

Haddenham Community Library (HCL) Annual Public Meeting 1 December 2017

Report of the Chairman of the Trustees

Introduction

1. This report summarises our history, our recent achievements and our plans for the future, with a focus on the challenges we face.

History and recent / current achievements

2. 2017 marks the fifth year of the negotiated agreement between HCL and Bucks County Council (BCC) following strong village reaction to a BCC to re-organise its local libraries, whereby BCC employs two staff who are seconded to HCL. Emma Foster and Ali Gilbert are these two staff and they have had another outstanding year leading HCL and its volunteers in providing library and community services to Haddenham and the surrounding area.
3. This fifth anniversary has been marked in November by a 'five act play' of events for young people and the wider community. For the youngsters, Korky Paul, illustrator of Winnie the Witch etc (and a library campaigner in north Oxford), and local resident Steve Cole (Astrosaurus etc) wowed packed houses of readers and their parents. Over brunch, Bruce Alexander and his son Sam (RSC actors both) delighted us with poetic and other literary readings. Famous crime novelist Clare Mackintosh (nee Tudway, who grew up in Haddenham) greatly impressed with her account of her writing history (assisted by the serving of cocktails by our PCSOs) and Rt Hon John Bercow (our MP and the Speaker of the House of Commons – who has supported HCL throughout) charmed and challenged residents of all political opinions over afternoon tea. These five events were so successful through the planning, organisation and friendly welcome of our volunteers, led by Ali Gilbert.
4. The great achievement of the year was the refurbishment of the Children's and Young People's area of the library by DEMCO Ltd, funded by HCL from carefully husbanded reserves. Staff and volunteers, led technically by Trustee Peter Mason, got a beautiful result – formally opened tonight by David Truesdale, Chairman of the Parish Council.
5. In addition to the normal range of services the year included regular activities by the groups of knitters and spinners, two Bridge Clubs and a yoga group. Saturday mornings included the popular craft and Lego clubs (we need to find a better way of picking up so much Lego!). There were also exhibitions of art work by the local art group and Rotary young photographers. Haddenham Screen continued to sell tickets through HCL and to donate their profits to us - a most welcome addition to our funds.
6. The Village Society continued to hold its meetings in HCL and supports our hopes to improve the public address facilities! We have book group links in the village and with the local schools, including Stone and Dinton/Cuddington. In the national Summer Reading Challenge we achieved one of the highest completion rates and on World Book Night we gave out books to parents at the school gates – something we may repeat. We continue to grow our supporter base for the Vale Lottery. As one of their good causes, we receive valuable funding from this not for profit community scheme, plus free marketing and fundraising advice. At the Village Fete, despite the climate conditions, we gave away 48 children's books. Our links with social support organisations and the local food bank continue and so far no-one has needed to trigger the defibrillator, but it's there as a community resource.
7. So, HCL flourishes, not least through the financial and moral support of local organisations. These include the Parish Council, Rectory Homes (whose chairman Simon Vickers serves as our President – unfortunately he is in New York this week), Haddenham Screen, the Haddenham Beer Festival Trust, Rotary, Haddenham Fete, Haddenham Mummers, Haddenham Garden Centre, the Christmas Tree Festival and others). Without this support we would be less happy and unable to fulfil our vision.

The future

8. The future for community libraries continues to be uncertain, especially in respect of funding. We are negotiating with BCC to extend the current agreement, but progress is slow, not least because BCC are awaiting the outcome of the proposed Local Government Reorganisation which is likely to lead to one or two unitary authorities.
9. Recently HCL was featured on BBC TV, recommended by BCC as a model of good practice, to inform Northants CC in their plans to move to a community model – a welcome compliment. (Roade village in Northants plans to visit shortly to pick the brains of our staff and volunteers). However, there remain clouds over the future and it is important to tell the community about these. We will be calling on all our supporters for even more input with ideas, time, contacts and money.
10. During the year HCL achieved approval from the local authority (AVDC) to a planning application to extend the building to improve facilities for community use, including a toilet for users and perhaps a coffee point. This approval runs for three years and the Trustees are not implementing it until future funding is more secure. This will include use of HCL reserves, some funding from Section 106 associated with new housing development, but further fundraising will be necessary. The building is covered through a 25 year lease with BCC, with whom we are in constant contact about heating and other matters.
11. HCL reserves have been used to refurbish the Children's Library area, a layout which is meeting with delight from users and their parents/carers. We hope that the new arrangements will encourage teenagers to use them.
12. BCC are consulting widely not just about the future of some library services but specifically about early years provision. At present some 30+ children's centres work across the county, mainly franchised to Barnado's and Action for Children, providing a range of support for families and pre-school children. To some extent, this has developed from the major government initiative called Sure Start. It involves in Haddenham the use of the library, with an office all week and exclusive use on Mondays and Wednesdays, and use of the Walter Rose Room in the Village Hall. This use, and the funding it brings to HCL and the Village Hall, is under review and may not continue next year.
13. At the same time, BCC is considering the future of its library services overall, because of its loss of all government grant. Savings are being implemented by reorganisations which include making the Aylesbury library self-service. HCL is seeking to negotiate an extension of our five year resource grant to preserve, in particular, our staffing arrangement and the funded hours of Emma and Ali.
14. So we have had a good year but there are big challenges ahead. Our excellent and dedicated volunteers merit the support of us all.

Steve Sharp

30 November 2017