

Chairman's Address - Charity AGM 2021

Good evening all and thank you for attending this year's AGM, wherever you are. Yes, it is a bit late, but it's been a busy year and we will get the return to the Charity Commission on time and no, it's not in person at the Barn. That's a shame, as we've all missed out on the mulled wine and mince pies, but with the changed Covid situation, there seemed little reason to struggle to hold it anywhere except online.

This coming Friday marks ten years since Hickling Barn opened its doors. The builders were literally sweeping the floor of the main hall for the last time, as 120 children and parents were walking in to watch the first cinema show in the new building. I was talking to my predecessor chairman, Richard Cook a couple of weeks ago and we recalled sitting against the food hatch at midnight, that New Year's Eve, with a large glass each of single malt, reflecting on how we had actually done it. Hickling Barn was – really – open for business!

I don't really care to reflect on the three and a half years that followed. An exceptionally sad time, caused by a few who didn't want the Barn and had done everything they could to avoid it being built, including trying to bankrupt the charity and inflict personal loss on the trustees. And in that regard, both the charity and its membership, I'm sure will always be grateful for those who stood up for a change in the parish council to enable a settlement to be reached.

But, as someone once said, "what doesn't kill you, makes you stronger"; and those years certainly gave us an exceptionally determined, strong foundation on which to go forward.

The strong bond between the trustees has remained and every one of us has worked tirelessly to ensure the village's fabulous facility goes from strength to strength, in terms of delivering the best possible community facility for Hickling. As chairman, I know I speak for all of our village as I thank you all for your help, support and commitment over the past year.

And I think it's important to also note that we have always had a healthy churn of trustees over time, as people do their bit, give what they can and then move on.

Some people of course, give their bit over a very long time and, as we say goodbye and say thank you to some trustees this year, I think it's worth noting that Harvey Gibbons has done something like 40 years. Firstly, as a parish councillor, then as a member of the New Build Team for the Barn project, a Phoenix Trustee (which saw our wonderful snooker facility return to Hickling in the Barn) and most recently, as one of our trustees. As they also depart tonight, I'd like to thank Stewart Chinman, Robin Slatter and Chris Watkins for their service to our charity, it is hugely appreciated, as is their offer of continued support as volunteers..

So, ten years on and almost two years into the Covid pandemic what does the charity look like?

- Well, I'd say very good and really positive overall, but not perfect; we are human after all! We don't always get things right but we do our best. We work really hard to

enable things to happen, in a safe environment, where people want to be and without being complacent, I think we are pretty good at that.

- You'll hear tonight that we are in good financial shape, with healthy balances, a sensible approach towards what we spend and identified funds which we seek to use this year for some repairs and a new ventilation system if that can be funded
- You'll also hear about a long list of events and activities that we have managed to deliver, despite Covid. This is perhaps what I'm most proud of; that, as many voluntary organisations have almost stopped during the pandemic, every day here, when we have been legally allowed to open during Covid, The Barn has been available to use.
- And all this is down to our volunteers - some very obvious, and many in the background – giving us the thousands of volunteer hours that go into keeping the whole facility running and moving forward. All this is unpaid, genuinely voluntary work, for our community.

So, thank you everyone for supporting the charity, have a safe Christmas, and here's to an even better next ten years!