

The Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committees



Badlesmere...on the way to Ashford 1927

Chairman's Report for the AGM of The Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committees, 10 May 2022.

Welcome to the AGM of Badlesmere Parish Hall (to give its proper title) for 2022. According to the Title Deed, our governing document, AGMs should be held in August. For some years now we have held in May to be closer to our financial year end and to avoid the holiday season when both committee members and residents are unlikely to attend. The following report covers the period since the last AGM, and for the financial year 1st Jan to 31st Dec 2021. It also includes matters pertaining to both the village hall and to the lees. (An explanation of this comment appears below.)

This AGM is the first since the coronavirus pandemic which prevented or restricted AGMs in 2020 and 2021. As chairman I issued reports in 2020 and 2021 and these are available on the website badlesmerelees.com. However, I may make reference below to events and matters that concern the last three years for sake of clarity and continuity.

The following people make up the current committee: me, Ian Earl, as chairman (and doubling up as Hall Manager), Sue Earl (secretary), Rick Blackman (treasurer), and ordinary members: Dave Austin (also Parish Councillor), Steve Burt, Gareth Fulton, Fred Gregory, Charlie Kirby, Katie Potter, Ben Pullen and Tom Sisley. In addition, although not on the committee, there is Lorraine Blackman who runs the 100 Club. Strictly the committee should consist of three elected members, and four representative members from (named) organisations that use the hall, and not more than two co-opted members. Since the Trust Deed dates from 1974 it is no surprise that the four organisations mentioned therein no longer exist, at least not in Badlesmere. In 2014, there was a feeling in the village that a small clique ran the hall and from the committee's point of view the village didn't offer much help to run it, so when I took over as chair I rather ignored the trust deed and endeavoured to have as big a committee as possible, with the proviso that co-opted members had to have a history of helping out with hall activities. In other words if you did 'things' you could be rewarded with having a say in the 'things' of the future. This is why we have a committee of 11, soon to be 12 when Chris Moore's membership is ratified by the committee later this evening. I have also built up a list of email addresses so I could inform residents of events and decisions in order to increase village involvement. It happens that none of the current regular users of the hall have elected to send a representative to sit on the village hall committee despite invitation to do so.

The term 'management committee member' is synonymous with the term 'management trustee'. All trustees have to sign a declaration of eligibility, essentially saying they are not bankrupt or have no

conflicting interests with the purposes of the Parish Hall. For over ten years we have not had any custodian trustees. This will only become of real significance when a new lease needs to be signed, which will be in 2027.

In terms of governance, the major change that has taken place in the past year was the complete separation of the finances of the Parish Hall and the Badlesmere Lees Preservation Committee. Separate bank accounts did once exist but were combined for sake of simplicity (so long as, it was noted at the time, all entries were easily identified with one or the other). However, I wished for a greater separation because if the village hall wished to seek, for example, grants as a charity. Without being registered with the charities commission it was important that we should not have accounts mired by income and payments associated with what is essentially private land (the lees) owned by a commercial organisation. To this end, just before last year's AGM, we opened new bank accounts for the Parish Hall, the original ones having been closed in 2003.

The Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committee is therefore really two committees. Nevertheless, it meets as one and decisions pertaining to the two different committees are made at the same meetings. The minutes now expressly state when an item pertains to the Lees Preservation Committee. By default unspecified items concern the village hall. In future, it was agreed, any fund-raising event will state more obviously where the profits will be destined.

One case in point where it was only the village hall that could be involved was in the applying for what I call 'Covid grants'. During the pandemic the government released funds to support the leisure and hospitality sectors when lockdowns or restrictions were in place. We successfully applied for five grants, and received in total £29 050.85 over the two years. Because we are a small community, with a corresponding small turnover, and the grants were fixed amounts allocated to wide bands of nominal income, we received much more than the losses we incurred. This has put our finances in a particularly healthy state. The committee is now choosing where best to spend. As a charity we not expected to keep excess funds over year-ends except for specified purposes. We have written a Reserve Policy, following guidance from Action with Communities in Rural Kent, to comply with this. Rick will give a summary of the state of the accounts of both committees at the end of this report.

The main refurbishment that we feel is appropriate concerns the toilets and storage space. However, we have already purchased new tables, chairs and associated trollies, replaced the fridges and freezers in the kitchen, and acquired a commercial-sized Hoover. Further expenditure will undoubtedly take place in connection with the kitchen, and on lighting, inside and out, and the hall floor, but advice has been already sought and rough surveys undertaken to see how we can improve the far end of the hall. Improvements to the path to the entrance and to the car park are also desired.

Covid obviously did result in a loss of normal income during lockdowns - from the lack of hiring, regular and otherwise, from the curtailment of fund-raising events, as well as causing expenditure when complying with covid-safe principles for re-opening. It also caused one of our regular hirers not to return afterwards. The latter has been offset by our acquiring two new groups, albeit small and not as regular. Another consequence of covid is the almost universal use of cards rather than cash for payments. We have therefore invested in a card reader that connects to the mobile network. It has been successfully tested but not yet at a proper event, nor inside this Faraday cage of an edifice.

The Badlesmere 10K Run was re-established in September, and made over £1200. It is hoped that this year's will be equally profitable. Success can be attributed to superb organisation and the considerable assistance of those helping at race HQ and acting as marshals around the course. It could not have taken place without the support of the Estate and the farmer on whose land we run. We also hope that the Annual Wine and Wisdom will return. Both these events will support the Lees Preservation Committee and, in particular, one of its key aims, a village sign. This may well come to fruition in the next twelve months. The cost of 100 Club membership was raised in 2021 from £10 to £15, having been unchanged since the 1990s. The sizes of the prizes were amended at the same time. It resulted in a not-unexpected drop in the membership but an overall increase in income.

Maintenance of the hall, independent of any refurbishment, has continued. For example, repairs to the store room external door and frame are underway. Management of the lees (by the BLPC) has continued and material for its tracks purchased. Mowing of the lees has been regularly carried out, with the areas that suffered a few years ago recovering well. The cost of the mowing is expected to rise noticeably this year, not least because of continuing increases in fuel prices. Plans are afoot to 'wild' the south eastern end of the lees, with the realisation that it will take years of managing not just the sowing of a few seeds.

Many changes and challenges are facing the village hall committee (and the lees committee) but we are well prepared for the future by having a healthy bank balance, a pro-active committee and numerous supporters.

Ian Earl
Chairman, Badlesmere Lees and Hall Committees