

## **Birchwood Youth & Community Centre**

### **Trustees Report for 2021-2022**

At the last annual report, we reported that the steady progress that had been made in previous years was significantly impacted by the Covid pandemic which closed the centre in the spring of 2020. We had been very fortunate to have been able to build up significant reserves over the previous two years through a combination of cost saving measures and increasing use of the building. We also reported that our main concern was that several of our user groups had either ceased operations or were likely to. As it turned out, all user groups apart from Slimming World, Repair Café, Headway and Birchwood Acts closed their operations. Some of these groups were providing an important community benefit. In particular, Birchwood Seniors and Age UK were both providing activities for older residents mainly in their 70s and 80s. The committees of both groups decided that they could no longer continue due to ill-health and no-one else within the groups was able to take on the roles.

We were fortunate that we still had a reasonable level of reserves at the start of the year but it was clear that it would take some time to build back our activities to pre-covid levels and bring the level of added value which we would all like to see for the community. Our key objective for the year was to try to stabilise our financial position so that our reserves were no longer reducing.

#### **Financial situation**

Overall, our cash balance in the bank started the year at £6038.22, but we finished the year at £6612, an increase of 9.5% . Our fixed costs include insurance, standing charges for gas and electricity, telephone/internet costs, TV licence and our water bills. Other fixed costs include the servicing of the fire extinguishers and fire alarm system, which are statutory requirements. During the financial year, we continued to keep the WBC bin service on hold as a means of saving money. For the 12 months our total income was £6070, £3997 of which came from hall hire and £2073 in the form of a grant from Warrington Borough Council to facilitate the change of our lighting from

fluorescents to LED. This change is expected to reduce our electricity costs to roughly half. Total expenditure for the year was £5496.13.

### **Buildings, Facilities and improvements**

The original strategic plan focused on several main areas as follows: –

1. ensuring that the buildings were safe, protected and renovated
2. Clearing old materials no longer needed
3. Improving the financial viability by reducing operating costs and increasing income
4. Making the centre work more effectively for the community
5. Widening the number of trustees and volunteers involved

The fire alarm and extinguishers were serviced/checked and several extinguishers replaced during the year which had reached their expiry date. The fact that several user groups had ceased to exist gave us a good opportunity to carry out some rationalisation in our store garage and reduce clutter in the process which is helpful in terms of safety.

The large awning which we have at the back of the building was cleaned and lubricated as it hadn't been used for many years. This is now fully functional.

Our successful bid for funds to replace all our lighting to LED lighting will have a number of benefits. Firstly, the electricity usage of the LED units will be roughly half of the current fluorescent units which will have a significant impact on our operating costs. Next, a number of the fluorescent units have quite a poor light output which contributes to a fairly dingy appearance of the rooms in spite of having been fully redecorated. Finally, the replacement of fluorescent tubes in our main hall lighting unit has always been problematic as they are exceptionally difficult to reach. This has often meant that tubes have not been replaced until a special stepladder could be borrowed, and the light output has been poor as a consequence. The life of the LED units now will be very much longer and the light output in lumens much greater. This is expected to make the whole facility look much more attractive to users, and it will be easier to maintain.

In the latter part of the year, our gas boiler failed due to an issue with the printed circuit board. The boiler is now 20 years old and parts are not easy to obtain any longer. It is also not especially efficient, and a modern condensing boiler would be more economical. It is our intention however to move towards electrical heating, if possible. It was not a good moment to think about replacement with a new gas boiler, and in the event, we were lucky to be able to source a second-hand circuit

board at low cost and have it replaced. It emphasises the need to look into how we will move forwards so that we can ensure that our heating costs are minimised and we can move forwards towards our net zero target.

### **Cost reduction**

Warrington Community Energy looked at the building some time ago with a view to carrying out a more detailed study aimed at making recommendations on heat pumps, insulation and a PV panel/battery installation. Unfortunately this didn't happen, partly due to Covid, but also because the person involved had a family tragedy which meant he was unable to carry out further work. It is hoped that will take place next year.

As mentioned earlier, we looked into replacing our lights with LED alternatives. Following a visit from a contractor from City Electrical Factors we were provided with recommendations for changing our lighting to LED across the whole building, and we were able to use this information to apply for a grant from the Warrington Borough Council Neighbourhoods fund to cover most of the cost. Our application was successful and we were awarded £2073 to purchase all the light fittings needed in December 2022. Subsequently, Birchwood Park agreed to carry out the installation for us free of charge, but due to work schedule pressures, the completion of the job did not take place before year end.

### **Activities**

An early task for trustees was to see what we might be able to do ourselves in the centre rather than be dependent on third parties. We also wanted to be able to operate these at either zero or minimal cost to those attending. Towards the end of the financial year, we were able to start up Birchwood Creates again. This is an art and crafts group run by Julia Ellis charging only £2 for a two hour session for attendees. Our first priority for running new sessions was to look at running a session for older people, but with the intention of starting up other groups as well once resources were available to do this. The key to doing this was to obtain some grant money, and a bid was submitted right at the end of the financial year to help us achieve this.

Birchwood Acts ran a number of sessions in the latter part of 2021, with a view to putting on a Christmas extravaganza similar to the one they did in 2019. In the event, the group had to abandon the idea as their numbers were just not sufficient to put the event on. This seemed to be due to

Covid fears in large part, and the group intend to look at starting up again once the Covid risk has significantly reduced.

Headway, a charity running sessions for those with brain injuries, continued to run sessions again during the year.

Repair Café successfully operated once again during the year, although the numbers of people attending were somewhat lower than pre-pandemic in spite of a lot of promotion on social media. This promotion will continue and it is hoped that numbers will slowly build back. We believe that once again, numbers are being affected by a reticence in members of the public to attend events with other people present.

We look forward to being able to welcome further community activities to help us get back to some sort of normality during the course of the coming year.

## **Other**

As we finish the financial year, the challenges ahead will be to continue to try to reduce the centre's costs further. This will be especially important as a result of the reduced use of the centre. We will also want to increase the activities which we run ourselves for the benefit of the community. These should have the benefit of being more stable. Third party activities often cease to exist, putting pressure on the centre's finances.

I would like to thank all our trustees (both present and past) and volunteers who have made an important contribution to what we do for the community of Birchwood. We would also like to express our thanks to Birchwood Town Council who continue to provide support on a number of fronts, including general advice and in helping to maintain and improve the grounds on which the centre stands both in terms of safety and appearance .

The town council has been looking at the possibility of passing the ownership of the land on which the centre sits to the trustees. This has not happened at this point and has been a low priority for the town council.

**Dr David Ellis – Chair of Trustees**

## Birchwood Youth & Community Centre - Accounts

	2020-2021	2021-2022	Var. %
<b>Expenses</b>	£	£	
Buildings/Equipment	0.00	2307.50	
Furniture etc.	0.00	0.00	
Fire alarm contract/repairs	263.40	266.40	1.1
Water	885.29	595.76	-32.7
Gas/electricity	1198.00	684.00	-42.9
Central heating contract/repairs	0.00	107.50	
Telephone/Internet	324.84	343.17	5.6
Cleaning/Caretaking	622.70	228.00	-63.4
TV Licence	156.99	159.00	1.3
Insurance	719.80	733.20	1.9
To petty cash	0.00	50.00	
Waste removal	0.00	0.00	
PAT Testing	0.00	21.60	
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>4171.02</b>	<b>5496.13</b>	<b>31.8</b>
<b>Income</b>			
Rentals	1255.00	3997.00	218.5
Fundraising/Donations	0.00	0.00	
Grants	0.00	2073.00	
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>1255.00</b>	<b>6070.00</b>	<b>383.7</b>
Balance brought forward	-2916.02	573.87	-119.7
Petty Cash	11.61	26.34	126.9
Cash funds in bank at year start	8954.24	6038.22	-32.6
Cash funds in bank at year end	6038.22	6612.09	9.5
Savings accounts	6.83	6.83	0.0
<b>Total funds carried forward</b>	<b>6056.66</b>	<b>6645.26</b>	<b>9.7</b>

