



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

Safe With Sound

"Never forget", my mother told me some fifty years ago as my wife and I aspired to buy our first home together, "that a house is a thief. It will take your money, steal your time and demand a great deal of your love and attention. But then, also never forget, if you look after it, it will look after you, keep you and those you love safe and, over the years, become part of your history and a source of many happy memories."

And she was right. I have thought about those words many times over the past 14 years or so since I became Chair of Trustees. Yes, there's always something at the Hall that needs fixing, restoring, replacing, modernising or installing – not to mention the regular bills every month just to keep "the lights on" so to speak. Just like a home in fact. After paying the annual overheads there's usually not much left from the hire income to invest in making improvements, so our strategy every year is to apply for various grants and awards to fund major improvements that would simply be otherwise unaffordable. Staggeringly, over the past 12 years more than £120,000 has been raised in this way, all of which has been invested in keeping the Hall and its facilities up to date after *listening* to hirers' feedback and trying to keep up with their expectations.

In fact, "*listen*" is the appropriate word right now. We've known for a while that acoustics in the Hall are not the best, and, for a time, trialled the use of microphones and portable speakers, but this merely amplified the sound distortion. So, three years ago, we set about finding a so-called 'retro-fit' solution that would not only generally improve the Hall's acoustics but also help users of the hall who had or were starting to acquire hearing loss – as the acoustics for them were particularly difficult. After some research a solution was found that entailed attaching acoustic panels to the high, vaulted ceilings. Naturally, it was an expensive solution but with the help of an award from the Lottery Community Fund, in late 2023 we were able to install the ceiling panels in the Small Hall. They made an immediate and measurable improvement to the acoustics.

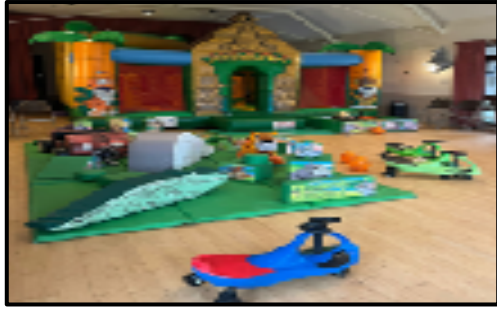
Having proved that the investment was worthwhile, your trustees were inspired to apply the same solution in the Large Hall. However, this would prove to be a more

daunting task, not just because of the size of the space, but also due the fact that we would need to install new curtaining across the stage and replace the old connecting doors (between the two halls) with new, custom-made, soundproofed trifolds. The estimate for the work was more than double the cost of that for the Small Hall – we obviously needed a lot more acoustic material and that had also increased significantly in price over the intervening period.

Then, in April last year, Malvern Hills announced the launch of its Community Facility Legacy Grant Scheme, "designed to **protect, enhance, and sustain public open spaces and community facilities** across the district". One of its aims is to "*ensure communities have access to high-quality, sustainable and accessible public open spaces and community facilities, that foster improved health and wellbeing and connected communities*".

Having read through the Legacy Grant Scheme document, the trustees believed their ambition to dramatically improve the safe level of acoustics in the Large Hall, with all the additional benefits that would bring, should meet the Council's Vision and eligibility criteria, and so we submitted our application. We called the project **SAFE WITH SOUND**.

I am delighted to report that in January we learned our application had been successful and we are now actively working with our preferred contractors to schedule the transformation of the Large Hall – which also includes installing hearing loops and more acoustically efficient flooring in the lobby and porch areas. We are committed to the Council's vision "*to enhance the current network of facility provision across the district with a focus on accessibility and inclusivity*" and thank them for this award.



In the meantime, we continue to welcome old friends and new hirers to the Hall as they make lasting memories together. Since the start of the new year and up to 1

March, we have hosted 54 events. The photograph above was taken at a 4th birthday party on 1 February – mum, Holly, texted us to say: *“Year on year we hire the Memorial Hall for both our children’s birthday parties, the space is fantastic and provides us with everything we need - we look forward to holding many more parties to come at the hall!”*

Seems my mother was right – the Hall may well be a thief, but looking after it means it can always be a part of our collective history and a source of many happy memories. Long may that continue for us all.

Jon Gamble, Chair of Trustees