

SHIPTON GORGE VILLAGE HALL TRUST

Charity No. 291996

Meeting Note from video call to discuss hall hire charges held on 10th February 2021

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Present: Tony Mallett (TM), Richard Hewlett (RH), Kate Chomacki (KC), Andrew Haydon (AH), Diane James (DJ), Tony Lock (TL), Sue Porter (SPo), James Webster (JW)

1. Welcome and apologies for absence –

TM welcomed attendees to the Trust's first Zoom meeting, which commenced at 4pm. Apologies had been received from Graham Garner, Sally Parker and Yvette Smith.

2. Declarations of interest

As the meeting would discuss the use of hall reserves to encourage the return of regular hirers to the hall, and since some Trustees were associated with these activities, the following interests were declared:

DJ – Parish Council

TL – Village Society

TM – Dog training club

JW – Parochial Church Council

3. Discussion of proposed policy on hire charges for 2021

TL introduced the topic. In essence, the Trust had benefited from grants paid to village hall trusts during the COVID pandemic, and he had proposed that a portion of these funds be used to kick-start the return of users when the situation allowed. Options included a reduction or elimination of hire charges for a period of time. Members had been asked to think about this ahead of the video call.

GG had commented before the video call that village organisations might be exempted from charges this year, and charges for other users be frozen until the end of 2022. He did not see a problem with the Trust having a healthy balance sheet, which puts us in a strong position to help and support the village in the near and longer term.

JW agreed in principle with the use of reserves to encourage the return of users, but noted that as lockdowns might reoccur in the future with no guarantee of further grants we should ensure we retain sufficient funds to cover hall outgoings in the long term.

KC also agreed with the principle that hire charges be examined. She felt that money from Covid grants in particular should be used for essential (rather than more superficially decorative) repairs and for keeping the hall viable. She noted that Artsreach income might not amount to much in the near future, but that it should in due course return to normal. She thought that a cheap or free event held at the Village Hall would improve village morale, either later this year or next year; this could be something organized by the VH Trustees. She also had no objection to sponsoring the Party in the Paddock in order to make that event, should it go ahead in June 21, a cheap or free social event for the village.

AH commented that promoting such a village event, perhaps in collaboration with other organisations, should be considered. TL pointed out that the Village Society has a village social event planned for June.

SPo noted that under the Trust Deed, our activities start and end with supporting the village, so using funds to encourage users back to the hall and our participation in a village event seemed reasonable. But we should keep an eye on our reserves.

RH endorsed a lot of what had been said. He also thought we should speak with the Parish Council (which pays in advance to use the hall) and offer a year's rent-free use since lockdowns had meant it was excluded from the hall for much of 2020. DJ will talk to Mary Boughton about this. RH also felt users would need quite a lot of notice before returning to the hall, and an early message from the Trust on post-lockdown charges might help with their plans. He also thought we might consider an outdoor Artsreach event.

DJ agreed with much of what had been said already, and supported holding an outdoor event that encouraged village participation. She noted the 2019 dog show had been very popular.

TM thought that working with other organisations on a village wide event was an interesting idea which he supported, but pointed out that we would need to work within Charity Commission guidance (circulated November 2020) if working with other groups; basically, we must stay within our charitable objectives. In terms of encouraging the return of users, he suggested we make a simple "free use" offer to past, regular weekday users for the remainder of 2021, with a review in November. He ended by saying he agreed that the financial outlook for the hall looked difficult, and suggested we take £12,500 (from year end 2019) as our lower reserves limit. RH suggested that this was a bit high, but said we could revisit at a future date.

4. Conclusions

After further discussion, TM asked Trustees to vote on three points:

1. We agree past regular users be offered free access to the hall, from the time it reopens to the end of 2021: **agreed unanimously**
 - TM to contact users
 - DJ will speak with Mary Boughton regarding advance payments received from the Parish Council
2. We agree we are interested in working with other organisations on a village-wide event or activity: **agreed unanimously**
 - TL will discuss with the Village Society
 - KC will monitor potential offers from Artsreach
3. We agree a lower reserve limit of £12,500 should be maintained, subject to future review: **agreed unanimously**

The call ended shortly after 5pm.