

# Thornbury and District Community Association

## Annual General Meeting

Thursday 11<sup>th</sup> July 2019 - 7:30 pm at The Chantry

### Members and guests present

#### Members

Roger Howell  
Rex Laney  
Mike Davis  
John Baird  
Rob Mills  
David Hine  
Robert Gerrard  
Brian Drayton  
Graham Morris  
Stan Goodwin  
Peter Booth  
Nick Belbin  
Phil James  
Pete Oddy  
Dave Derham  
Sue Fry  
Carl Lapworth  
Elly McDonald

#### Guests

Jenny Benson  
Sally Derham  
Eric Pizzey  
Ron Hayhurst  
Martin Elliott

### Apologies for absence

Judith and Bob Dale  
Red Cross  
Matt Albury  
Linda Swinbank  
Mary Thoburn  
Elizabeth Voought  
Tracy Bees

Graham Morris opened the meeting and introduced himself as Vice Chairman and Dave Derham as Chairman and Treasurer.

## **Minutes of last year's AGM**

Dave Derham read out the key points from the minutes of the previous AGM. These were unanimously agreed to be an accurate record of the previous meeting.

## **Matters arising from previous minutes**

There were no matters arising.

## **Chairman's report**

Dave Derham has been Chairman since 1<sup>st</sup> January. He provided the following report.

### **Key points from the year ending 2018**

Improvements:

- Repairs to roof (from lottery funding)
- Lighting improvements - LED low energy (from Coop grant)
- Window refurbishment / painting project started (From Enovert/landfill tax + South Glos. council)

Events held during the year

- Fireworks
- Murder Mystery
- Collectors Fair
- Witches Performance

Trustees Changes during 2018:

- Christine Carter, Kate Taylor, Lynette Sayce resigned during the year.
- Carl Lapworth and Graham Morris joined at the end of 2018.

Dave paid special thanks to Christine Carter for her hard work as Chairman during some challenging times. He also pointed out that it was her passion and enthusiasm which inspired him to become involved as a Trustee.

## **We were facing a number of challenges at the year-end:**

- Occupancy averaging around 18%
- Debt – unpaid invoices unacceptably high (more later in Treasurer’s report)
- Locking up problems – place being left open and huge insurance risk
- Private parties - Control / insurance issues /noise for neighbours / profitability
- Insufficient funds available for necessary improvements
- Lack of clarity on where trustees and staff’s energy should be focussed
- No clear plan for maintaining and developing the facilities
- Chantry has a low profile in the Community
- Insufficient focus on marketing / getting new customers

## **We needed a plan**

In January a strategy meeting was held with the aim of agreeing exactly what we are trying to achieve and to put in place an action plan for making this happen. Subsequent meetings and discussions have taken place to refine some of the ideas generated at the strategy meeting.

Dave pointed out that a document detailing the agreements reached in the Strategy meeting is available for anyone who would like to receive a copy.

The key points resulting from the meeting and subsequent discussions are as follows:

## **What is our mission – what are we trying to achieve?**

This was unchanged. The objective is to provide facilities for use by all members of the local communities to enhance their education, social engagement and level of wellbeing.

## **Why should people to use the Chantry rather than somewhere else?**

Why have they been using it to date?

- Character and sense of history
- Personal attention and friendly customer service
- Wide variety of rooms which satisfy all but the very largest requirements
- Cheap

What do we want to change?

Just make these better:

- Make the facilities much better quality whilst retaining character and sense of History

- Do whatever we can to keep improving the quality of customer service and friendly environment
- Increase staff hours when it becomes possible
- Keep the pricing very competitive – BUT we do not want people to use the Chantry purely because it is the cheapest.

## **What type of use are we focusing on?**

### **Primary focus**

It was agreed that the primary purpose of the Chantry will be as per the constitution – i.e. to provide facilities for use by all members of the local communities to enhance their education, social engagement and level of wellbeing.

### **Commercial use**

Only to subsidise our core activities, but this must not compromise the use of the facilities by the general community.

### **Private parties**

It was agreed that parties should not be hosted until they can be made profitable, safe and fully compliant with our insurance and any safety regulations. We would need to have a member of TDCA staff present to ensure that everything is run properly and that the facility is locked up at the end. We cannot guarantee to provide such staff at this point. No more bookings will be taken until further notice.

### **Weddings**

It was agreed that the current practice of hiring the venue out for weddings at low cost does not make sense and will not continue. It was agreed that this should be reviewed when the Bar room and main building toilets have been renovated. At that point, it makes sense to identify one or more Wedding Organisers who can take full responsibility for the event and just pay us for the hire of the facilities. We should be aiming to make significant profit from these events and they could be a significant contributor to the TDCA finances. We should also investigate the possibility of the Chantry becoming a licensed venue for holding wedding ceremonies.

## **What should be the role of the TDCA trustees and staff?**

It was agreed that Trustees should be responsible for the management, maintenance and development of the facilities and proper financial management of the Trust.

It was agreed that we should NOT be involved in running fundraising events (with the possible exception of the annual Firework event) as we do not have adequate resources to do this properly and historically they have used far too much time from the office and

caretaking staff. The real profitability of some of the historic events is questionable when all costs are taken into account.

The new Friends of the Chantry organisation was agreed to be the appropriate vehicle for running fund-raising events and we need to help this group to be self-sufficient as quickly as possible.

Areas where the Trustees need to put more focus:

- We should be more effective at promoting what is happening at the Chantry and certainly need a better website.
- We need to be far more pro-active in finding new customers and generally developing the usage of the Chantry.
- We should continually aim to improve the satisfaction level of our customers.
- We need thorough processes for researching, planning, financing and approving improvement projects for the infrastructure as well as the rooms and spaces within the buildings.

### **What should be our approach to charging for the facilities?**

It was agreed that we should maintain the principle of making the facilities very affordable for genuine charitable users and that this would be subsidised by more commercial users.

A working group has been set up to review pricing and propose any changes.

### **How will we approach carrying out improvements to the facilities?**

1. Take one part of the facility at a time and restore it properly in sympathy with its original period of history. The goal is that every room will be beautifully restored and each one will be different.
2. Only do things properly when we can afford to do them. No more bodes.
3. All projects will have agreed scope, budget and proper project management.

### **What is the agreed short- term plan for improvements to the facilities?**

1. Complete Window refurbishment project - (now done)
2. Bar Room complete refurbishment – (almost complete)
3. Completely refurbish the main building toilets.
4. Clear attic spaces and install insulation – (The attics have already been cleared)
5. Repair external surfaces and rainwater goods and paint the outside of the main building
6. Replace heating system, which will be expensive and will need a grant. – (a system design has almost been completed by consultant at no cost to the charity)

### **We have also carried out minor improvements over the last year:**

- Energy efficient changes to lighting
- Repairs to toilets and drainage
- Entrance doors have been fitted with proper closers
- Entrance door has been repaired and painted
- RADAR lock has been fitted to Disabled toilet
- New dishwasher

### **What are we going to do to increase the usage of the Chantry?**

We want to focus on attracting things which will fulfil our primary objective - education and wellbeing of the community:

- Regular tuition classes
- One-off workshops in arts / crafts and others
- Therapy sessions
- Music events / clubs
- Small theatre productions
- Regular café
- Daytime events for seniors such as Bingo, Quizzes, lunch clubs etc.

### **Actions already carried out:**

The facility has now been branded “Chantry Community Centre” on website and Facebook. This has resulted in significant increase in traffic to the sites.

An action list has been agreed for targeted campaigns to attract new groups.

Simple stuff – we have spoken to lots of people about what we are doing and have asked them to let everyone know that we are open for business. There has been a marked increase in the level of enquiries for new bookings at the Chantry and some have already signed up.

### **Other things we have done this year**

- On-line ticket sales set up for FOC – being used for Shakespeare play and will be used for fireworks night. And any future events. Saving a huge amount of admin time.
- Locking up – new procedure is now in place with people being paid to ensure that everything is secure at night.
- We have recruited 2 new members of staff
- Absorbed cleaning duties into caretakers’ roles, saving a head but enabling us to increase salary levels.

- Monthly staff meetings are now in place .

## **Staff challenges**

We had a very difficult time a little while ago.

A series of events, led to us a situation where we suddenly had no office staff. IT is important to point out that there was never any problem between the trustees and the staff and we are still on very good terms with the previous office staff, Sally and Debbie. Both of them were extremely sorry to leave us in a difficult situation and both of them have been back on several occasions to help us.

The need to replace 2 people and manage operations in the meantime created a huge amount of pressure and it was a very difficult time. However, we got through it and quickly recruited 2 new office Staff (Jennifer Darton and Sue Fry) who are settling in well.

Clearly all of this set back a number of the initiatives we had in place.

We learned a lot during the difficult period and above all it became clear that what ought to be a very simple business has actually become incredibly complex over the years.

It has taken the new ladies almost 2 months to get up to speed and there is still a lot they do not understand about the way things have been done.

We came very close to the Chantry having to close because it was not possible to operate the business. If we do not change things then there is a real danger that if we lose key staff again in the future (when, not if) that the Chantry would in fact close.

This is a major risk that we have to address.

We MUST simplify procedures – have standard ways of doing things.

We must make use of standard computer systems to automate key processes.

This will inevitably mean changes for some of our customers, but if we do not change then we will not survive.

A key side effect from simplifying and automating processes is the that office staff will be able to spend their time doing much more useful things such as being even more helpful to existing customers and promoting the Chantry and finding us new customers.

## **Where are we now? What are our current challenges?**

Funding is needed for operations and improvements:

- We MUST raise occupancy levels
- Obtain whatever grants we can

- Fundraising events

Raising our profile and get more customers:

- There will be a major focus on attracting new groups to the Chantry
- New website needed
- Much better and consistent use of social media

Simplification and automation of processes:

This is mission critical as another staff loss could close the Chantry

- Must standardise procedures
- Put in place a booking system (ideally on-line with customer access)
- Simplify payment processing
- Replace accounting system

We need more people:

- Bar work
- Practical help with improvement projects
- Gardening
- Marketing

## **Constitution / Membership and Trustees**

It has become clear that the current constitution, written in the 1960's and having a couple of minor changes over the years, is completely out of step with current reality.

### **Membership**

The original premise was that there would be a large number of paid up members, affiliated Organisations and "Sections" (member organisations). The paid up members vote at AGM's and elect a Council, who in turn elect an Executive Committee to run the organisation.

The reality is we now have a handful of legitimate Members and one remaining Member Organisation. We need to re-look at the concept of Membership and will debate this before the next AGM and come up with proposals for ways of operating which actually reflect reality.

### **The role of Trustees is also changing.**

The role of the Trustees has needed to change over the years. It started as a group of people each representing their own club's interests. It has needed to develop into a group of people who share a vision and work together to grow and develop the Chantry to ensure its continued success for the whole community.

## Summary

It has become clear that the Chantry has reached a crossroads, and probably did many years ago. The original concept of having a significant number of member groups all with an army of enthusiastic volunteers died a long time ago. The collapse of the Social Club is just one symptom of the changes that have taken place.

The need is possibly greater than ever for a facility like the Chantry in order to maintain a sense of Community in a rapidly growing Thornbury. Those involved in managing and guiding the charity are driven by passion for ensuring that the Chantry not only continues, but significantly develops and improves, as well as a determination to see the wonderful building restored to its former glory.

Dave asked if there were any questions on the matters he had covered. The following points were made and questions asked;

1. Rob Mills made the point that in addition to the priorities mentioned by Dave, a key role of the Trustees is to ensure that TDCA operates in compliance with all Charity law and Charity Commission guidelines.
2. Eric Pizzey stated that the Stamp Club had moved to the Chantry 5 years ago and the reasons were in line with how Dave had described why we want people to use the Chantry. Other considerations were the availability of a room on the ground floor as well as convenient parking.
3. Eric mentioned that the Chantry does have competition from other venues and we need to be aware of their pricing. Graham responded by saying that we are very aware of the other venues and we have been doing a lot of research into their charges while we consider how we should move our own pricing strategy forward.
4. Eric promised to send details to Dave of a wedding organiser.

Stan Goodwin proposed a vote of thanks to Dave Derham for his hard work during the year, particularly in steering the charity through a difficult time with the staffing challenges.

## **Treasurer's report**

The 2018 accounts were available at the meeting and the offer was made to email a set of them to anyone who wanted a copy.

Dave Derham as acting Treasurer gave the following summary:

### **2018 Financial key points**

Normal operating income (rents + leases ) in 2018 was £57,500.

Operating costs were £65,600. The main components were wages at £37,000 and Electricity at £10,500 (this will rise again this year to about £12,000).

The core business of renting out space is therefore running at a loss of £7,500.

The only way we kept in profit was by the following:

- Operating grant from the Town Council of £4,000
- Events income £3,600
- Bar profits £2,200

Total of grants received in 2018 was £26,000,

The key components were:

- £18,600 from Enovert (Landfill tax) for sash window refurbishment
- £3,000 from South Glos council for the same project
- £700 from Thornbury Lions for work on the toilets
- £1,100 from South Glos Council (Member fund) for work on the toilets
- £1,000 received in donations for "pots of paints " appeal

### **Debt:**

At the end of 2018 the overdue amount on unpaid invoiced was £7,000. There had been a culture in place for some time of not chasing payments so as to avoid upsetting customers. Procedures were changed and this was reduced to £200 within 6 weeks.

### **Reserves:**

Reserves have historically been maintained equivalent to 6 month's expenditure.

This had no scientific basis at all and meant that almost £40,000 was kept in reserves. On investigation this is massively higher than the reserves held by similar organisations. We are failing in our duty to fulfil our key objectives if we just sit on a huge pile of cash.

Reserves were re-examined with a more scientific risk analysis and it was decided that reserves should be adequate to cover the loss of top 3 customers, which cannot be replaced for 12 months and on top of that enough to pay a £5000 bill for unforeseen emergency expenditure.

This equates to £17,500 so the reserves level was set at £18,000.

This has freed up over £20,000 which can be spent on improvements to facilities in addition to budgeted amount.

It was recognised that the Charities Commission would not be happy with the Charity sitting on a large amount of money when it should be spent in pursuit of the charity's objectives.

## **Approval of Accounts**

The accounts for 2018 were approved unanimously.

## **Election of Treasurer**

There were no new volunteers willing to stand for the role of Treasurer. Dave Derham said that he would be willing to continue to act as Treasurer until a replacement can be found.

Graham Morris proposed Dave Derham to continue to act as Treasurer. This was seconded by Rex Laney. The motion was unanimously agreed.

## **Election of Group representatives as Management Trustees**

Rob Mills was happy to continue to be the representative Trustee for the Railway Club. There were no other candidates and Rob was elected to continue in this role.

Roger Howell was happy to continue to be the representative Trustee for the Society of Friends. There were no other candidates and Roger was elected to continue in this role.

Stan Goodwin was happy to continue to be the representative Trustee for the Radio Club. There were no other candidates and Stan was elected to continue in this role.

## **Election of Members' representatives as Management Trustees**

Mike Davies indicated that he wished to step down as a Trustee. Dave Derham thanked Mike for the service he has given over several years.

The following people were willing to stand again as Trustees:

Rex Laney, Graham Morris, Carl Lapworth, Dave Derham

They were all unanimously elected and will continue as Trustees.

Elly McDonald volunteered to stand as a Trustee. Elly runs the North Avon Drama group / NYTC, which meets at the Chantry. Not only is she very keen to see the facilities kept and developed but she is also keen to help to promote the Chantry as a centre for the arts in Thornbury.

Elly was unanimously elected to become a Trustee.

## **Appointment of Financial Examiners**

In line with an agreement made at the previous AGM, TDCA moved away from using Burton Sweet during the year and have engaged the services of Dunkley's. This resulted in a saving of £700 for the annual accounts preparation and independent examination.

The meeting unanimously agreed their support for the change and appointment of Dunkley's.

## **Any Other Business**

1. Stan Goodwin mentioned that the Thornbury Volunteer Centre is running a workshop on Governance for Trustees in September. Stan has booked to attend. Dave said that either he or Graham would also attend if they are available.
2. It was raised that the over-attendance at the Fireworks night resulted in a lot of unpleasantness with people having to be turned away. This was an unpleasant experience for the people manning the gate. Things should be managed much better in the future in order to avoid a repeat of these problems.

Dave apologised to the people involved that they had to deal with a difficult situation last year.

Graham said that the over-attendance was due to a website (what's on in Bristol) promoting the event without asking our permission. He said that in future we will be able to monitor mentions of our event on the internet and contact anyone who is inappropriately promoting it.

Dave pointed out that in future all ticket sales will be made using the new on-line ticketing system. This can ensure that we only sell the correct number of tickets and it will make it clear when the event is sold out.

There were no more points raised and the meeting was closed.