

Harriston is a small village of approximately 100 houses, located just over a mile from the town of Aspatria in West Cumbria. The village was originally built between 1820 and 1830 to house miners for a new colliery but was then redeveloped in the 1970's. Harriston Village Hall was formerly used as a school during the day and as a miners social facility in the evening.

Background

The village hall in Harriston has been used for community benefit since the village was built in the 1800's. In recent years the building had been run by local groups with support from the housing association but without any clear governance arrangements.

The hall closed in 2015 and a few months later the community became aware that the building had been put up for sale or lease.

The Project

A group of 4 residents formed the Harriston Village Hall committee and decided to fight for the hall, to make it a relevant part of the community once more. They approached ACT for advice on how best to do this.

With support from ACT, the committee considered their options and began to plan:

- Future governance arrangements,
- Negotiating a lease,
- Attracting funding for refurbishment,
- Policies & procedures for running the hall,
- Involving the wider community in order to make it a success.

The committee chose to adopt the model village hall Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) Constitution and registered with the Charity Commission.

In July 2016, the new charity trustees agreed the new lease and finally got keys to access the building. The hall was found in a terrible state, with an unpleasant smell of damp. Health and Safety concerns meant it was empty for a further 12 months until repairs could be completed.



Harriston Village Hall

What has been achieved?

Once the trustees could access the hall, they completed a risk assessment and planned improvements needed to make the building fit for purpose.

Insurance was arranged as a priority, choosing a provider with a track record of working with village halls. With very limited funding, monthly instalments rather than an up front annual fee was agreed.

The hall was completely cleaned and repainted. The 'back office' alone took four days to clear of old equipment, furniture and other items which were no longer useful, to make it into a usable space.

The trustees took advice from ACT on the appropriate policies and procedures to put in place, to help ensure everything is run well in the future.

Funding has been received from a number of small local grants plus fundraising events held by the trustees. These events, together with articles in the local paper and a new



Local children's 'thank you' posters in the hall



Children's Craft activities in the hall

Facebook page, helped to get the word out that the hall was up and running again, and to encourage people to get involved.

Events include: coffee mornings, children's craft club, seasonal parties, prize bingo, raffles and a 50/50 club. WiFi has also been installed, to help other new groups, including a Heritage Group to research the history of Harriston village.

The Learning

- Building relationships and good communication is essential - between trustees, with people using the hall, the wider community, and other partners and support organisations.
- Expect the unexpected! Things don't always go to plan - the discovery of exposed heating pipes meant the hall couldn't open up as soon as intended.
- Make governance and health and safety a priority. Focusing on these first means you can be confident things will run well.
- Having a variety of different events and groups helps attract a wide range of people into the hall. Regular usage helps create a more sustainable income.
- It helps to have people with a range of experience and expertise involved. The trustees were pleased to welcome 2 new volunteers on committee at the first AGM.
- You can never have enough volunteers! Ideally there would have been more community involvement when the hall first reopened. It can be difficult to get people interested at first but keep asking, it will improve.
- It has been a challenge to get across to people that the hall is being run differently now, as a new independent charity. The main objective is to provide a village hall for the benefit of the local community, but people need to get involved to secure it's future.
- Using social media is good but only if it's kept up to date. Having a Facebook page for the hall has helped to publicise what's going on and interact with people online.

Contact Details

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