

ONLINE UPDATE

This year's Foxlowe Arts Centre Annual Supporters Evening took to the world wide web – alike to so many community meetings of late due to the nation's ongoing battle with coronavirus.

The Foxlowe financial year runs from November to October and so the evening focused on a run down of the November 2019 to October 2020 year.

Foxlowe chairman Chris Thompson began his PowerPoint presentation with running through the many much-valued aspects which have kept the venue going over the past 12 months:

pledgers, donations, Creative Hub/rentals, Government grants, as well as the introduction of the Foxlowe Loan Scheme. Income from the cafe, when allowed to be open, also helped the survival of the Foxlowe during these surreal times.

The Foxlowe Arts Centre's end of year balance was minus £15,316.68. (it was noted that without pledgers and Creative Hub rentals this figure would have been minus £62,000).

Chris set out that it is envisaged that the cafe will survive thanks to customer support whilst we were open, VAT Reductions, as well as the Government Furlough payments. The Foxlowe Trading Company broke even by the end of the year.

Chris then went on to outline the key positives from the past year:

- The continued support from pledgers and volunteers.
- We stayed even on pledgers in-

come from the preceding year due to recruitment.

- Foxlowe Loan Scheme. This has raised £400,000 from Foxlowe Supporters and £50,000 from the Government Bounce Back Loan reducing interest rates from 5% to 2%. This will save over £100,000 over the remaining term (ending 2029). From August 1st 2020 it will save us £17,748 in the first year alone,

much needed with the pandemic.

- Disabled ramp grant approved.
- Improvements to the main function room (The Bromfield) during lockdown helped by donations of £3,000.

- New internet cable for live feeds, this will help us to stream live shows and increase revenue.
- 95% of rentals are still paying.

- The majority of pitched roofs now repaired using the HLF Grant.
- The oldest part of the building (1770) has had the damaged modern cement render removed and replaced with lime and sand render that will help the building breathe and not trap damp (funded by HLF and SMDC).

- Architects plans drawn up for a new toilet block (part funded by SMDC).
- A scale model of the Foxlowe built by Steven Kirkby during the first lockdown which will help with future plans.

For the current year, plans are to:

- Develop our Arts Strategy.
- Workshop consultations with our supporters to look at a 350 capacity enhanced performance space.
- A new exterior maintenance plan to finish repairs and painting

in the next two years (depending on when we can open).

- Improve visitor experience to the Creative Hub, by painting and repairing the foyer, stairs, landing and corridor.
- Bring the Orangery/conservatory into use.
- Repair outbuildings and improve visitor experience when leaving the Bromfield via the side entrance.

Chris then went on to outline the challenges the Foxlowe has faced and continues to face:

- Build up our reserves again - these should be at least 3 months of yearly expenditures (non reserved).
- Look at more funding.
- Recruit five to six new pledgers each year due to losses.
- Covid-19 restrictions.



The meeting then moved to open questions and debate over a number of matters.

One question was how people could support the venue to which pledging was promoted as an excellent way to gain much-needed additional income, especially while the venue remains closed due to Covid-19.

Live & Local coordinator Michael Quine then ran through

the plans for live theatre, once restrictions allow, and trustee Andy Norton gave a similar run down for music and comedy gigs; as well as how the Bromfield Room had been re-configured to enhance the audience experience at the Foxlowe.

Trustee David Bell ran through funding opportunities which have been, and some which are being, looked into, as well as that he is drawing up an Arts Strategy for the Foxlowe Arts Centre.

Trustee Claire Parton explained that work has been done to go through the pledgers email list and that anyone with any ideas can email supporters@foxlowearts-centre.org.uk.

A good discussion took place with regards to publicity of the Foxlowe with several ideas being mooted such as a leaflet drop across town, more press releases, posters as well as additional word of mouth.

Anyone wishing to be sent the Power Point Presentation and/or the recording from this meeting, can email supporters@foxloweartscentre.org.uk.

Here's our chairman, Chris Thompson, with our contribution to say a huge thank you for the Heritage Lottery Fund grant we were lucky to receive for external building maintenance to our beloved Georgian building.

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Foxlowe says thank you to lottery players

The Foxlowe Arts Centre recently took part in a nationwide 'thank you' to all the national lottery players who help fund some many projects across the country.

The big thank you took place online and saw recipients of such grants taking selfies of themselves holding their fingers crossed – just like the National Lottery logo.

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Accessibility improvements

The Foxlowe is set to see improved disabled access – thanks to a local government grant.

The ramp which leads onto the patio area from the Foxlowe's car park is set for a major revamp, as too is the ramp into the building itself.

This much needed improvement is thanks to funding from the Staffordshire Moorlands District Council's Disabled Facilities Grants.

This follows feedback from users of the Foxlowe who have requested improvements to access. We hope to increase accessibility further in time, such as a lift to higher floors of the building, when funding and building regulation permission allows.

The team which administers the Disabled Facilities Grants has been in touch to ask if we can help publicise the funding which is also available to individuals

A spokesman said: "A Disabled Facilities Grant is funding to help a disabled

person adapt their home to make it easier and safer to live in. It can be used for: widening doors and installing ramps and step rails; improving access to rooms and facilities - e.g. stair lifts or level access bathing; adapting heating or lighting controls to make them easier to use." They added: "For adults over 18 years the amount of grant you can get will be decided by a test of resources - your income and capital and that of your spouse. The team will ask you what you find difficult and might need support with. They can recommend household equipment and gadgets or a free home assessment might be needed to recommend changes to help. The information that you provide about the changes you need will be passed onto the Support for Independent Living in Staffordshire service (SILIS), who can help you apply for a grant."

www.staffordshire.gov.uk or call 0300 111 8010.



Comedy streaming live from the Foxlowe

Local theatre and film production company Rotten Park Road, based in Leek, have produced an exciting new digital comedy show that is currently being livestreamed out to on-line audiences.

Funded by Arts Council England, the project, "In the Leek Midwinter" began in December 2020, where the company performed outdoor carol singing to bring some much-needed festive joy to the people of Leek.

The company are feeling extremely fortunate about the project being able to go ahead during the pandemic. Writer/Director Patrick has written much of the show based on recent events that did actually happen recently, including an actor getting stuck in flooding (they found themselves gently floating down a random B road in Cambridgeshire en route to a carol singing job).

The show also draws on the true fact that the project was originally intended to be a Christmas show, and that when all planning took place,

Leek was in Tier 1 and in a position to be able to hold socially distanced indoor events.

That said, the company are excited to be streaming the show, and they are using innovative ways of staging the production to create close-up, mid and wide shots that would normally be created by the cameras.

The show is being livestreamed directly from the Foxlowe Arts Centre, following the glorious refurbishment of our Bromfield Room performance space.

The production has been written and directed by award-winning writer/director Patrick McConnell and performers are Lynne Payne, Sophie Toland and Declan Wilson.

The remaining live stream performance dates of In the Leek Midwinter are February 19 to 21, and 26 to 28.

Event link can be found at www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/in-the-leek-midwinter-tickets-138135181045.

For further information go online to www.rottenparkroad.com.

Banding together to help families

A group of Leek businesses recently clubbed together to raise money and gift donations for a local appeal for families struggling financially after a particularly difficult year.

Mark Brammar, Dave Swarbrook and Cathy Bower, from the Foxlowe Arts Centre Creative Hub, coordinated the appeal along with the Fox & Crow Gallery. The gifts were donated to an annual appeal at Haregate Community Centre, from where they will be distributed.

As well as gift donations, over £500 cash was raised which was

used to purchase gifts in Leek. Several independent retailers offered generous discounts to make the money stretch even further and businesses including The Foxlowe Café, Bibelot and Duck Feathers hair salon also donated gift vouchers. Laura Cottingham, manager at Haregate Community Centre said: "We have contact through the centre with many families who are barely managing financially and were also placed under even more pressure with the expense of



Christmas.

"We collect gifts for children and young adults each year so that no one feels left out at Christmas.

"The concerted effort from all the people at the Foxlowe added around 250 presents to our total and we are incredibly grateful to everyone involved who helped make Christmas special for so many local families."

Keeping you in touch by email

As well as producing our Foxlowe Newsletter, and also updating our website and social media pages, we have a number of coordinators and teams across the Foxlowe family who organise different aspects of entertainment and have their own emailing list to who they send out updates and news from their area of entertainment. If you would like to be added to

their emailing list, please let us know, and we will pass your email addresses on to the relevant team(s). The different entertainment areas are: *Comedy, Film, Gallery, Music, Talks, and Theatre.* Please email us with your name, and which entertainment area(s) you would like to be kept informed about, at supporters@foxloweartscentre.org.uk.



New ventures available

As the years have progressed with the community running the Foxlowe Arts Centre, more and more areas of the beautiful Georgian building are being used for a variety of creative purposes. After almost a decade, the majority of spaces in the Foxlowe are now (when Government restrictions allow) either offering a host of hospitality and entertainment for the public to enjoy, or they are occupied by creative businesses – all contributing to the community arts ethos of the Foxlowe. The trustees are now looking at utilising both the cellars and also the small but deco-

orative conservatory. Foxlowe trust chairman Chris Thompson explained: “We are potentially looking to work with a partner organisation/individual to develop plant sales in the conservatory and we are also looking at developing part of the cellars. One idea is to possibly have a pottery studio down there, but we would love to hear of any other ideas about what they could be used for. “If anyone would like to discuss either of these new possible ventures, please email us at hello@foxloweartscentre.org.uk or people can call me direct on 07793 711844.”

Pledges most welcome

We have had a few enquiries about how people can support our arts centre, not just during these surreal times, but in general. One of those ways is to become one of our much-valued pledgers, without whom the Foxlowe Arts Centre would just not be what it is today. Foxlowe chairman Chris Thompson said: “With no regular grants and not being able to open at the moment, we rely even more so now on our much-valued pledgers as well as the income from Creative Hub rentals. “We would most certainly welcome any new pledgers to come on board and help us keep the Foxlowe alive. “For the price of a cup of coffee a

week you can ensure the Foxlowe Arts Centre will survive.” Most pledgers donate a regular contribution as little as £2.50 a week, which provides much valued financial support for the upkeep of the Georgian arts centre building and development of our arts programme. For further information and to download a Pledgers Form, go online to <https://foxloweartscentre.org.uk/how-to-support-us>. If you are perhaps unable to open the online form, and would like a Pledger Form posted out to you, email us at supporters@foxloweartscentre.org.uk.

Garden News

ALISON McCREA, Foxlowe Garden co-ordinator, reports on the latest greenfingereed developments.

And with one almighty leap we were free! Ah well, we can dream but in reality things are beginning to look up, although it still seems too early to make definite plans. Meanwhile the plants are all ignoring Covid and many are pushing their metaphorical heads above the parapet. Spring is such an optimistic time of year; how can we fail to join them in spirit? Although our regular February and March Seed Shares won't be going ahead, we can have a rethink for 2021 and maybe do things differently.

During the dormant season, the Foxlowe gardeners have been working with the Nature group at Moorlands Climate Action (MCA), to develop a climate-friendly market stall in Leek planned for one Saturday a month. This will be launched initially to provide the means for climate-friendly gardening, including green manure and cover crop seeds to protect soils from being left bare, along with guidance on using them. We'll also have several types of peat-free compost for people to try out and a variety of seedlings for sale, brought on by MCA members and Foxlowe supporters. We had hoped to start in March but expect it will now be April at the earliest. Nevertheless, we anticipate a fruitful collaboration, which may compensate for being unable to do seed shares.

The planned dragonfly sculp-



ture is also still in its dormant phase. Nevertheless we've recently seen heartening signs of movement. Fundraising is beginning to move again and, thanks to several very generous recent donations, we've virtually reached the halfway mark, helped by planned changes in the design that have brought the overall cost down to £820. With reopening and the return of garden play, we're optimistic that the remainder will be raised quite quickly.

Another disappointment among the many last year was the cancellation of Hûg, Foxlowe's Green Festival, planned to host all sorts of stalls and activities, both inside and out, to promote green living. This was being organised by MCA's Events group, with all profits going to insulate our lovely Foxlowe building. In other words, the plan was to give it big green hug with a nod to Danish 'hygge'. The good news is that the organising team are dusting down their plans, contacting previously booked participants and keeping our fingers crossed for the provisional new date in late June to be Covid-resistant.

If you would like to become involved with the garden, please contact Alison Mc-Crea by email at alison_mcc@btinternet.com or e-mail volunteers @foxloweartscentre.org.uk.

Work in progress



Even though the Foxlowe is currently closed, there's still much (socially distanced) work going on to enhance and improve the arts centre. One of the many latest projects has been to redecorate and make improvements to the stairwell which is used by the business folk who hire rooms in the top floor Creative Hub. Here's a picture of the work in progress.

Entertainment still on holdfor now



Events and activities at the Foxlowe Arts Centre are still yet to make a comeback due to the current Government guidelines surrounding the nations ongoing battle with coronavirus. However, there's still lots of hard work going on behind the scenes to ensure that live entertainment will be back in our newly-refurbished function room – once Government restrictions allow.

Music and comedy coordinator, and Foxlowe trustee, Andy Norton said: "As soon as (Covid-19 Government) restrictions are lifted and we are able to put on socially distant shows, we have our monthly comedy show to confirm and a few music shows, which will get announced very quickly when this happens. Andy further explained that some gigs have already been rescheduled: "The date for John Otway's gig is looking likely to be next year, while Simon Evans' March date is also moving to later in the year or early next year. "Bob Log is moving to February or March next year; while Mik Artistik's gig is moving to Saturday, November 27 this year. "Ian McNabb has set

a new date for Friday, February 22, 2022.

"Meanwhile, Limehouse Lizzy is scheduled for Friday, November 12 this year; and Henge has rescheduled again, this time for Sunday, October 17."

Andy added: "We also have some of the comedy acts we had lined up, currently rescheduling to still come to the Foxlowe."

For any refunds on tickets for events which have not taken place at the Foxlowe, due to the coronavirus, please email address hello@foxloweartscentre.org.uk. For further information, and to see up to date news on music and comedy gigs at the Foxlowe Arts Centre, go online to www.foxloweartscentre.org.uk.

Get creative with dragons

Leek's historic connections to mythical dragons are being celebrated in a competition for budding artists.

The Moorlands town has long been associated with the fire-breathing creatures through old street names and locations. These include Dragon Street (now Picton Street), Dragon's Field (the area around modern-day Queen Street and Regent Street); and Dragon Land - the area behind the Green Dragon pub and running through to West Street and Westwood Road Recreation Ground (where our chairman Chris Thompson is pictured here). Now, the team at Foxlowe Arts Centre are inviting local residents of all ages to draw or paint a dragon for an exhibition to be staged at the centre as soon as lockdown restrictions are lifted. Chris Thompson, chairman of the Foxlowe trustees, said: "The cur-

rent lockdown seems to be hitting people even harder than the previous ones and we wanted to do something to lift everyone's spirits.

"Recently, some of our volunteers have uncovered old documents, including house leases and indentures, with references to places in the town which used to have the word 'dragon' included in their names.

"We want to celebrate those links with an exhibition of paintings and drawings of dragons.

"We'll organise some prizes for the best ones and we hope to choose an overall winner whose design could feature on a large flag or banner to be displayed outside the arts centre."

The Foxlowe's Paint Or Draw Your Dragon competition is open to anyone living in or around the Leek area. Entries - which cannot be returned - should be on a sheet



of A4 paper with details of the artist's name and phone number on the back.

Entries from artists aged 15 and below should also include their age.

To submit your dragon artwork to the exhibition, simply roll it up and push it through the letterbox in the front door of the Foxlowe Arts Centre.

Alternatively, put your artwork in an A4 envelope and either push it through the letterbox or send it through the post.

All entries will be displayed in the exhibition and winners will be announced towards the end of March.

Foxlowe Arts Centre Co-ordinators

All co-ordinators are volunteers. Each has a number of volunteers helping with work in their area. Volunteers are always welcome at the Foxlowe Arts Centre. However much time you are able to offer, your help will be most welcome. Whatever your skills there will be a task to match! Please contact Volunteers' co-ordinator Marion Fenton on 07974 063674 or email volunteers@foxloweartscentre.org.uk

Building Maintenance

Cliff Deighton - 07789 362179

Exhibitions: Gallery

Charles Walker - 07708 421574

Cafe Gallery

Georgia Hamilton-Smith - 07715 338099
Clare Mellor - 07814 773340

Films

Maureen Wiskin - 01538 385799

Gardens

Alison McCrea - 07753 172564

GatewaySHED

Cliff Deighton - 07789 362179

Health & Safety

David Barnes - 01538 388478

Marketing

Marc Briand - 07799 175909

Music & Theatre

Andy Norton - 07974 063674

Talks

Cathryn Walton - 01538 388429

Volunteers

Marion Fenton - 07938 226469

Web Site

Alison McCrea - 07753 172564

Minutes of the meetings of the trustees, copies of the trust's annual accounts and past issues of ST13 are available for reading on site in the box files in the first floor vestibule next to the William Morris Room.

Foxlowe Cafe & Catering for Private Functions

Welcoming and relaxed ambience Monday to Saturday: 10am-4pm and every first Sunday of the month



Good selection of vegetarian meals and daily meat option. We cater for all kinds of private parties (all subject to Covid-19 Government guidelines). Contact; Centre Manager, Vicki Heath: 01538 386112.



Foxlowe trustees gratefully acknowledge the financial assistance of Leek Town Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Architectural Heritage Fund, Leek Lands Trust, County Councillor Charlotte Atkins and the Moorlands Partnership Board.

The Foxlowe Arts Centre is a Limited Company by Guarantee: 0775732 and a Registered Charity: 1144382.

Trustees: Chris Thompson (chair), Belinda Hargreaves (secretary), Andy Norton (treasurer), Dave Bell, Marc Briand, Colin Broome, Peter Kent-Baguley and Claire Parton.

This newsletter is published by the Foxlowe Arts Centre Ltd, Market Place, Leek. ST13 6AD.

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Printed by HCM Printers, Strangman Street, Leek. 01538 387275.