MARCH UPDATE FROM THE TRUSTEES OF THE LEIGH AND BRANSFORD MEMORIAL HALL

Endings and Beginnings – Shareholders and Dividends

February, for the Hall Trustees, is always a busy time. Our new financial year starts on the 1st March so February is the month we take stock. This entails looking back at how the hall has been used over the past year and whether, with the income generated, we were able to achieve all the planned improvements, as well as covering regular maintenance work and all the other annual running costs. As a registered charity we are required to submit our annual accounts to the Charity Commission, so Mary, our Treasurer, is kept particularly busy at this time of the year before we can finally 'close the books' for the year.

This is important work because the year that is **ending** in many ways determines and influences what we can do in the year that's just **beginning.**

But as well as being legally accountable to the Charity Commission, the trustees consider their primary accountability (as well as their first responsibility) is to each and every member of our parish community. For it is our community that entrusts us with the effective and efficient management of our lovely heritage building and grounds – and our job is to ensure it not only survives but thrives in the twenty-first century - over a hundred years since it first opened its doors.

In a very meaningful sense, every member of every household in our parish is a *'shareholder'* in the Hall, and your annual '*dividend*' is to know that the Hall remains a valuable and modern community asset with a viable, long-term future.

So, **first,** let's start with looking at how the Hall was used throughout the last year, for it is almost solely through the income generated by hires that it can remain a going concern.

There was a total of over 350 separate hires that took place in the year from the beginning of March 2023 to the end of February 2024. Putting this into context:

- that's an increase over the previous year of about 5% equating to an average of one hire a day
- May and November were the busiest months accounting for 21% of annual hires
- occasional hires last year almost doubled compared to the previous year – and as these hires are usually longer in duration than our regular weekly and monthly group hires, they generated more income

Second, more income over the past year meant that, in addition to the many improvements made during the first half of the year, since last November we have been able to:

- install new, more efficient hand driers in all the toilets
- replace the water damaged ceiling in the ladies' toilets adjacent to the Small Hall
- purchase and install a defibrillator on the corner of the external wall in clear sight of the Sherridge Road – adding to the number of defibrillators already available in the parish
- set in train the professional repair of a number of deepening potholes in the driveway and car parking areas
- attend to the drainage problem immediately outside the main entry doors.

Third, the amount of positive feedback we have been receiving from occasional hirers has been steadily increasing throughout the year. Several of whom have rebooked during the course of the year (and for next year) because they like the space so much – and have recommended it to their friends. We have also seen an increase in repeat hires from organisations who now regularly use the Hall as a training space. Repeat hires are a good indicator of hirers' satisfaction.

Fourth, but of equal importance, last year's healthy increase in hires together with the proportional increase in hire income, means we start the coming year in good financial shape. Added to which almost 100 advance bookings have already been taken for the year head and beyond. At our trustee meeting later this month we will be mapping out our ambitions for further improvements to make your Memorial Hall even more welcoming.

And finally, we are hoping to re-establish the **Mothers and Toddlers Group** later this year if there is sufficient demand. We'll update you on our plans as they are firmed up. In the meanwhile, we look forward to another year of serving you, our community ***shareholders***, creating new ***dividends*** along the way.

Jon Gamble, Chair of Trustees