



Minutes of
The Eleventh Annual General Meeting of
The Soper Hall Community Centre Ltd
On Friday 23rd September 2022 at 7.00 pm

Participants:

Directors: Beverley Connolly (Chair) Andy Parr, Matthew Baker, Michael Cooper, Hilary Hopkinson

Volunteers & Members:

1. Chairman's Welcome & Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone.

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from John Howarth, David Knight, Martin Smith, Natalie Smith and Peter Dommett

3. Minutes of meeting held on 24th September 2021

Accepted as a correct record.

4. Chairman's Report

Preservation, Repair, Renewal and Replacement

Good evening and welcome to the Soper Hall Community Centre Limited AGM.

As is tradition and expected, we start the evening with a relevant quotation. This year the theme is Preservation.

The Soper Hall exemplifies this quote – we, as a Board, have had the good sense to preserve, protect and improve this beautifully designed building which links us with the “Father of Modern Caterham” and certainly, we believe, has a great future.

As ever, this has been a year of change and I am delighted to welcome some fantastic new talent to fulfil crucial roles on our Board. I do hope you will approve their appointment of this evening.

David Knight joins us as Buildings Director. He will be using his huge amount of experience, knowledge, and contacts to help us with the constant stream of improvements and repairs needed for a building of the size and age of the Soper Hall. This will include major projects such as window replacement and improvements to the toilets as well as others.

Pete Dommett joins us as Maintenance Director. He will be using his expertise to help with the day-to-day running of the Halls. He will be the first point of call for emergency issues and repairs.

Martin Smith joins us as IT Director. He is taking on the challenges of dealing with and upgrading our ageing website, replacement of the creaking booking system and working on comms generally.

Chantal Mozzi-Baker has taken on the important role of Company Secretary. She is replacing the much-respected John Howarth, who has decided to retire this year after many years of dedicated service to the Hall. She will also act as Innovations Director – responsible for new ideas for fundraising, events, and activities.

I must also mention our new caretaker, Matt and Office Manager, Sue without whose invaluable assistance we would find it difficult to function.

Please join me in welcoming them to their new roles.

Since my report last year, the Soper Hall has faced yet more challenges. I can only give my grateful thanks to our amazing Finance Director, Matthew Baker, who from day one of his tenure has ensured that we have enough reserves to cope should any emergency arise. Which was exactly what happened when asbestos was found in the boiler room and then the boilers failed.

This is one of those horrible jobs that sucks away precious funds but does not have any visible impact on the building itself – you can't ooh and aah at a new boiler room as we did when we officially opened the Garland Hall.

These two emergency projects almost ate up the reserves that we had so carefully built up.

We did seek some external funding for the boilers – an application was made to TDC for a CIL grant and other sources were investigated to no avail. Apparently, TDC claimed we could function without boilers! It is interesting that other charities in Oxted have been awarded millions in funds for new buildings and extensions, but the Soper Hall was not deemed worthy enough by the current administration.

As ever, we rose to these challenges and used our own initiative and resources to raise even more funds to meet the costs required.

As we have always done, we worked not only to fund the costs of the asbestos and the new boilers but also to replenish our reserves. I can now tell you (and Matthew will explain in more detail) that we are just a few thousand short of the target for reserves we set when this Board first took over the management of the Soper Hall.

That is a magnificent achievement.

Not only that, but we raised enough funds to respect the memory of our late HM Queen Elizabeth by installing new flag poles to replace the ones removed by the previous Board and were able to fly these at half mast to show our love and honour for our Glorious Queen when she passed away.

None of this could have been done without the support of this great team of people standing here. They give up their precious personal time and energy to ensure this building is maintained for future generations. Our Charity does not have high staffing costs, we apply prudence in all financial matters and rigorously challenge all significant expenditure proposals. We are now looking to cut the costs that we can in light of the current economic situation to ensure that we can continue to provide a glorious, majestic heritage building for the enjoyment and use of the local Community. Long may it continue.

5. Finance Director's Report

Matthew Baker gave the following report:

This report covers the accounting year to November 2021.

With the gradual reopening of the halls and some hirers returning throughout 2021 we were able to see a rise in our income (£72k vs 65k 2020). Whilst still not back to pre-pandemic levels it is worth noting our income has risen further in 2022.

During the pandemic the base income from office leases enabled us to maintain our cash reserves above our stated goal of £30,000 which represents our minimum of 6 months costs. During 2021 we spent just over £11,000 on removing asbestos from some basement areas mainly the boiler room. We also increased cleaning of the halls to allow the safe return of hirers and these two costs meant that we showed a small deficit for the year.

However, upon the removal of the asbestos, it proved not possible to reactivate the boiler and since the year end we have had to replace the boiler at a cost of £36,000. As a board we took the decision that this was an essential repair and despite this expenditure we are maintaining cash reserves of over £20,000 and we are continuing to build these back up to £30,000.

With most of our hirers now returned to the halls, the position in the halls is looking better and we should be able to continue to build funds as we have many identified repairs upcoming and we would like to continue to invest in the upkeep of the hall. We would be hopefully of seeking grants in future to increase the pace of the repairs and updates we are able to do to the building. We are expecting a substantial rise in utility costs in 2023 as our current fixed contract runs out at the end of the year and the board will continue to monitor this situation.

Overall, the hall continue to be financially stable and a thriving part of the community.

6. Relationship Director's Report

Michael Cooper gave the following report:

The year has seen us continuing to try to pick up the pieces from the two years of pandemic.

A notable point in all of this was the ongoing support of our tenants. This brings in almost enough money to cover the running costs of the hall. (Not the maintenance and improvement costs however.) There have been a few changes of tenants but we have managed to keep all of our rooms occupied and have even had to turn away some potential new tenants. Also, our car park has reached the limit for SHCCL to provide car parking to local businesses.

There has been a slow return of regular hirers but a number have not returned. I think there is still a concern among older people and some youngsters, of taking part in evening events. However, we do have some new tenants to start to fill the gaps. Of note are the Comedy Night and Music night events which seem to be recovering well. Of course, the spectacular success of the recent Beer Festival shows that things are improving.

Interestingly, we seem to be getting more ad hoc events ie parties etc.

With the general continued positive improvement in people's views on personal safety we are looking to start advertising the hall for regular hirers once again. Our aim is to re-establish ourselves as the vibrant Community Centre that Caterham deserves.

7. Events Director's Report

Hilary Hopkinson gave the following report:

It's been another fairly challenging year as we've still been feeling the after-effects of Covid with many people still anxious about being in crowded places. This has meant that the attendance at events such as the monthly market, comedy and music nights are still below the numbers we had pre-covid, but we are slowly seeing an increase.

However, we were able to hold our famous Christmas Fair again last year and despite a few last-minute setbacks and atrocious weather conditions the footfall was, only slightly down on 2019. It was wonderful to welcome Father Christmas and his trusty Elves again and plans are in place to make this year's event bigger and better than ever this year!

We are always looking for ways to help the community and in June we started a weekly Coffee Morning for our local Ukrainian guests and their hosts. This has definitely been one of the most rewarding experiences in my eight year involvement with the Soper Hall. We have met some absolutely amazing, strong resilient women and their children and feel privileged to be able to help them in some small way. It was a joy to watch them forming friendships with one another and settling in to the community. Most of these ladies arrived with just whatever they could fit in a suitcase and as we have been inundated with generous donations from local people and were able to hold a drop in day for the Ukrainian guests to come and choose clothes and toys for the children. We are indebted to the charity Sal's Shoes for the donation of brand new school shoes, and of course I couldn't have done any of this without the help of other volunteers. A particular thanks goes to Natalie Smith, Annette Evans, Janet Shaw and Julie Pescod – and also the Caterham School mums for the amazing cakes they baked every week.

We had a very special visitor to one of our mornings – our wonderful late Queen! We had to invite Her Majesty to the coffee morning of course and our Ukrainian guests loved her and even took selfies with her before we transferred her to her rightful place on the balcony to wave to the people of Caterham on her Jubilee.

I am looking forward to working with our new Directors – in particular Martin Smith in creating a new more user-friendly website – and with Chantal Baker coming up with ideas for exciting new events.

Lastly, I would like to thank all our wonderful volunteers, without whom I would not be able to fulfil my role. In particular, I would like to thank Natalie & Martin Smith, Jenny Gaffney and Martin Defreitas who can always be relied upon to turn up and help, often at very short notice.

8. Election & Resignation of Directors

8.1 Retirement by Rotation

Beverley Connolly and Michael Cooper retired by rotation in accordance with the Articles of Association and offered themselves for re-election, On being put to the vote this was **AGREED**

8.2 To appoint the following Directors to the Board:

Chantal Baker, David Knight, Peter Dommett and Martin Smith were all proposed and seconded.

9. Election of Chairman

Beverley Connolly was proposed and seconded to be appointed Chair for the following year. On being put to the vote this was **AGREED**

10. Election of Vice Chairman

Andy Parr was proposed and seconded to be appointed Vice Chairman for the following year. On being put to the vote this was **AGREED**

11. Determination of Membership Subscription

It was unanimously **AGREED** that the Membership Subscription be set at £12 (£10 plus VAT) for the following year.

12. Any Other Business

There were no other Items of Business.

13. Date of next Annual General Meeting

To be advised.

Soper Hall Community Centre Ltd
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