

## **Baldock Town Hall Group –**

### **Chair Report – 29<sup>th</sup> June 2015**

In our first year much of our energy and attention was focused on getting the usable space in the building functioning again. We were able to report great success in that last year and this year the functioning space once again worked well for us.

However we recognised that to properly manage the space we needed to ensure that our own management and regulatory guidelines were in place, rather than borrowing from others policies that might not quite fit our evolving model.

Therefore in 2014/15, although we have managed to run and supervise events, we have also had to concentrate on the policy and procedures to back-up our event and building management.

Of course we had covered the mandatory requirements such as insurance, fire and health & safety etc., but we wanted our own terms & conditions for room hire and general policy documents. We are very thankful to our Company Secretary, Becca, working closely with Anna, Ellie and others to produce various documents, until we were all satisfied that we'd adequately covered our bases. We appreciate, of course, that these are flexible documents, produced to evolve as we grow and regulatory governance change, but they will serve us well going forward.

Becca also took the licence issue head-on, working on our premises / event licence proposal. Our Event Management Committee was granted the Premises Licence this year, which is a great achievement, so our thanks to Becca for her efforts on this.

Our events themselves have been great. We have enjoyed the first pantomime in years and The Drama Group have gained confidence in their productions with the addition of new writers / performers. We are fully committed to supporting Maureen, Nick and the group in any way we can.

The Fireside Festival was again a fantastic event. It gives us a great deal of encouragement when people, local and from out of the area come in and say what a lovely space we have created, with a great atmosphere. Joanna and Anna worked tirelessly on the Festival and their hard work is rewarded when the acts and events are so well supported.

We have had to make decisions over the year as to the coffee bar performance. Despite the efforts of the committee to keep the Tues – Sat 12 – 2pm opening hours, we had to admit that we didn't have enough volunteers to do so. A decision to open Fri – Sat was made but extending the hours to 10am – 2pm each day. This has paid off and slow trickles of people do use the service.

However, with some extra encouragement from Liz regarding local artist exhibits, we have now decided to restructure the space going forward as an exhibition / gallery space. Liz is currently looking into suitable picture hanging mechanics, but we have wholeheartedly agreed to the change of use. So although we will still offer refreshments to visitors of the new gallery, the 'coffee shop' ethos may change again in the near future.

We have also had to make choices about the Thomas Pryor (TP) Hall. Again, with encouragement from Joanna and Anna who have steadfastly pointed out the benefits of using TP as theatre; rehearsal, audition, performance space, etc., we have finally come down on this side of the coin, albeit with a caveat that we do need to involve the local population and provide local events in the space from time to time.

Our space was never intended as a 'community centre', i.e. advertise for parties and / or regular hourly slotted in users. Firstly, it was always agreed that we would not compete with the existing community centre on these 'regular' bookings, rather compliment the community centre on the activities we could offer. Secondly we simply do not have the infrastructure to support such intense booking activities.

We have just had a change in bookings secretary and would like to thank outgoing Jenny for her hard work and efforts to ensure the smooth running of past events and welcome Di, who we will support going forward. However we do see our event management as a committee activity and we all have played a part in supporting events.

We have recently acquired some staging blocks which will be used in the TP Hall to create staged seating. This allows us to use all aspects of the hall for performances and we must thank Joanna for arranging this.

To this end we have had to review our strategy on hosting other event types in the future, as the staging is very heavy to shift about. We are also looking at our strategy on the letting of the hall without a bar (where a bar might be applicable). Running costs necessitate such decisions.

We have had a disappointment when looking at repairing and refurbishing the TP Hall floor. It was noted by the professional contracted to complete the work that the hall floor 'is not fit for purpose', (and obviously hasn't been since we took over the lease) being only 2-3mm thick in places. We are not able to do anything with it apart from replacing it. We have kindly been allowed to carry the grant received from Cllr Michael Muir's HCC locality budget for this refurbishment towards the replacement, but we are a good deal of money short to finance a new floor at the present time.

Going forward we have just approved Anna's proposal, working with a local firm, to look at the work required to have a lift installed. We aim to go out for grant funding on this project this year. The addition of a lift was always part of our original business plan phases.

Overall this past year has been a lot of fun, but hard work, so one of main thrusts has to be to encourage more volunteers and friends. We had a clear-up and clean-up weekend, where a good sort out of accumulated surplus material was removed, enabling the museum to re-open and use other parts of the building. We also have some essential building work– damp proofing and electrical work – in the pipeline.

We are currently looking into sound (PA) and lighting costs and other fixtures and fittings to enhance our space and on that note would like to officially thank Joanna for the beautiful curtains that she donated downstairs.

We now look forward to our 3<sup>rd</sup> exciting year.