

SHUTFORD VILLAGE HALL

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT - May 2016

Activity in the Hall during the 2015-16 year has shown a marked reduction largely due to the Mums and Toddler group finally ceasing their activities after the Summer school term. Some considerable efforts were made to keep the group going but the lack of toddlers in the village was a problem they could not solve. Wendy is hopeful of a revival and is actively pursuing leads that could get something underway towards the end of this year. The Church has been using the hall to good effect with their PCC meeting, seasonal functions and fund raising activities. The usual Parish Council meetings, the WI, only 4 private bookings, administration of the hall and Festival meetings provided the remaining activities.

We welcomed Lena Cusiter as the WI representative following the resignation of Lynne Parsons at the end of July. Rita Livesey volunteered her services and was co-opted at our November meeting. Cleaning services were again provided by a village youngster and Jessica Newport has been carrying out a fortnightly duty since October.

Maintenance has again been restricted to essential repairs with yet another door handle replacement and a water leak in the lady's toilet traced to a plastic water pipe having been gnawed through by a rodent! Attention to a sticking main entrance door has been a continuing problem largely due to the exceptionally wet autumn, winter and spring seasons we have experienced, not helped by the very humid interior caused by seepage through the roof.

The project to replace the hall has been the main activity of the committee during the year. The Parish Council called in the help of ORCC to organise a survey of all the households in the parish to determine their views of an increase in the parish precept on the council tax to repay a £150,000 loan over 25 years, which produced 57.3% in favour. We were also advised that 54 households who did not return the survey would have voted in favour with a 95% confidence level. This raised the expectation of the committee and most of the villagers that the Parish Council would go ahead and apply for permission to borrow and take out a Public Works Loan. At the September Parish Council meeting, attended by a large number of villagers, the vote was 2 in favour and 5 against! Our committee was astounded and dismayed not least by the Council being unwilling to reveal any formal reasons for

their decision. Informal discussions arranged with some councillors a week later made no progress whatsoever, but affordability by some people seemed to be the only cogent argument against. Later, it was admitted by ORCC that their assertion regarding confidence in the extended result was wrongly given and that the only meaning was that 57.3% of those that voted were in favour, and nothing more.

In an attempt to ensure that all people had opportunity to support or oppose the committee's plan to rebuild the village hall, an open meeting was arranged and held on February 4th, independently chaired by Michael Robarts, a councillor from Balscote. One of only 5 villagers to have actively and extensively opposed the plan was invited to express his views along with one villager who expressed strong support for the plan, before opening the meeting for discussion. The meeting went very well indeed and a simple count of hands revealed an increase of those in favour of the plan after hearing the detail of the scheme and why it was necessary for the future of our village. As a way of confirming the urgent need for replacement of the village hall an independent survey of the building was commissioned and conducted on 11th January by Leys Longden & Co. This confirmed extensive damp largely due to an insecure roof allowing water ingress to the vaulted original ceiling and a serious crack in the concrete foundation slab that was the root cause of the deterioration of the vinyl floor covering across the width of the hall.

The Parish Council were then asked to consider a revised loan over 50 years to reduce the precept increase and this was agreed at their March meeting. However, they intended to carry out a further village survey and made it quite clear that other unspecified conditions would also be taken into consideration. It was because of this that the committee decided to withdraw their request for a public works loan and pursue other ways of achieving a more rapid start to a revised project.

Finally, we would like to thank our major benefactors for their generosity and patience. The many pledges of financial and practical help from villagers who are supporting our project are very much appreciated and special thanks must go to Gordon Freeman for his expertise and dogged determination to see the project to completion.

Roger Bancroft – Chairman
15th May 2016