



## **Chair's report 2019**

Although we held a couple events in June 2018, we actually closed the centre from July to events, through to April 2019, to enable the works on the building to proceed.

In my 2018 report I mentioned that we received a Building Heritage Capital Grant from North Herts District Council and this, together with some Section 106 monies, some of which we had in reserve, we have used to put our strategy plan into action, which is where a lot of our effort went last year.

We went out to tender in April 2018 for the first part of the work, which was to replace the windows within our theatre space. These were sourced, chosen and specially made in order to retain the same external appearance of the building as the original windows, only these will open, are double glazed and, therefore, not only offer soundproofing, but ventilation as well.

In December 2018 we also had a boiler and radiators fitted in the museum end of the building, which is going to make such a huge difference during the winter months. Apart from the original fireplaces which were disused many years ago, the only heating was a couple of electric wall heaters. We also appointed a building control management company to monitor the refurbishment works on our behalf and ensure we get the work carried out to the required standard.

The final works were completed in April 2019 in time for our Grand Opening, during the Baldock Festival fortnight. The works were not without their problems, however, with external rendering needing replacing between two of the windows and asbestos detected in the ceiling of the old fire station area, which had to be removed. All of this work increased our costs and time for the project.

However, even during this time, although no events were hosted, we did let the space to our regular users such as the Scamp Theatre Company, as rehearsal space, a local Company, as a training space, and a couple of our local children's dance classes and our art/writing groups. All of these groups were very accommodating.

We did have to close the Gallery, as the works were in the area and there was quite a bit of dust about, although we do have to thank the building company, Haywards and the Building Control coordinator, Steve, for their attention to detail and clean / clear down policies. The gallery space was used as storage for the duration of the works and out of bounds as part of the construction site.

But it was worth it. We have super bright and clean refurbished toilets, with new sanitary ware throughout, which now includes a DDA compliant access for all toilet. Our lovely new coffee / bar serving area in the Gallery has totally reformed the space and we have had lots of cupboards fitted for extra storage.

The new heritage space that has been created by removing a wall between the old coffee / bar area and the museum provides a big space with opportunities for inspiring display layouts. It provides lots of head height, which now just needs a new revamp of its own. But that will have to be completed under a second phase, which will also hopefully include new doors into the building. So still lots of exciting things to prepare for in the future. In the meantime the museum has been able to display their latest exhibit in the space, which is giving the room a bit of purpose.

We are all looking forward to moving ahead with the next phase of the project.

We are also looking forward to resuming with the Balstock Music Festival this year and have started a small community cinema on a monthly basis to bring a cinema back to the town. Our history in the afternoon talks have also resumed, with these being regularly attended and proving very popular.

Thanks again to all the efforts by every volunteer to get these works done and bring the building back into use. Special thanks to Ted and Liz for their efforts over the refurbishment period and to Haywards for their very professional approach to the works.

*Alison Gentle, Group Chair*