

Weedon Parish Council

Clerk to the Council Mrs Ruth Millard

Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held in the Old Schoolroom on Tuesday 23 May 2023 at 7.30pm

Present: Joanna Rose, Catherine Rodnight, Wendy Kett, Sarah Gibbs, Judy Nagele, Mike Stevens

Acting Chair and Minutes Secretary: Joanna Rose

1. **Receive Apologies:** Colin Rose, Ruth Millard

2. **Minutes of the Annual Parish Meeting held on 24 May 2022**

The minutes of 24 May 2022 were agreed and signed. The signed version would be uploaded to the Weedon website to replace the draft.

3. **To receive a report from Chair of the Weedon Parish Council**

Chair of Weedon PC Cllr Joanna Rose presented the report from the Parish Council.

4. **To receive reports from other Weedon village organisations**

Reports were given by:

- Weedon Village Association – Catherine Rodnight, Chair
- Charities (Dr John Bridle's & Lord Fortescue's) – Wendy Kett, Clerk
- Tuesday Club – Judy Nagele, Chair
- Churches (Weedon Methodist Chapel & St Mary's Church Hardwick) – Sarah Gibbs, Head Steward
- Weedon Wildlife Group (Wild Weedon) – Mike Stevens, Chair
- Golf Society – presented by Judy Nagele (prepared by Colin Rose, Chair)
- Old Schoolroom – Joanna Rose, Chair of Trustees

Copies of reports are appended to these Minutes.

5. **Public Open Forum**

No issues raised.

6. **To agree the date of next meeting.** Tuesday 28 May 2024 to be held in the Old Schoolroom

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm.

Chair's Signature

Date.....

Weedon Annual Parish Meeting 2023

23rd May 2023

Report by Joanna Rose on the Parish Council April 2022 to March 2023

As with most public bodies, the Parish Council financial year runs from April to March. This is a report on the financial year April 2022 to March 2023.

Constitution and Meetings

In the year to March 23, six regular scheduled general meetings (every other month) plus several planning meetings were held in the Old Schoolroom.

The council continues at its full strength of 7 councillors, with six elected in May 2021 (for 4 years) and one more co-opted in November 21.

The Council continues to be supported by our experienced and efficient Clerk and Responsible Financial Officer Ruth Millard, who has been employed by Weedon PC since 2013.

The main part of Weedon Parish Council's work is looking after the public areas of the village for the community

1. The Park and Play Area

The Park is owned by the Parish Council. We arranged for grass cutting, hedge pruning, path weedkilling, lawn improvement treatment, inspection and maintenance of the play equipment and emptying of the litter bin. To supplement the annual inspection by ROSPA, we are grateful to volunteers John and Frances Smith for checking the Park every week in the summer, as well as carrying out cleaning and re-coating to benches and seats.

The Park play equipment continues to be robust, requiring only minor repairs to bring it into compliance with the ROSPA recommendations. Works were carried out checking chains, tightening bolts and other fittings, replacing strimmer guards around the base of several posts, sanding some of the timber surfaces of the equipment and the fence. The PC was grateful to Gerry Millard for carrying out these repairs professionally at a competitive rate in a timely manner.

A more costly repair was for one of the large posts supporting the double pedestrian and vehicle gate, which had rotted. It was dug out and replaced, and an improved self-closing mechanism fitted by a local fencing contractor.

At Christmas, the PC again purchased a tree, which was placed on the Park. The previously purchased fairy lights were used again to great effect.

2. Weedon Graveyard and War Memorial

The PC manages the graveyard under a 99-year lease. We arranged for the maintenance of the grounds and handled the administration for new graves and memorials and plot reservations.

We were grateful to Paul Winrow, who continued his volunteer work checking the graveyard on a regular basis and carrying out clearing and tidying around the graves. A lightning grounds blitz was also organised for May last year, which was the icing on the cake as far as the Best Kept Village judges were concerned.

In January, works became necessary to the beautiful copper beech tree near the War Memorial, due to overhanging of the road, the memorial and the neighbouring Abbey Cottage. It's under a Tree Protection Order, so specific permission was required. The job was carried out most professionally by South Bucks Tree Surgeons.

3. Other public spaces

We had the grass cut and weeds controlled around the pond and on the village green triangle. Steve and Jayne Richards continued to care for and feed the ducks with grain paid for by the PC. The High Street Pump trough and the barrel on the Triangle were beautifully planted and maintained by Clare Macdonald (triangle), and Christine and Nic Nicolay (pump).

In September, the water level of the pond was at its lowest for some time. This provided the opportunity for the 10-yearly task of dredging the pond floor to remove all the duck-poo debris and take the base back to the clay. George Cheshire brought in a digger and dumper truck, and helped and refreshed by the Stockaway residents, more than 20 truck-loads of manure were removed to an arable field offered by Paul Gregory a few hundred metres to the south. A win-win situation – and the pond has refilled beautifully since.

A very important public facility to keep the village clean and safe is the provision of dog bins. The PC replaced the dog bin at the Fortescue track, which had been damaged beyond repair, and arranged for a new one by the entry track to Kirby's Field on Aston Abbots Road. There are now 3 dog bins spaced through the village, and the PC pays for them to be emptied regularly.

4. Footpaths

The Council monitors footpaths to ensure landowners keep them clear and undertakes clearance itself on Footpath 12 from New Road to Lilies wood.

The stiles on the main village walk have now all been replaced by more accessible pedestrian gates. In February, two more stiles on one of the outer footpaths to the south of the village were removed and aluminium kissing gates installed. The PC applied for a grant from the Wing and Ivinghoe Community Board and was awarded the full cost of £500 for each.

5. Streetlights

These are owned and maintained by the Parish Council, and the PC pays for the electricity to power them. The heritage-style LED lights have reduced electricity usage and cost, and we are fortunate to be in a fixed-price 3-year contract, so that we have been insulated from the worst of the electricity price rises so far.

6. Speed control

Community Speedwatch sessions are in full swing. During school term times, we try to hold two one-hour sessions on separate weekdays – one early morning and one late afternoon. It seems that with the opening of various relief roads elsewhere round Aylesbury, speeding offenders have reduced somewhat, but a typical hour-long session often results in 10-15 offenders, who all receive letters from the police. We currently have 12 trained volunteers, but more are always welcome.

We are going to be working with the new Bucks Highways contractor to identify other speed control measures which would be permitted by Highways legislation, and affordable for Weedon.

While the MVAS signs are still being rotated around the 6 approved sites in the village, we are seriously investigating upgrading the signs to solar-powered smiley-face versions, which are proved to have even more impact and success in reducing speeds.

7. Highways

We continued our Devolved Services contract from Buckinghamshire Council, for which we receive a grant. Weedon PC arranges grass verge cutting within the 30mph limit, road and pavement weedkilling, sign cleaning, and monitoring of hedges bordering roads. These works are carried out for us by a local contractor.

Wildflower verges. It can take up to 5 years for wildflower meadows to establish fully, but there are encouraging signs of many native wildflowers and grasses, plus many more bees, butterflies and other wildlife.

The PC appointed new horticultural contractors for the verges, the Park and chapel grounds last year, and we were very pleased with their work.

8. Noticeboards, Newsletters and Website

The village website at www.weedonbucks.org.uk was maintained by the PC and hosted locally. Community organisations have access to their site areas and can update them.

Email, which was widely used to communicate with Weedon residents during the pandemic, has continued to be important. The Parish Magazine is now delivered digitally to the majority of households, but those not on email are provided with printed copies.

The Parish Council newsletter/update had not been published during covid. So, in September we produced a bumper edition, reporting on key achievements for the last 3 years. This year we are back on track for an annual update.

Best Kept Village

We won the Gurney Cup in 2022 for villages of up to 500 inhabitants! Everyone pulled their weight to bring off that gratifying result. We've entered again this year and are up against all the category winners from 2022. But there was a great turnout for the annual village clean-up on the Coronation Bank Holiday Monday, so the village is definitely getting behind our entry again.

Platinum Jubilee

The Parish Council has the power to spend some of its budget on items which are not otherwise allowed for in local government legislation. In 2022, we decided to make a grant of £500 towards the Platinum Jubilee celebrations for Queen Elizabeth II in Weedon. The joint organising committee of Weedon Village Association and Weedon Old Schoolroom put on a tremendous free street party with these funds, and did the village and the late monarch proud.

Another important element of the parish council's work is in liaising with outside organisations

Planning (Buckinghamshire Council)

The Parish Council is consulted on every planning application for building in Weedon. We can respond with No Objection, Support, Comment or Objection. We consider our response to every application at a public meeting. We also monitor tree works applications in the Conservation Area.

The Council was delighted to welcome a decision on appeal that allowed a new house on half of the Aston Abbotts Road gap land, while ensuring the PC gained control of the remaining gap field, which will be re-wilded. The site has been cleared, the massive conifers along the rear fence removed completely, and the village is rewarded with the return of stunning public views from the road across the Area of Attractive Landscape towards the Chiltern Hills. The Council's control of the remaining gap will ensure these views are retained forever, while the land will be managed as a bio-diverse wildlife haven which can never be built on.

Highways (Buckinghamshire Council)

We continue to liaise with Buckinghamshire Council, who have responsibility for all the roads, footways and footpaths in the county, to try to speed up repairs and resurfacing. Their new highways contractor came into place in April 2023 and we are hopeful of better response times for reported issues.

Other Organisations

Councillors attended meetings of the Wing and Ivinghoe Community Board, a forum set up by Buckinghamshire Council to bring together parish and Buckinghamshire councillors and other local stakeholders in one relatively informal quarterly session. This forum helps us stay informed and linked into projects in the wider local area. And they gave us a grant for the new footpath gates!

Financial and Administrative

The accounts for the year ending 31 March 2022 were audited and submitted last summer. The 2023 accounts have been finalised and will be submitted for audit by the end of June.

The PC's main income comes from the parish precept of £13,800, funded by residents' Council Tax. Weedon residents have paid the same amount of village Council Tax for the last 12 years, and we haven't needed to increase the figure for 23-24! We have maintained services and covered our routine expenditure with the precept and budgeted income grants. But the exceptional works to the pond and the copper beech tree, plus two new dog bins and the Jubilee grant were paid for from reserves.

We're still carrying forward a prudent £18,300 to next year.

Weedon Parish Council has played its part in a very pleasing year for the village, with noted highlights being the Jubilee, winning the Best Kept Village competition and the long-hoped-for return of the village gap. I'd like to thank sincerely all my fellow-councillors, the clerk, our contractors and volunteers, the other village organisations and certain key individual residents for making all of that happen.

Weedon Village Association Annual Report 2023

Review of the year January 2022 to January 2023

Good evening. We represent the village association which organise events throughout the year making a profit where we can and re investing it into the village

I'm Catherine, This is Wendy our Treasurer and this lot are on the committee, Sally Jones, Lizzy Birks, Lottie Holmes, Mandie Fairhurst (not able to be here) , Helen McIntyre (also gave apologies) and Penny Stevens

We have had a year that has returned to a more normal level of activity but we will be introducing the Ball back into our agenda for 2024.

We did the clear up at the beginning of May 2022. We are always grateful to the village for the amount of people who turn up to this event as it makes it so much easier. Thank you to Joanna for providing the pickers and bags and organising the collection of the rubbish.

Open gardens last year was a very successful event very well organised by Lizzy and it was so lovely to have some gardens open that we wouldn't normally be able to see. Great tea – thank you to the committee for their baking skills and we raised a good sum of money which Wendy will go into shortly.

The Birks very kindly hosted a Barn dance in their marquee which we aimed at families, and we had a great evening. Lucky with the weather and the venue made it. Very ably run by Mike Stevens and he is a great caller. Thank you so much to him and to Lizzy and Chris as it was lovely to run another type of event in a different way.

The horticultural show is always a well attended village event, although the entries were down a bit last year. Thank you to Clare for the organisation and it made a profit and there were some excellent entries in all categories.

The Jazz BBQ was as always a great way to end the summer. David and his band are great and we are always really lucky with the weather. The BBQ helpers stepped up as well and it was a lovely event.

There was a quiz in November with Bob Gregory and it was a great evening in the schoolroom. Usual winners of course, but it doesn't seem to matter. The committee did a great job of providing dinner instead of the usual fish and chips and it is in the calendar again for this year.

The childrens parties were very well organised by Penny in spite of her knee being out of action. Her daughter provided excellent entertainment and it went really well. Thank you to Penny.

January 2022 we did the meals on wheels but January 2023 we were able to run the over 65 dinner as we always have. It is always a fun event with entertainment provided by a contact of Sarah Gibbs – she was great and getting the audience going with singing and playing the piano.

I wanted to say a big thank you to the committee who are all going to be standing again. We all seem to dip in and out depending on our commitments and without them it wouldn't be the Committee it is. Thank you also to all of you for supporting our events. We are always open to new ideas so please let any one of us know if you would like to see a particular event this year.

Dr. John Bridle's & Lord Fortescue's Charities 2022

Dr John Bridle's Charity provides grants to applicants living in the Ecclesiastical Parish of Hardwick, which covers Weedon, Hardwick and the south side of Bushmead Road, Whitchurch. Grants are either for people in need or for those in education, and are not means tested. Lord Fortescue's Charity provides grants to residents of Weedon who are in need and can also give grants for the general benefit of the residents of the village.

Dr John Bridle's Charity

About half the income of the charity comes from agricultural rents and half from investments. An increase in investment income resulted in a 5.5% increase in total income.

During 2022 grants totalling £4,750 were awarded of which £500 was given to Whitchurch School to help towards the cost of new phonics books. Money was also given to 21 residents of Weedon & Hardwick (up from 17 in 2021), 9 as Educational grants and 12 as Need grants. There was a marked increase in the number of Need applications, reflecting the difficulties people are having with the increased cost of living. New rules governing the allocation of funds, approved by the Charity Commission in 2021, enabled a higher proportion of the available funds to be given to those in need.

Lord Fortescue's Charity

Over 80% of the income of the charity comes from agricultural rents with the remainder from investments. Income for the year was almost the same as for the previous year.

In 2022 Need grants totalling £2,450 were made to 9 residents of Weedon. This charity also saw an increase in the number of Need applications.

Leaflets for both charities were printed and delivered to all households in their respective areas of eligibility. Each leaflet provides details of the sort of expenditure for which the charity can provide assistance and includes an application form. Application forms and information about both charities is also available on Weedon village website www.weedonbucks.org.uk and for Dr John Bridle's charity on Hardwick Village Association website www.hardwick-village.co.uk

TUESDAY CHURCH

We started our 47th year in April 2022 with 34 loyal members and were pleased when non-members could join us for a variety of interesting talks.

The membership and visitor fee has remained the same since just before the Covid outbreak. The charge for coffee and the raffle has been the same since 2007.

The ten talks over the year covered subjects which hopefully entertained and informed our audience, including "The Countryside in Summer" and "The Wildlife of Madagascar" which were illustrated with brilliant photographs. "Winston Churchill's Toyshop" and "The Duke of Windsor and The Nazis" were both seriously thought provoking subjects. A highlight was a talk on "600 years of Family life in Wotton" by a descendant of the Seamons family.

We held a Coffee Morning in August in aid of Florence Nightingale Hospice and thanks to the generosity of all those who attended and supported the event we raised £400.

"Zee Canto" provided our Christmas entertainment which was followed by light refreshments.

We feel we have recovered well in difficult circumstances since the Covid lockdown. Sadly we have lost a few members for various reasons who are much missed but we do have new members who are most welcome.

We strive to make our evening meetings friendly and welcoming and provide activities for the enjoyment of the members and visitors. The continued support from the residents of Weedon and Hardwick is much appreciated.

We have a full and varied programme going forward from here which we hope will be of interest to everyone.

Report relating to Weedon Methodist Chapel for the Annual Parish Meeting 23rd May 2023

The year to end March 2023 has picked up at the Methodist Chapel following a quiet period during the Covid pandemic.

The local ecumenical partnership between the Methodists at the Chapel and the Anglican St Mary's in Hardwick is governed by a joint committee which oversees all aspects of church services, buildings, policies, finances and events. It meets every two months and there were 6 meetings during the year.

Sarah Gibbs is Chapel Steward and maintains the links with the Aylesbury Methodist Circuit for the planning of all church services and Methodist policies such as safeguarding and data protection. She attends the regular Circuit meetings. Facilities and maintenance of the Chapel are carried out by Paul Winrow, and Graham Delaney to whom the committee is very grateful.

The Chapel funds had recovered slightly over the year and are now back to a normal level, but this has largely been due to the Methodist Circuit agreeing to accept a reduced Circuit Share (the contribution towards Ministerial costs. The Chapel receives most of its income from planned giving, which is being reviewed at the moment, and from various donations. Other receipts add to the churches consolidated funds and have been bolstered by joint fundraising activities with St Mary's including a couple of concerts.

The monthly family services at the Chapel on the second Sunday of the month led by ministers from the Methodist Circuit have been pretty well attended and there was a special Christingle service in December. In addition we held a very successful live nativity from the Chapel down to the Fortescue Field (even on a cold and rainy evening in December). Singing and refreshments kept everybody going – thanks to all involved, mainly to Saskia Welman for helping to organise, and to the Five Elms pub for their support.

The November remembrance event also took place in the Chapel grounds and we were lucky enough to have local resident Jonathon Freeman-Attwood along to play the last Post and Reveille for us. Several funerals have taken place but there were no weddings or baptisms at the Chapel over the period.

Outreach has continued from the Chapel with regular foodbank collections organised in favour of the Aylesbury Vineyard Storehouse, a Christian body which serves the Aylesbury area. These collections have been very well supported by the village and are gratefully received by the Vineyard.

The Chapel building is in need of repair and redecoration. We await the visit of the Circuit architect to assess the movement in the roof so that we can initiate works to restore it and make it watertight. Once that has occurred, we should be in a position to give the interior a revamp. We are investigating ways of using it for purposes other than just the services and what updates the building will need to accommodate any new activities there.

Many thanks to John Jones for cleaning the inside of the very beautiful windows, and to Nicolette Habgood and Ralph Followell for their contributions and for getting the outside of the windows cleaned as well.

Sarah Gibbs
Chapel Steward
05 May 2023

Weedon Wildlife Group – Report to Parish Meeting – May 2023

This Group was formed early in 2020 following a combined initiative by the Parish Council and BBOWT (Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust). Although named after Weedon village, we are also recognised by Hardwick as their own local wildlife group and we encourage members of both villages to participate in our events. Membership is open to all and there is currently no membership fee. Activities are funded by voluntary donations. This is our third report to the Parish Meeting. We continue to be very active and we are delighted to report that our events are well supported by villagers of all ages.

Since the last Parish Meeting, we have achieved the following:

- Maintained control of our finances – we have just over £1,300 in the bank account and turnover in the last 12 months was around £400.
- Held our second Annual General Meeting during which membership of the committee was confirmed: Mike Stevens (Chair); Sally Jones (Secretary); Wendy Kett (Treasurer); Martin Routledge (Conservation and Survey Officer); Saskia Welman (Social Media and Communications); Penny Stevens (Education and Engagement), Jackie Brett (Hardwick Liaison). Although each committee member has a stated 'role' we operate very much as a team.
- Continued to hold regular committee meetings which are always well attended, lively and convivial.
- Arranged a guided tour with the Oxford Swift City Group in June last year.
- In September 2022 we hosted a presentation and training session by the River Thame Conservation Trust (RTCT) in the Weedon Old Schoolroom. This was part of their Citizen Science initiative to engage local people to assist in monitoring the quality of water flowing towards the River Thame, which includes the brook between Weedon and Hardwick. Around 20 people attended from the surrounding area including several from Weedon. There are 35 testing sites and Wild Weedon has responsibility for regular monitoring of three (Hardwick All; Fleet Marston, Denham, Pitchcott ALL; and Upper Thame ALL). This is an exciting activity providing evidence for RTCT to inform businesses, landowners and water treatment authorities regarding the impact their activities may be having on the waterways forming the river Thame catchment. (The tests cover: Nitrates; Phosphates; Turbidity; Ammonia; Temperature; pH – Acidity)
- Supported the Parish Council in their initiative to re-wild roadside verges around the village.
- Submitted regular articles for the Parish Magazine.
- Continued to encourage use of the moth trap, kindly on loan from BBOWT, enabling villagers to gain an insight into the variety of these fascinating creatures near the bottom of the food chain.
- Collaborated with the Weedon Open Gardens event to highlight wildlife-friendly features incorporated into their designs, with a view to encouraging such features in visitors' own gardens. We will be repeating this liaison this year.
- Held a very successful 'wildlife-friendly' scarecrow competition which resulted in over 20 highly original scarecrows on display around the village.
- Continued to arrange talks, including an excellent presentation by Rhona Bate about bats, which preceded our second AGM in September.
- Published our second Wildlife Calendar, featuring photographs taken in and around Weedon and Hardwick.
- Continued to arrange 'Wildlife Trails' which have attracted participants from all age groups – the most recent was at Easter.
- Purchased and installed protective steel tree guards around the elms we planted in Fortescue field. Sadly, only two of the three saplings planted there have survived but we are delighted that the centrepiece planting of five elms in the field behind the chapel (a contribution to Queen Elizabeth II's Green Canopy initiative) have survived and appear to be doing well - three have reached a height of around a metre and two reaching almost two metres.
- Maintained our website at www.wildweedon.org.uk (120 visitors / 180 sessions in the last year). 29 villagers have 'signed in' to the site, giving them access to the Members' page where a copy of all the presentations made to date can be viewed. The site was set up as a trial on a free 'Wix' platform and

we have now exceeded the available space. As a consequence, we are looking to the next phase of development for the site. It is a good source of information for anyone interested in supporting wildlife, whether new to the subject or more experienced. We aim for it to be accessible for all ages, informative, educational and fun.

- Under the banner of 'Wild Weedon', our social media platforms on Facebook and Instagram attract modest numbers of visitors. Our Facebook page has 89 members and Instagram has 70 Followers.

A couple of on-going activities are now nearing completion:

- We continue to work on the design of our logo which will eventually be used in all our communications
- The design for the Information Board intended for Stockaway pond is virtually complete. This will be submitted to the Parish Council and the immediate neighbours for review in the near future

All in all, a busy and exciting year and we look forward to a growing engagement with villagers of all ages in both Weedon and Hardwick.

Ideas for future projects and original ideas for activities are always welcome!

Mike Stevens

Chair – Weedon Wildlife Group (Wild Weedon)

Weedon Golf Society – Report for Annual Parish Meeting May 2023

The WGS celebrated its 25th anniversary in 2022 and had 27 paying members for the season.

Historically membership has been limited to current and past residents of Weedon but it was agreed by the Committee that membership would be opened up to residents in the surrounding villages in the central and eastern Aylesbury Vale area (e.g. Aston Abbots, Wing, North Marston etc). Currently membership stands at 26 paid up members.

The emphasis of the Society remains very much on the social and fun aspects of golf rather than being overtly competitive and so it caters for players of all ages, abilities, sexes and handicaps.

To encourage new members going forwards, the Committee agreed to introduce three new competitions in 2022; The President's Trophy, The Weedon Shield and The Rose Bowl. These supplemented the four existing trophies; The Men's Championship, The Ladies Championship, The Absent Friends Trophy and The Mike Moore Memorial Trophy.

Additionally:

- The format of the Society's golf fixtures was overhauled in 2022 to include a greater number of individual competitions for the more competitive members whilst retaining team events for the higher handicap members so that hopefully everyone gets the opportunity to win something during the season, and
- The day of the Society's golfing fixtures was changed from Friday to Thursday as securing suitable tee times on Friday's was becoming more problematic given the size of the Society.

Fixtures are normally held on the second Thursday of the month from April to October and in 2022 eight fixtures were held with an average of 15 players per event. For 2023, the season has been extended from March to November with intermediate fixtures during the summer months with a total of 14 events planned.

Although the golf fixture day was changed to Thursday for 2022, the day for the traditional post fixture 'golfing' dinner was retained as Friday. However, it was becoming increasingly unviable to continue holding the dinners in the Old School Room and so the Committee agreed to a proposal for these to be held in a private room at the Unicorn Public House in Cublington for the 2022 season. This venue is again to be used for dinners for the 2023 season.

The annual Weedon Golf Society Christmas Dinner was also held at the Unicorn in Cublington in December 2022 and during this a sum of over £250 was raised in charitable donations for distribution to two local charities, The Florence Nightingale Hospice and The Air Ambulance.

Colin Rose, Chairman, Weedon Golf Society
May 2023

Chair's report WOS for AGM April 23 re year 2022

Weedon Old Schoolroom in 2023 is a cleaner, greener village hall! We have done away with the oil boiler in favour of an electric one, and by buying renewable electricity, our energy use is completely fossil-fuel-free.

LETTINGS

Looking back at January to December 2022, it was a year of steady building back from the enforced closures of the pandemic. We ended the year at almost three-quarters of the lettings income in pre-covid 2019, but not fully up to the £4- to £5000 of our heyday.

And as we all drifted almost straight from covid into the cost of living crisis, we were so grateful to have grant funding from the pandemic in our reserves to help fund the leap into green energy. And to afford the higher price of everything from paper towels to (of course) electricity. We ended 2022 after exceptional spending of over £9,000 still with almost £17,000 in the bank.

In order to attract new hirers, and help established ones make their finances add up, we decided to hold our lettings rates at their pre-pandemic levels for the rest of 2022 after the first four months at three-quarter rates. And of course, we offer free wifi and do not charge extra for heating, unlike some halls.

We have just reluctantly had to raise prices (from April 1st), but we're still extremely competitive in the local area. Fortunately, we don't have any sort of profit motive, and our charitable objective is simply to ensure that a village hall in good repair and with excellent facilities is available to Weedon residents at a reasonable price into the future.

We have a good number of regular hirers, both old and new – although there's always room for more!

THE CAFE

The Schoolroom café on the first Friday of the month has been a resounding success since its inception in September 2005 – over 17 years ago. It's lovely to see residents old and new enjoying coffee and home-made cake at affordable prices in such a relaxed atmosphere. What a great way to contribute to monthly funds for the hall!

EXPENDITURE

This year's relatively high expenditure has been planned and budgeted for, to set us up for many years to come.

- Already mentioned was the investment in the electric boiler. We got rid of the oil boiler, the oil tank, the exhaust flue, the £200 annual boiler maintenance – plus the fumes, noise, smell and potential fire risk. What a huge relief!

Yes, the cleaner electric energy use has been expensive – particularly during the bedding-in period, where we needed to work out the best and most economic settings on the controllers. But it was the right thing to do, and we're happy with the way it's working now.

- As reported at last year's AGM, we finally identified the root cause of the damp on the chimney wall by using a company called Damp Detectives. The work was carried out in June by a trusted local builder and – I know I've said this before, but this time it really seems to be true! – the problem seems to be solved.

- Every year we have routine service visits by specialist contractors to check the fire extinguishers, electrical appliances and the boiler – our last one of those in 2022, hurrah!
- But 2022 was certainly the year for electrics. In addition to all the work related to the new boiler, we had to contend with:
 - The 5-year fixed electrical inspection and remedials
 - A new fuseboard to cope with the 3-phase boiler
 - The annual PAT testing
 - New smoke detectors, replacement emergency light and dimmer switches
 - And not electrics-related, but fairly costly plumbing repairs were needed to the disabled and men's loos.

Other long-planned repair works came to fruition in April:

- Repair of the cottage windows, upstairs and down, carried out by a local joiner for a fraction of the cost of replacement windows, which we had considered
- Full re-staining of the outside of the front doors and noticeboard, plus interior decoration of the chimney wall

ADMIN

Having extended our policies and procedures in 2021, we reviewed each of them in November 2022 and published revised versions on the website. Laminated copies of every document are on display in the smart new racks in the entrance lobby. We have a protocol to review all the policies annually.

At the recommendation of our insurers, and at a very modest cost of £75, we have just completed an insurance revaluation of the hall. Fortunately, the valuation came in only slightly higher than the current insured amount, but we were very pleased to have this confirmed.

TRUSTEES

I'd like to thank the trustees of the Old Schoolroom for all their work during another quite challenging year. Particularly Alan Askew, as Treasurer, and Margaret Askew, Secretary, who carry out their essential roles quietly and efficiently. But everyone plays their part –

Penny Stevens, Judy Nagele, Anne Redstone, Lizzy Birks, Beverley Jones and Shirley Bush

We're grateful to Jill Lynch for continuing to clean the hall each week, for a very reasonable cost.

I've mentioned Shirley Bush in her role as Trustee. But of course, she and husband John are the long-standing and incredibly hard-working unpaid Bookings Secretaries and Building Supervisors.

THE JUBILEE STREET PARTY

The commitment and effort of every Schoolroom trustee – along with the WVA committee, and many others – were to the fore when it came to Weedon's celebrations for Queen Elizabeth's Platinum Jubilee. The hall was the hub and the beating heart of the Street Party, with every table, chair and piece of crockery in use. The setting, the marvellous weather – and so many people's contributions and participation – made it a fitting tribute to a dearly loved monarch, and a great day to remember for the village.

We are so lucky to have such a beautiful and iconic village hall in Weedon, and the trustees feel privileged to work to keep it that way. It was wonderful to see it dressed up to the nines with bunting, flags and flowers for the Jubilee – living up to its central role in Weedon's community. Long may it continue!