

## January Newsletter from AirS

Welcome to our January newsletter - there's a lot going on, especially with five workshops detailed below, so please take the opportunity to come along and find out how we can help!

### **Forthcoming training and workshops for hall trustees and managers**

We have five upcoming events over the next three months which should be of great interest to those running village halls and similar community buildings.

Working with our colleagues in Kent and Surrey, Rother DC and Mid Sussex DC, these events will provide a perfect opportunity to network with other trustees and managers and discuss matters of common interest. We hope to see you there!

#### **1) Tuesday 31<sup>st</sup> January – Sussex House, Lewes**

- **Trustee Roles and Updating Governance - Surgery Sessions from 10 – 12pm**

An opportunity to discuss burning or immediate issues with Louise Beaton, our AirS Village Hall Advisor. Please make sure you bring any relevant documents. We offer up to four half hour sessions which are free to subscribers. Telephone Claire Reynolds on 01273 407305 to book a slot.

- **PAT Testing Training 1.30 – 4.30 pm - Sussex House, Lewes**

Provided by Quick Test Ltd, this costs £75+ VAT to subscribers, £95 non-subscribers (NB. this course is full but let Claire Reynolds know if you are interested as further events can be held). In addition, AirS has now purchased a PAT Tester which will be available to hire to halls that have an accredited tester. More information in the next newsletter.

#### **2) Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> February – PAT Testing Training**

Again provided by Quick Test Ltd and hosted by Surrey Community Action on the 1<sup>st</sup> Feb at Walliswood Village Hall between 1.30 and 4.30pm. The address is Surrey, RH5 5RJ.

Please contact Surrey Community Action for more information. At the time of writing, AirS is not aware whether this is fully booked. Please phone 01483 566072.

#### **3) Saturday 4<sup>th</sup> February – Langton Green Village Hall, Tunbridge Wells, Kent from 9.30 – 12.30pm**

**Trustee Training** run by our colleagues, Action in Rural Kent. See attached flyer for further information. The cost to AirS' subscribers is £30 per hall (as many trustees can attend as wish). Please see attached flyer for booking details.

**4) Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> March – The Woodside Centre, Bolnore, near Haywards Heath from 6.30pm – 9pm**

**Rejuvenating our Halls** – AirS workshop focusing on involving younger people, CIL and S106 funding opportunities, and the results of a survey by Mid Sussex District Council into the future needs of halls in Mid Sussex. Free to subscribers – see attached booking form.

**5) Tues 7<sup>th</sup> March – Brightling Village Hall, near Burwash, East Sussex from 2pm – 4.30pm**

**Making the most of our Halls** – hear about the effects of renovating Brightling Village Hall and discuss an action plan for the future of your hall, thinking about the role of trustees, how parish councils can help, budgeting and future improvements. Free to subscribers - booking form attached.

## News and Information Updates

### Village Halls in the Media

Following on from an article in the Daily Telegraph on 2<sup>nd</sup> January, there's been much interest in the press about the future of village halls. You can read the original article here and please do comment to keep the story alive:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/01/02/village-halls-face-bleak-future-ageing-volunteers-dwindle/>

Sue Homewood and Duncan Sanders from Groombridge Village Hall, and Jeremy Leggett, Director of AirS, were also featured on Meridian TV as a follow-up piece:

<http://www.itv.com/news/meridian/update/2017-01-11/uncertain-future-for-village-halls/>

Although the editorial agenda was aiming to convey the future of halls in a negative light, we contacted journalists to offer a more balanced view and portray village halls in a positive way, underlining their crucial role at the heart of our rural communities. We will continue to push these positive messages in all our future media work.

Using the Telegraph article as the basis for a message about the support halls need to thrive, a letter from David Robins (Chair of the Rawson Hall in Bolney) was printed a few days later which touches on relieving the burden of VAT and the importance of the advisory services provided by the ACRE Network, of which AirS is part. See attached copy of the letter.

In addition, Alastair McPherson, Chairman of the Woodside Centre, is keen to get a campaign going to rejuvenate halls with younger volunteers and more activities for younger generations. Your thoughts and ideas would be welcome so please write to us at:

[villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk](mailto:villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk)

Halls in other parts of the country have also featured in local and national media, so this publicity presents a perfect opportunity for you to be writing to your MP and your local paper to tell them how important your hall is, what you are doing well and what you need to keep your hall and the services running. You will find plenty of ideas in this newsletter and in the information on the village halls section of the AirS website.

### **Recruitment of New Trustees – Some Hints and Tips**

As mentioned above, Alastair McPherson is a member of Sussex Community Buildings Advisory Group (SCBAG) and is keen to push for the rejuvenation of halls and encourage more and younger people to step forward and get involved. Dorset Village Hall representatives met Sir Oliver Letwin MP, who has long been a supporter of village halls, and he has suggested focusing on the young retired/semi-retired (60 – 65 years old).

Members of SCBAG suggest the best form of recruitment is to ‘tap someone on the shoulder’ and ask people directly if they will help. This gets a better response than writing articles. Also asking several people at once who perhaps know each other is also a good idea. They felt it becomes easier when the hall is on a reasonable financial footing and there is less work involved in fundraising.

To recruit a new Treasurer they suggested breaking the job down and seeing if two people might share the role. One example is where bookings and invoicing are one responsibility and accounts, budgets and reports the other. They also felt it important to have trustees appointed by user groups, as the right people will provide feedback and help, but they do need to attend meetings and contribute, not attend only when they have a complaint!

### **Non Domestic Rates**

In the past few years a number of Sussex halls have complained about the bureaucracy required each year by rating authorities in order to maintain any or all of the discretionary rate relief previously granted. When we discussed this with Horsham DC we suggested a three or five year review would be more appropriate because of the work involved (for volunteers and the authority) and the need to have a long term view of hall finances. Halls need to be able to put funds into reserve for heavy items of expenditure given the small amounts of grant aid that local authorities can now afford.

In the meantime, we hear there were proposals in the Autumn Statement 2016 to increase business rate relief for rural shops and pubs to 100%. Details are still awaited, see <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-business-rate-relief/rural-rate-relief>. This is welcome news indeed for these important village services but given the amount of volunteer work that keeps our equally important village halls alive, it would be grossly unfair if village hall trustees still have to make the case for it every year.

If you have a view about this, email your MP and copy it to the Chief Officer of your rating authority.

## **Broadband, Wi-Fi and TV Licences**

Halls installing broadband sometimes ask if they will need a TV licence as a result. If it is only to enable hirers to access the internet, no TV licence is needed. However, if the internet will be used to watch live TV from any service or for public screenings of major events, then a TV licence is required. We gather this includes online services including those from commercial TV companies e.g. All4, SkyGo. Also if the internet is likely to be used to access BBC iPlayer then a TV licence is also needed but not for other catch-up services.

The **2016 Model Hiring Agreement Standard Conditions of Hire** clauses 4 and 23-26 cover use of Wi-Fi at halls. This model agreement is available to subscribers via the website log in.

Some halls have also set up their own Wi-Fi policies and information kindly shared by the Community Council for Somerset is in the password protected area of the AirS website. An internet search shows Upton Village Hall has an example.

ACRE is discussing a partnership with a national provider to offer a broadband package for village halls and would be grateful for information about current providers used and charges paid. If you have information that would help please email: [villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk](mailto:villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk).

Simon Gale, Vice Chairman of Barns Green Village Hall, has kindly offered to run a session for halls about Wi-Fi security, use by young people etc. If you are interested in AirS organising such a session please contact: [villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk](mailto:villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk) or Claire Reynolds on 01273 407305

## **Charity Commission Consultation about Annual Return – Opportunity to Have a Voice**

The Charity Commission has announced a consultation for next year's annual return as part of a two-year review of the key information they collect and display from charities: <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/annual-return-for-2017-information-collected-from-charities>

The annual return enables the Commission to collect information about charities so that it can identify issues of concern, either in specific charities or across the charity sector. It is also the source of information displayed on the Register of Charities which allows the public and donors to find out information about charities.

Questions are asked in the consultation about whether charities should keep certain information up to date more regularly than annually. There are also questions about the proportionality of the regulatory burden and the annual return. The consultation can be filled in using a simple online survey and runs until 9 March 2017:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/annual-return-for-2017-information-collected-from-charities>

## **Insurance Premium Tax (IPT) Rise**

We reported in the November newsletter that the Charities Tax Group was collecting information on the expected cost of the rise in IPT from 10% to 12% in June 2017. 87 village halls have kindly responded so far from across the UK.

The Charities Tax Group would welcome more information from halls that have not done so yet. The link is here: <https://www.charitytaxgroup.org.uk/tax/insurance-premium-tax/>

The amount of IPT being paid by village halls is sometimes staggering - 9% of those responding so far pay over £200 per annum, with a few double this, and they face rises of around £50 per annum. Insurance is one of the single biggest items of expenditure for many village halls, so an increase in IPT can have a disproportionate bearing on running costs.

Unfortunately insurance premiums are not necessarily related to income but to size and style of building. For example, Ringmer Village Hall recently found out that the reason for their heavy premium was their flat roofs (they changed to Insure Your Village Hall after shopping around). Please note also that the flat roofs were identified by the insurance company from a 'google earth' search while processing the renewal.

### **Proposal for VAT refunds on building work for halls**

With Brexit round the corner, ACRE is again making the case to HM Treasury for a VAT refund scheme on improvement and extension work for village halls. A copy of the proposal is attached.

Last year Search and Rescue charities were the latest to secure a VAT refund scheme and ACRE is hopeful that with the help of the Charities Tax Group, this could be the turn of village halls. However, it needs sufficient halls to write to MPs to win their support – **so get in touch with your MP now about this issue!**

If you feel that the amount of tax being paid by your hall is having a detrimental effect on the services you can provide, this is the opportunity to email your MP and ask if he/she will champion this proposal with the Treasury Minister Jane Ellison, MP. It would be worth at the same time asking for an amendment to IPT legislation to exempt village halls from Insurance Premium Tax (IPT) or alternatively suggesting that the amount is used to fund the ACRE Network support for halls.

Many halls have written over the years about the impact of non-reclaimable VAT, IPT and business rates but every time the Government changes and these points need to be made again.

### **ACRE Village and Community Halls Network**

The new ACRE Network is now the key vehicle for ensuring that the voice of village halls is heard on issues that affect the management and running of these vital community buildings, following the closure of the National Village Halls Forum.

Over 300 halls have signed up so far. The more that do so, the easier it will be for ACRE to make this more effective and win sponsorship to develop it further. So please do sign up by following the link: <http://www.acre.org.uk/our-work/village-halls-network>

Information about issues, campaigns and consultations is posted there explaining how you can help, also providing a resource to back up the shorter items we put in these newsletters.

### **East Sussex Community Information Service (ESCIS)**

If you are a hall in East Sussex, ESCIS offers a free page to advertise both your community hall and any events that you have planned. Please contact the ESCIS team via email or telephone to find out more and also what they can do to help you promote your hall.

Contact details: [info@escis.org.uk](mailto:info@escis.org.uk) or via their website [www.escis.org.uk](http://www.escis.org.uk).

**West Sussex:** In West Sussex the county council has similar facilities on their website – [www.westsussex.gov.uk](http://www.westsussex.gov.uk) as do some of the Districts. It is worth looking at those website to see if there is a community information or community buildings section.

### **Looking for ideas?**

Take a look at the Crowborough Community Centre website. New activities for January 2017 include the film Brooklyn with an American theme dinner, a talk about Growing Your Own Business and new health and wellbeing activities: <http://www.crowboroughcentre.info/>

## **Funding News**

### **Village SOS**

This short film shows some of the inspirational projects that benefitted from the mentoring provided through the recent lottery funded Village SOS Scheme:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iQ4s67zcQdc>

### **Important News - Big Lottery Reaching Communities Buildings Programme Closure**

We have received from ACRE the following information from the Big Lottery Fund: “We are closing the Reaching Communities Buildings programme from January 2017 as we consider the most effective ways to support ideas which centre on places and spaces. We are still able to fund small scale capital expenditure through our Reaching Communities programme - organisations apply for up to £100,000 as part of their proposal”.

We have alerted ACRE to the fact that several Sussex communities are in the process of working up applications, who need information about the shape and timing of a successor programme as soon as possible.

### **Funding sources**

#### **Screwfix grant applications**

Screwfix Foundation supports registered charities running projects that fix, maintain, repair and improve community or charitable facilities for people in need. The application form is now available online: <http://www.screwfix.com/help/screwfixfoundation/>

## **PRS for Music Foundation**

The PRS for music foundation offers grants to projects that involve the creation, performance and promotion of new music and enable songwriters, composers, artists, bands and performers of all backgrounds to develop creatively and professionally:

<http://www.prsformusicfoundation.com/funding/the-open-fund/the-open-fund-for-organisations/>

## **Volunteers Needed**

### **Sussex Community Buildings Advisory Group (CBAG)**

We were sad to see two long-standing members step down as members of the Sussex CBAG this month. This leaves a gap needing to be filled and we would welcome new volunteers from halls in Chichester District to 'fill their shoes'.

Mike Elliott at Fittleworth Village Hall and Pam Bruce at Northchapel Village Hall both joined SCBAG when fairly new trustees and found they gained a lot from the experience of other members, particularly when raising funds for major improvements, which they in turn have been able to pass on to others.

The role of the group is to work with AirS on improving the service to village halls and community buildings and to offer advice when needed - membership is not an onerous commitment! There are three meetings a year and members are invited to share their experience in various other ways too, for example at workshops, providing help to other trustees and occasionally letting MPs, councillors and the press know and understand the issues affecting their hall.

Mike and Pam both represented halls serving smaller rural communities and have performed a valuable role in raising the particular problems facing trustees managing such halls, lobbying MPs and councillors about issues such as rates, grant funding, non-reclaimable VAT and the threat of abolition of cheques. They have also helped run and chair workshops, shared their experience with other halls and advised AirS about our services. After more than ten years' service each we shall miss them both and are most grateful for the support they have provided over the years.

## **Ideas, ideas!**

SCBAG members shared some good ideas in January. For example, Amberley "next door" is a parish email system which enables people to post one liners e.g. reminders about events. Groombridge now has a walking group which meets and walks before the Community Café, based in the hall, opens. In addition, Copsale Village Hall has a monthly "bacon buttie" event.

### **Community cafes, drop-in opportunities**

We would like to hear from halls that have community cafes or drop-in opportunities for local people. We hear so much in the press about social isolation and loneliness and we know that this can be a particular issue for people living in rural communities. So let us know about what you might be doing to combat loneliness and isolation. Please email: [villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk](mailto:villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk). We will publish the responses in the next newsletter.

## **Frequently asked questions**

### **Wedding Receptions at Village Halls – Follow Up**

We posted in the October newsletter some tips shared by members of the Sussex Community Buildings Advisory Group. Following further enquiries we have turned them into a new Topic Note (see attached) which is being posted on the password protected section of the AirS website. Let us know at [villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk](mailto:villagehalls@ruralsussex.org.uk) if you have more experience to share on this subject.