

Haddenham Community Library AGM: 30th August 2013

Chairman's report

It is a great pleasure to see everyone here this evening, especially our financial supporters, our partners from the County, the Parish Council and our wonderful volunteers.

Many of you know the Community Library story, but not all, so forgive me if I spend a moment recapping our history.

My first memorable date is the 24th of January 2011, a Monday as I recall. A meeting in the St Mary's Centre, following the County Council's earlier announcement that the fourteen 'smallest' (whatever that means) libraries in the County were to become Community Libraries or possibly close. Reference was made to something called 'the Big Society'. The meeting was planned as a workshop to see how to plan for the future. We were seated at tables to come up with ideas. The County representatives were taken aback when the packed meeting turned against the idea and they graciously agreed to enter in to dialogue.

The local emphasis was that we would not be deprived of our professional staff, even if they were reduced and supplemented by volunteers. This was in no small part a tribute to the work of Barbara Paul and her staff. A petition to this effect was circulated in key venues (including schools, pre-schools, U3A and Little Italy) and quickly had 800 signatures for presentation to the County Council.

The County Council's thinking was evolving with help, I am sure, from our local champion Margaret Aston and our local MP John Bercow, both of whom joined me in key meetings. The County was now ready to work with us – negotiate if you wish - to develop a real partnership. We would be offered a five year resource grant, with funding also from the Children's Centre use of the library on Mondays and Wednesdays and a 25 year lease on the building – details to be thrashed out over the coming months.

We developed a vision statement of how the library could become even more part of the community of Haddenham and surrounding villages. This would guide our plans for the future. Copies of it are around the library this evening for information and comment.

So let's move on in time. The dialogue with the County led to greater mutual understanding and an increase in the offered grant. We moved towards the proposed handover date of November 2012 and, crucially, began to recruit and train our volunteers. Even then the legal documents had not been agreed, but we knew where we were going. Volunteers, including some trustees, learnt the ways of the County Spydus system (it took me four attempts to pass the test!). Most importantly, we joined with the County in recruiting a manager and an assistant. We all agree that finding Emma as manager and David as her assistant was very important. Their skills with people and knowledge of

the systems have been vital in taking HCL forward. David is being promoted to manage the Winslow library and we wish him well on this, his last day with us. We are pleased to welcome from next week Melissa Polkey who currently works in the Buckingham library.

Meanwhile, the organisational structure was developing. We became a charity and a company limited by guarantee. The five original trustees were Richard Hirst, John Brandis, Brian Bowman, Tim Mozley and me. We have now been augmented by Peter Mason, Lorraine Gooch, Cheryl Ormand, Grace Brown, Victoria Wakeley and Carol Mason. This improves the gender mix and, even better, reduces the age profile. But, crucially, the range of interest, skill and commitment is maintained and strengthened. Later we will be asking the meeting to agree to re-appoint the new group of trustees. Richard Hirst and Brian Bowman have felt that they should now stand down, but they remain available for advice.

So, how do things stand now and what does the future hold?

Formally, we are on the verge of finally signing the resource agreement and lease, with help from our solicitors who have been partly funded by County Council grants.

From this year, we become responsible for part of the staff and other costs and so are dependent on outside contributions to maintain our current healthy cash flow.

Operationally, we have strength from the range of activities which Emma will describe in a moment. We have over a hundred new library members. We are building our book and other stock, using grants from the County and local organisations. We are making our computers more up to date, including public use of wi-fi. We have more furniture, so that community organisations can use our facilities out of library hours. We are part of the County stock system, with all the benefits that brings.

But, if our library is to continue to thrive as a vital part of the local community, we depend crucially on the many volunteers who put their names down each week for shifts and on financial support from existing sponsors and, we hope, new ones..

We welcome comments and ideas, either now or by email and orally in the library – and we always need more volunteers and sponsors.

Steve Sharp

The email addresses of trustees are available in the library and on the website.