

Waterhouses Community Association

Trustees Annual Report 2023-24

As Honorary Secretary, it is my pleasure to present this Annual Report.

1) Waterhouses Community Association's goals

Our goals are to raise funds to cover the cost of running the Village Hall, and to provide activities that improve the quality of life and the environment for residents of our Village and the surrounding areas. We could not achieve these goals without the hard work and continued support of our Committee Members and all our Volunteers.

Sadly, we lost one of our members this year, Nora Gill. Nora enjoyed attending hall events, including our weekly coffee mornings and our Grub Club. Nora was also a valued supporter of the Village Hall, allowing us to use her field each year for the Annual Duck Race. She will be greatly missed.

2) Projects

- Waterhouses Woodland Group (Report from Stefan Gemski, Waterhouses Woodland Group Leader).

Over the last year, Waterhouses Woodland Group has continued to successfully manage the woodland. They regularly produce charcoal, which is sold to local residents and businesses, with the funds paid to Waterhouses Community Association. In addition, the group has completed a range of new activities in Waterhouses Woods, eg they have built a woven fence around the enclosure, scythed the meadow which will increase wildflowers, and thinned and coppiced the woodland to allow more light to the woodland floor to encourage more bluebells etc. The volunteers have also erected many bird boxes kindly made by Tom Finlay to British Trust for Ornithology standards.

The Durham Woodland Revival Project, which provided the initial funding and training, will come to an end in May 2024. It was initially suggested that Waterhouses Woodland Group sign up as official Durham County Council volunteers. Although this solution may be suitable for other groups, our group is by far the most active and ambitious, therefore this would not be an appropriate solution. For example, Durham County Council paid for Chainsaw Training at Houghall for two members of the group who now have a City & Guilds qualification, but as Durham County Council volunteers, they would no longer be allowed to use chainsaws in Waterhouses Woods. Stefan Gemski will continue to liaise with Durham County Council to see what other options may be available.

- Bar Refurbishment and Developments (Report from Martin Straw, Bar Manager)

Ownership of the bar was transferred from Waterhouses Social Club to Waterhouses Community Association on 1 January 2023. The bar was refurbished in August 2023 using funds raised by the Social Club. The cabinets and worktops mirror those that were recently

installed in the kitchen, and a new bottle fridge and glass washer were also installed. I hope you will agree that the end result is a great success.

Following the refurbishment of the bar, we have listened to the feedback and suggestions given at the last AGM, and from our customers, and have improved and revised the drinks on offer. We now stock a wider variety of wines, both in small and large bottles, as well as introducing some better quality wines. Our range of ciders have changed again to better quality, and we have introduced a varying range of new 'guest' beers which change on a regular basis. We have also extended the range of low/non-alcoholic drinks available. The snack range has also been increased in variety. These have been well received, including the occasional 'special cocktails and spirits'.

The 'cost of living' crisis has impacted us, with wholesale costs increasingly significantly which has meant that we had to increase prices from 1st October 2023 although we kept these to a minimum. However we still offer excellent value comparative to other pubs, social clubs and continue to welcome anyone who wishes to pop into our Social Evenings on Wednesdays and Fridays from 9.00pm as well as the other regular events held at the hall.

It would be remiss not to thank our team of volunteers who regular help 'man the bar', setting up, serving, and clearing away - it is truly appreciated and if anyone feels that they could help out it would be great to hear from you. Training is given and the pleasure of being 'Landlord or Landlady' is warmly received by our customers!

3) Future Projects

- Hall Lighting

Several of the hall's lights no longer work due to faulty fittings. However, due to changes in the law, all lights need to be replaced with LED fittings. Although costly to install, LED lighting uses 90% less energy and lasts up to 25 times longer than traditional incandescent bulbs, which would reduce our running costs and be better for the environment. We have been fortunate in obtaining a grant through the Area Action Partnership to cover the full cost of the installation and would like to record our sincere thanks to Councillor Marion Wilson and Councillor Dan Nicholls for their generous support. The work is expected to be completed in May 2024.

- Hall Heating

The hall is currently heated by ageing electric night storage heaters, which are highly inefficient and becoming increasingly difficult to repair. We have been supplementing the heating by using four electric oil-filled radiators, which has increased our running costs further. Therefore, we plan to replace the current system with infrared heaters to ensure the village hall continues to be fit for purpose. This system is expected to reduce the running costs by about a third and has been shown to work well in other village halls in the area. Again, we have been fortunate in obtaining a grant through the Area Action Partnership to cover the full cost of the installation and would like to record our sincere thanks to Councillor Marion Wilson and Councillor Dan Nicholls for their generous support. The work is expected to be completed over the summer, so we can look forward to a warmer hall this winter.

4) Hall Activities

Thanks to our volunteers, we have continued to provide a range of regular activities over the past year:

- Weekly events include coffee mornings, cinema nights, playgroup, social evenings, dance fitness sessions and floorball.
- Knit and natter takes place every two weeks.
- Monthly events include family film nights, grub club, and a games night which was introduced in September 2023.
- Our bi-monthly quiz night and wine club are as popular as ever.
- The Theatre Club has continued on an ad hoc basis.

The hall is also home to Beavers, Cubs and Scout groups, as well as Music and Memories run by Lesley Woodhead.

Our volunteers also supported several annual events:

- We had some fabulous entries for our Scarecrow competition, with 'Where's Wally' taking first place.
- Lots of local residents carved pumpkins and decorated windows for the Halloween Trail, and it was lovely to see families in fancy dress come into the hall for hotdogs and spooky activities before following the trail.
- Despite the cold weather, we very much enjoyed our Christmas tree lighting service. We sang carols around our extra large tree which looked amazing, then enjoyed mulled wine and mince pies, while our Christmas raffle was drawn.
- Our Senior's Christmas Lunch was as popular as ever, with a fabulous traditional dinner served to over 50 guests.

This year, we also celebrated the King's Coronation with tea and cakes, a children's entertainer, and a commemorative coin for Waterhouses residents and hall members.

5) Fund Raising

The Village Hall depends on fundraising activities for income, therefore a special thank you goes to the many volunteers who contributed to these activities and to members of the community who came along to support us.

- We had a wide variety of stalls at our Summer Fair in June. It was a lovely sunny afternoon, so ice creams were popular, as was PCSO Winstanley with his police van.
- We held a MacMillan Coffee morning in October, with all proceeds going directly to MacMillan Cancer Support.
- We held Ceilidhs in October 2023 and March 2024, which were great fun as always.
- The Christmas Fair was very well attended. We invested in some new Christmas decorations for the main hall, and a new grotto for Father Christmas which looked fantastic!
- We had a record number of supporters at our annual Easter Duck Race in March, with lots of amazing entries to our easter egg and decorated hat competitions.

The hall was also hired for 17 private events, including two sleepovers for Beavers and Scouts, generating approximately £830 income. Users have been extremely complimentary about the hall facilities and the service they received from volunteers.

We would like to introduce more fundraising activities over the coming year to cover the increasing costs of running the hall, but we need your help. We are keen to find volunteers who can help organise and deliver events, where a couple of hours from each volunteer can make a huge difference. We know that everyone leads busy lives, but if you know of anybody willing and able to join us, please let us know.

6) Hall matters

- Repairs and maintenance tasks have been carried out throughout the year, including repairs to the ladies' toilets, annual PAT testing, and the installation of a replacement storage cabinet for the defibrillator thanks to a grant through the Area Action Partnership.
- Issues relating to surrounding area have been reported to Durham County Council. The footpaths opposite The Paddocks were particularly problematic as the lights were out. Local residents also found it difficult to walk between Waterhouses and Esh Winning at night as there are no lights once you leave the village. The Council said they would investigate.
- A Dog Policy was introduced this year, which means that well-behaved dogs are now permitted in the village hall. All other policies have been reviewed and updated in line with the Charity Commission guidelines. Copies are available on request.
- Unfortunately, Kevin Gill is unable to continue as a Trustee for the coming year, although he will continue as a volunteer. We would like to thank Kevin for his input and his support over the last year, which is very much appreciated.

Membership of our Management Committee is currently at an all time low with only five trustees. If anyone is interested in joining the committee (either as a trustee or as a representative of a user group), please speak to any member of the Committee.

In conclusion, I'm sure you will agree that it has been another busy year. We couldn't keep the hall running without the support of our volunteers and the support of the local community who contribute to activities and events. Thank you all.