

## **HORNCLIFFE MEMORIAL HALL ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2025**

### **CHAIR'S REPORT**

Beginning on a personal note, it has been a privilege to chair Horncliffe Memorial Hall's Committee this year and I would like to thank Mo, its previous Chair, for having created a leadership framework which was so easy to follow, and all my fellow Committee members for trusting and supporting me to do so.

It is a source of pride to be able to say that once again, whilst having financial outlays which will be referenced in the Treasurer's Report, the Hall has continued to go from strength to strength in the range of events and activities provided for the community, and monies raised. This could not happen without the support of the many clubs, groups and independent bodies that utilise it, aiding its fund-raising and bringing new people in to maintain and even refresh its momentum. Thank you to all who put on and/or attend events here, donate, visually enhance, and otherwise help Horncliffe Memorial Hall in word or deed. Picking out a few from the latter categories this year, I would like to mention: Horncliffe in Bloom, Flip and Graham Dixon, June Hope, Maggie Asquith, Enid Thornton, Andy May and Mark Inwood. We welcomed Mark as a Committee member over the summer for a short but beneficial period and were grateful for his positive comments on our work for the community in his leaving message to us. We are pleased that the Committee's entirely voluntary hard work is valued - from that often seen, such as the provision of refreshments and other help for both our own and other groups' events, to the often unseen, of members carrying out their various designated roles behind the scenes.

This year we welcomed Livvy Cawthorn as a new Committee member. Steph Tucker took on Hall bookings responsibilities, as a part of which our Events Calendar underwent a full internet revamp. Mel Jarvis engaged in making sure that Hall policies are fit for purpose and, with Eileen, that the Hall facilities remain safe. Also revamped was our Committee Members' Induction Pack, which we hope will be of benefit to those wishing to join in the future. A process of review linked to this and other, community, conversations, initiated discussion at our meetings about aspects of the Hall's constitution, charity status and our liabilities and I shall return to this a little later in my report.

Committee-led fund-raisers have continued in the form of our increasingly well-attended coffee mornings, the very successful Spring Plant Sale organised by Eileen (with Stephen's help) and combined once again with Flip and Jacquot's excellent Horncliffe Dog show, Open Gardens, a ceramics workshop, and a Cider Talk and Tasting provided by the aforementioned Andy May. We had looked forward to rounding off the year with a Christmas performance by visiting entertainers 'Fool's Gold' next Saturday, but I'm sorry to report that this has had to be cancelled due to a lack of advance bookings. We shall look at our Christmas offering again for next year.

There are few days when the Hall is not in use, a situation which I have discovered via conversations with other Northumberland community members is not always the case in relation to similar premises elsewhere. Our committee also boasts a strong skills and interests base among its members who, as separate individuals outside of it, commit additional time and energies to lots of other ventures in and around the village. I mention this only because I believe it might sometimes be the cause of a 'blurring of lines' on the outside with regard to what is and is not within the remit of the Horncliffe Memorial Hall Committee. I surmise that at least one previous Chairperson, as read in a past Hall Meeting Minutes book, was experiencing something akin to my own concerns in this regard, when he explained that: "the Committee was[is] appointed to administer & maintain the Hall, not to organise all the events". Quoting again, this time from our Governance document: "the general management and control of the Trust Premises and the arrangements for their use ..." are what is vested in the Committee of Management (i.e, the Committee). So, whilst it must be reiterated that the Committee is of course hugely appreciative of the contributions to the Hall of so many interested groups and individuals, I would like to clarify that it is NOT the Committee's role to get involved in wider village matters, be a conduit to the Parish Council unless on matters instigated by the Committee itself, or to take on responsibility for project ideas coming from persons outside of Committee, unless of course we, as separately interested individuals outside of our Committee roles, wish to do so. I hope that, without offence, this will be understood and respected in terms of approaches made to Committee as we move into 2026.

With further reference to remit, the public may be aware that the Committee has, in the latter part of this year, instigated some legal activity connected with the Hall's trusteeships and positions of both HPC and

the Committee in regard to these. In August, we had approached the Parish Council to rectify with their solicitor what we believed to be a recording omission re the Hall's deeds and covenants with the Land Registry. We needed to resolve this prior to seeking access to a capital grant we had in mind for Hall improvements (namely better insulation, other energy saving initiatives suggested as part of a very positive and informative Energy Audit and Report received earlier in the year from Community Action Northumberland, and/or possibly a small building extension to replace two sheds at the back of the Hall). The result of ensuing discussions with the Parish Council, research, and other consultations between ourselves, the Charity Commission, our insurers and Community Action Northumberland, was the decision to seek the advice of our own solicitor, to which fortunately, as a charity, we could gain access pro bono. Our reasons for doing this were to establish clarity not only on the Land Registry issue, but also relating to interpretations of the Hall's Governance document and questions about trustee/owner -ships and liabilities which had arisen in both our own Committee conversations and those with HPC. Anticipating our solicitor's advice by the end of November, we were hoping for outcomes and resulting planned actions to be able to be shared at this AGM. However, we have not as yet received the solicitor's report and are unable therefore make a fuller statement at this point. Considered decision-making as a committee and further liaison with the Parish Council on that will occur when we do have the necessary clarifications and as we move on into the new year.

Thank you to Eileen Clark who has been invaluable in the working through of all these matters whilst also carrying out her regular role as Committee finance manager and organising events such as the aforementioned Plant Sale and Open Gardens, Ceramic Coos Workshop in October and a bench-oiling working party over the summer, which readied our stock of wooden benches for wintering in their new store outside on the forecourt and for durability over many more seasons to come.

I opened my report by stating that it has been a privilege to chair the Memorial Hall Committee in 2025. In closing, I will admit that it has also been quite testing at times. However, I do believe that periods of reflection and review, such as have been caused by some of the afore-mentioned trials and tribulations, *will* be beneficial to future Committees tasked with responsibility for this wonderful Hall facility. Whether returning as Chair or general committee member for the new Committee, I shall work hard to ensure that this is the case. I also look forward to seeing plans already in the making for next year's Hall events come to fruition and to its continued support and prosperity in 2026.

P. Plenderleith  
30/11/25