

Hacheston Parish Council – Annual Parish Meeting

21st May 2025

Report from Hacheston Village Hall

1. Trustees and Personnel

There have been no changes to Trustees since the last AGM. Adrian Barney (Treasurer) has advised that he wishes to stand down after the AGM in May 2025. A campaign to find a replacement commenced in March 2025 but has so far been unsuccessful however one volunteer to be a Trustee has come forward. The Chairman proposes that he stands down at the AGM in May 2026 as he will have completed 5 years in the position.

If replacements cannot be found for the Treasurer in the short term and the Chairman in the longer term then the Charity will have to consider closing down its activities as it cannot continue to operate without active personnel in these vital roles.

The incumbent Booking Clerk and Cleaner / Caretaker remained in position for the whole of the year maintaining stability in hall operations. The Trustees thank both for their contribution to the hall's continued success.

Chris and Lee White (Bar Managers) have advised that they will be moving away from Hacheston by mid- 2025. The Trustees thank them both for their service to the Village Hall. The search has begun to find a replacement for them.

2. Meetings and Governance

The Trustees met four times in 24 / 25. At each meeting Health and Safety issues, safeguarding and financial performance were reviewed along with other current issues.

The required independent examination of the 24 / 25 accounts was successfully completed in May 2025 by Chris Dobson.

The Register of Trustees on the Charity Commission website was updated as required. A full annual return for 23 / 24 was made in July 2024 consisting of the Chairman's Report, the accounts and the Independent Examiner's Report.

3. Health and Safety Activity

Following the annual third-party Playground Inspection in October 2024, remedial works were agreed and undertaken in April 2025. Routine monthly inspection of the playground equipment continues to be undertaken. There have been no reported incidents in the hall in the year.

4. Financial Position

The hall continues its good financial performance delivering a surplus for the year, underpinned by our core regular hirers and the successful resident events organised by the Volunteer group. One off hires continue to be booked at short notice but the number has improved to 64 in 24 / 25 compared to 39 in 23 /24.

The surplus the hall is able to generate appears to have plateaued at just above £6k. Excluding hire deposits, revenue and costs are similar 24 /25 cf 23 /24. The Trustees have taken the difficult decision to increase hire rates by £1 to £12ph for regular hirers from 1.9.25 for the first time in 3 years.

Hacheston Parish Council (HPC) continues to support the maintenance of Fairfield Green. The Trustees are grateful for this support

Energy costs continue to have a big impact. From April 2025 the hall has switched both gas and electric contracts to new tariffs with Octopus, the effective gas rate is slightly lower and the effective electricity rate slightly higher.

The Trustees have committed to three exceptional items of expenditure in 25 /26; investment in battery storage to make better use of the electricity that is generated from its existing solar panels (£4367), repainting of the exterior of the hall (£4496) and legal fees to convert the hall to a charitable incorporated organisation. (£2000).

This expenditure, along with routine anticipated costs, is expected to put the hall into a deficit for 25 /26, reducing overall funds to around £30k.

The Trustees remain confident that the hall will be viable despite having to face these considerable challenges.

5. Leases with Hacheston United Charities (HUC)

No progress has been made with HUC in acquiring either the freehold or extending the lease term for the land upon which both Fairfield Green and the hall are located.

Several meetings were held with HUC and HPC in 2024 to try and progress the matter and it has been left in the hands of HUC to come to a decision about committing some funds to obtain legal fee estimates for disposing of their assets. It is hoped that the Trustees of HUC will meet in 2025 and make a decision on this matter.

The Trustees contacted HUC in March 2025 to request that the hall lease the small section of Fairfield Green (situated adjacent to the B1116 and to the south of the hall) which it doesn't currently have control of. No response has yet been received from HUC.

6. Battery Storage Project

Following previous unsuccessful attempts to obtain attractive quotes for battery storage to compliment the hall's existing solar panels, the 2024 Suffolk Solar Together initiative was pursued in Q4 2024. This led to an attractive price of £4367 being obtained from Greenscape Energy of Ipswich for 10kWh of battery storage to be installed outside of the hall.

The battery storage project offered an opportunity to keep downwards pressure on the hall's energy bills. Greenscape Energy's proposal advises that the batteries will enable the usage of generated solar power to increase from 26% to 71%., representing a saving of £675 at the current electricity price.

The equipment was finally installed in early May 2025 but is not operational yet. This will hopefully be shortly remedied and the benefit of increased utilisation of the solar power the hall generates realised.

The Trustees are grateful for two grants which this project benefitted from; Councillor Sally Noble and East Suffolk Council's Enabling Communities Fund (£1000) and HPC (£1500). An application was made to EDF's Neighbourhood Fund but this was unsuccessful.

7. Assets of Community Value

The future of HUC is currently being reviewed by its Trustees. One possible outcome is the closure of the charity. If this happens the assets of the charity will be disposed of. The charity's assets are principally three pieces of land; Church Meadow – the land upon which the village hall and green are located, the Allotment Land – situated to the rear of 1 – 8 The Street, and Whitbread Meadow – situated at the rear of Garnett's Gardens.

If it is decided to dispose of Church Meadow and the Allotments, HPC and the Village Hall would like to ensure the opportunity to acquire the land for community benefit exists. This can be achieved by registering the land as Assets of Community Value with East Suffolk Council (ESC) under the Localism Act of 2011.

Applications were made to ESC on 21.11.24 to register Church Meadow and the Allotment land as assets of Community Value. The chairman was advised by Sam Kenward, ESC Communities Officer for Framlingham, Wickham Market, Kelsale and Yoxford and surrounding villages, on 12.2.25 that both applications had been approved and that the paperwork would follow soon. To date nothing has been received from ESC but the Chairman has been reassured that both pieces of land have been registered.

8. Electric Vehicle Charging Points (EVCP)

The hall has been pursuing a proposal with Suffolk County Council (SCC) since Q4 2023 to install two electric vehicle charging points in the hall's car park.

In Q2 2024 SCC appointed its successful contractor, Connected Kerb, to undertake the project across the whole of Suffolk. In the second half of 2024 the hall undertook legal due diligence of the two legal agreements (a lease and a Cluster Member Agreement) that it was expected to enter into to complete the project and by December 2024 it was ready to do so.

Through the discussions with SCC to execute the legal agreements it became evident that the current legal status of the hall charity, ie that of an unincorporated trust, was an impediment to the efficient execution of the agreements and their maintenance over the period of the agreements and the benefit of the proposal to the hall.

It was agreed with SCC to put the proposal on hold for 6 – 12 months while the hall evaluated whether it was feasible to change the legal status of the hall to one that was more favourable.

9. Proposal to Convert the Legal Status of the Hall Charity

As has been described above the EVCP proposal highlighted that the hall may not have the optimum legal status for operating in the 21st century.

An unincorporated charity such as the village hall is not a legal body in its own right and cannot enter into contracts or own property in its own name. This means the charity trustees have to enter into contracts on behalf of the charity and they can be personally liable if something goes wrong. Any property needs to be registered either in the name of the Official Custodian or a group of trustees of the charity. Complications can arise if any of the named trustees retire and/or die.

The two leases with HUC which the hall and green benefit from were entered into by the people who were Trustees of the charity at the time (2005 and 2008). A number have since moved away or died; all have retired.

To address these issues, the Trustees have agreed that the legal status of the hall charity should be converted from an unincorporated trust to a charitable incorporated organisation (CIO). This is achieved by creating a new charity and registering it with the Charity Commission, next the unincorporated charity's assets need to be transferred to the new CIO and finally the unincorporated charity is wound up in line with any rules set out in its governing document and the Charity Commission is notified of the merger of the charities.

So far, the Trustees have created a constitution for the new charity based upon the Charity Commission's foundation model and on 27.3.25 applied to the Charity Commission to create the new charity. Their decision is awaited.

Legal advice has been sort regarding the transfer of the hall charity's two principal assets (the two leases with HUC) and the process of establishing contact with the surviving Trustees from 2005 and 2008 has begun.

On the assumption that the above is satisfactorily progressed to the stage where the existing hall charity is to be wound up, it will be necessary to call a meeting of all residents of Hacheston to agree to this.

10. Proposal to Improve the Facilities Offered by the Village Hall

A group of Volunteers have begun evaluating ideas to improve the facilities offered by the Village Hall with the objective of better serving the needs of the community. A consultation with residents will be carried out in 2025 to firm up plans with a view to make an application for funding to the Sizewell C (SZC) Community Fund at some point in the future.

Discussions have been held with representatives of the SZC Community Fund to better understand the needs of their process and to help shape thinking about what needs to be done.

A formal sub-Committee of the Village Hall Trustees will be created in June 2025 to guide this project forward.

11. Volunteers

The Volunteer Group continued its good work throughout the year putting on events for the benefit of residents every month. An exciting calendar of events has been established for 2025.

Of particular note were the D Day Celebration / Bring and Share Lunch in June 2024 and the Christmas Celebration which were both particularly well supported by many families. The Trustees are grateful to HPC for supporting the D Day / Big Lunch event.

As ever we need more residents to come forward and volunteer to help. Not only with events but grounds maintenance and routine inspection of the playground equipment.

Nevertheless, the Trustees thank all volunteers for their massive efforts throughout this year without whose help the hall would not be as successful as it is.

Malcolm Robinson
Chairman of Trustees – Hacheston Village Hall