

# **SBAR Annual General Meeting**

**12<sup>th</sup> December 2024**

## **Chair's Report.**

Our AGMs are normally held in the period July to September, so this year's, as last year's, is rather late. The hope we had last year of finding additional trustees during the Autumn has not materialised. The AGM is actually a review of the previous year, so 2023 in this case, so this report will start with a look at 2023 but, as in previous years, will also bring matters up to date.

Total income in 2023 dropped slightly by comparison with 2022. Lettings in 2023 did not recover to pre-pandemic levels and the Ukrainian Hub ceased to operate regularly as the previous attendees became more integrated into British society. The Produce Market, which had restarted in 2022, with fewer participants than pre-pandemic, also dropped as stall-holders struggled to re-establish their businesses. The Cafe, however, recorded a big increase in income under paid management but, unfortunately, the costs outran this revenue and paid management was discontinued from June 2023. The continuing regular hires in the year were Table Tennis, Iyengar Yoga, women's fitness, ballet, Music Memory Cafe for people with Dementia, Pilates, Gentle Active Games and Parish Council meetings. Other hires included 2 school concerts, a wake, a wedding reception and birthday parties. We would normally supplement these hires with our own Events, but we found it increasingly difficult to find volunteers to help us present these. One exception was our very successful Art and Craft fair in the run-up to Christmas. These are all good examples of the types of demand for and use of the Hall and some hires also use the Cafe and our catering service. The 100 Club Lottery continued, as in previous years, to be an important contributor to income.

Exhibit 1 shows the financial result for 2023. Income dropped by 9% but that was because Development Fund receipts in the previous year inflated income. The big problem was the 34% increase in expenses, excluding mortgage costs. The biggest rises were in Utilities and Insurance. As mentioned before, because of the increase in Cafe costs, which rose by far more than Cafe income, we stopped paid management and reduced opening times in light of the number of volunteers available and low demand. Yet again there were mortgage rate increases throughout the year, which put up mortgage interest costs by no less than 48%. All this had a dramatic effect on our bank balance, which started the year at £6,853 but dipped below £1,000 in August, compared to our goal of having a minimum bank balance of £5,000. The Charity Bank came to our aid, as they had done during Covid, by giving us a capital repayment holiday for 6 months from September 2023 to February 2024. By dint of very hard work during Autumn 2023, the bank balance had recovered to £2,845 by the end of the year. Nevertheless the final surplus showed a very dramatic drop of 95% from £10,455 in 2022 to just £567 in 2023. As we said in our Trustees Annual Report to the Charity Commission, our principal achievement in 2023 was to have survived.

Now to bring you up to date. We have benefited from the appointment of Richard Sharp as a Trustee. He has created a new website ([stbriavels-ar.co.uk](http://stbriavels-ar.co.uk)) with an on-line booking system, which has at last made the diary visible again to potential hirers and has for the first time enabled them to book directly themselves. He has also helped with repairs and other practical matters which have saved us money. We have also continued to work very hard to re-build the business. Our pro-bono accountant, Mark Fenwick, creates accounts for us every quarter, so the latest figures are for the 9 months to September 30<sup>th</sup>, which are shown in Exhibit 2. Lettings were up by 4% compared to the same period in 2023, the Produce Market has recovered its mojo, rising by no less than 60% and very well-attended, Events are 8% ahead, the popular Quiz Nights with food being especially profitable, and takings at the bar are up by 76%. The operation of the Tuesday afternoon Cafe was suspended in June through lack of demand, though it remains open for organised groups on a self-serve basis. The village cannot support 3 cafes and we had to direct our efforts to more profitable catering in support of both Events and some private hires. Overall, income in the first 9 months of this year was 5% down on 2023, entirely due to the reduction in the Cafe operation. At the same time we benefited from a huge drop in expenses, not only from reduced Cafe costs but also lower Utilities costs. All this has gradually rebuilt the cash balance which, at 30<sup>th</sup> September, stood at £5,346. The surplus, which had been just £567 for the 12 months of 2023, stands at £3,338 for the first 9 months of this year. We have recently had a further boost from the Christmas Fayre, in which we changed our focus somewhat from the previously-named Art and Craft Fair, and from another very good Quiz Night.

There is, however, one major problem: we do not have enough volunteers. Before the pandemic we had over 30 regular volunteers; now we have just 6. We delivered leaflets to most of the village in early Autumn, which yielded 21 replies offering ideas for Events but with no offers of volunteering. The trustees have worked incredibly hard to keep the place afloat. The catering team, led by Jane Duggan and myself, have been particularly stretched, sourcing food and cooking and serving meals, and we are simply not able to continue at the level of intensity we have experienced this year. Another example is the load borne by John Hurley: he is managing bookings and liaising with hirers; he also manages the Hall, including opening up and identifying maintenance issues and arranging resolution. He is also the Fire Officer, conducting weekly checks on associated safety equipment. In addition, he is Health and Safety Officer and Secretary to the Board of Trustees. As a result he almost lives here; there are rumours he has a bed somewhere on the premises. It is a remarkable effort for which we are very grateful. He is committed to keeping the Hall going, but has decided not to seek re-election as a Trustee in order to dramatise the unsustainable level of work he is currently undertaking. He is continuing as a volunteer but we obviously need volunteers to take on some of this work.

So the need for volunteers covers help with the following:

1. Supporting the catering team at events and at hires asking for catering;
2. Providing support at Events, such as managing the door and stewarding in the hall;
3. Organising an Events Group to set up a programme of events. The hire of the hall by groups and individuals does not generate enough income to cover the cost of running the Assembly Rooms; a programme of events is very important. The 4 or 5 Quiz Nights a year we currently run boost funds very well but we need more events in order to generate a surplus. Chairing an Events Group does not necessarily mean managing each event but would mean ensuring that one member of the group does manage each event, using a check-list we already have; this is probably the one most significant need we have;
4. Becoming a trustee; we would like the body of trustees to include the major functions of the business. For example, the chair of the Events Group ideally would become a trustee. We also need someone to take over managing bookings and a Secretary, to minute meetings and check incoming mail and emails and action as required.
5. Offering pro-bono help in trades such as plumbing, electrical systems and Hall maintenance.

We have two more requests.

Firstly, we need to improve our communication with the community, especially about Events you might attend. We do not currently have a marketing database, so there is a sheet coming round which asks if you are willing to be on our database. It would really help us if you would be willing to do that.

Secondly, we have several 100 Club Lottery balls not taken at the moment, so please subscribe for a ball or two if you can: the cost is £60 per ball for 12 months.

I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of the Board to offer my sincere thanks to the volunteers and donors whose support has been invaluable, and to the regular hirers and members of the public who have continued to use the premises throughout and support the Assembly Rooms as a community focal point.

Finally, may I offer my personal thanks to my fellow trustees for all their hard work and to Lesley Bartholomew for her crucial work on maintaining the accounts and assistance with Quiz Nights. The Board is of course committed to the continuation of the Assembly Rooms, but needs help to do so.