insisting on hirers having and seeing evidence of their own insurance policy covering their use. Wide range of different policies at the different halls present.
- Fireworks – Grimsargh noted recent issues (seen by others present) with Social media criticisms of the amount and loudness of fireworks at an event, which would require a further review of (the application of) hire terms.
- Paid staff vs volunteers. Some halls present have a number of paid staff - up to a full time manager. Discussions revolved around issues of what paid staff will (won't) do and any potential impact on what volunteers will and won't do. Many/most halls simply cannot afford paid staff, but many also have problems getting volunteer support to do what needs to be done. Some reported having a success with setting up a WhatsApp group to post up specific requests for support and enable easy discussions between trustees/volunteers. Grimsargh are embarking on endeavouring to establish a meaningful, involved membership to gain some level of “ownership” of the hall and its running within the local community. Watch this space....

Online Meetings and Future Discussion Topics

After discussion the following were agreed:

Solar panels, battery storage and heating systems – next online meeting, soon in the New Year, on a Thursday, so Barton can attend and will try to ensure a date to suit other halls with solars and those interested in this overall subject. Noted the possibility for a future ad hoc meeting at a relevant hall to see an installation and discuss further, in more depth.

Online ticketing – early March for an online meeting. Grindleton noted it had been a “gamechanger” for them

Online booking systems – following on from a previous online meeting to have a review of an actual system, in use at its place of use – John from Samlesbury volunteered to demonstrate Hallmaster at Samlesbury and we will also liaise with some users of “Hallbooking.com” to show their system at the same session.

Next Physical Meeting

To include the AGM, this is now arranged for Saturday 26th April 25, at Parbold Village Hall and will include a lunch and perhaps further discussions afterwards. Lunch will need to be paid for by members attending. Suggestions for discussion topics and potential speakers to be forwarded, as the available topics discussed are now allocated out to the next two online meetings and the autumn physical meeting.

Date for autumn meeting – Eileen to Liaise with John.

Links for NFC and QR Tech Items

The google review sign came from here <https://www.aliexpress.com/item/1005007783081348.html>
£1.89

They are available customised with a QR code for your page for
£9.39 <https://www.aliexpress.com/item/1005006181450090.html>

The stickers were from here <https://www.aliexpress.com/item/1005007268055316.html> **£0.79 for 30 (!)**

Aliexpress is a Chinese marketplace – similar to Amazon. Most things arrive within a week or 2. It is not so easy to return and get refunds as Amazon.

UK options include places such as

<https://zipnfc.com/25mm-nfc-sticker-clear-wet-inlay-pet-ntag213.html> where the stickers are 24p each.

<https://zipnfc.com/nfc-pvc-card-google-review-card-ntag213.html> The google review signs are only 66p here, slightly different to Simon's, but might work better for some people

There are loads of options out there. The sign with QR code and NFC could easily be made at home and put up in a hall, albeit on paper rather than plastic, but that would cost about 25p.

The app illustrated is called Tagwriter and is for

android <https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.nxp.nfc.tagwriter>

and iphone <https://apps.apple.com/us/app/nfc-tagwriter-by-nxp/id1246143221>

QR code generators can be readily found online, e.g.: <https://online-qr-generator.com>. There are lots of others available too.