

From: Sent: 20 January 2025 16:50
To: Muna Clough <clerk@doddingtondistrict.org.uk>
Subject: Blakenhall and District Village Hall

Dear Muna

My name is Gina Jackson and I'm writing to you on behalf of Blakenhall and District Village Hall, which you may be aware is the Village Hall serving the communities of Blakenhall, Lea, Doddington, Checkley, Bridgemere and Hunsterson.

I'm writing to you to make you aware that we are currently facing some challenges as a village hall committee. We are wondering whether it may be possible to find a way to work more closely with the Parish Council as we feel we need some support. Additionally, we would like to let you know what we are doing to try to help ourselves

Our committee currently consists of just 3 members plus a Chairperson. Sadly however, our Chairperson will be standing down, due to her own commitments, after our meeting this week. Our Chairperson is also the person who cleans the Village Hall, which is another position we will need to fill.

I'm not sure whether you're aware of the history of the Village Hall, so just to give you a quick overview-

The land on which the Village Hall stands was donated to the community by a villager in 1958 and until it was replaced in 2011 the hall was an ex-army barracks hut.

The hall was completely rebuilt in 2011 after extensive fundraising efforts by the committee and community, and it is owned and managed by the trustees and current committee. The committee which rebuilt the hall has over the subsequent years dwindled to 2 remaining trustees, one of which is the treasurer, plus me – I'm a relatively new committee member, joining in the last 18 months. (There were originally 3 trustees but Jean Berrisford, a founder member passed away several years ago, so now only 2 remain, both of whom are long standing committee members.)

The Parish council used to hold alternate meetings at our Village Hall, until it was knocked down for re-building. Additionally, the Village hall Chairperson at the time, David Lane, was also a member of the Parish Council. This allowed us a greater sense of connection and in turn provided a modest regular income for rental of the hall. It also meant that we were more visible to the Parish Council as an essential Parish resource.

To help us with the management and running of the Village Hall, we currently pay an annual subscription to the Charity "Cheshire Action Trust" who support the committee with practical and legal advice. They also distributed Government funding to us during Covid to keep us going through that time. The Cheshire Action Trust has advised us to apply to become a charitable organisation to protect ourselves legally and financially as a committee and to assist us in our fundraising efforts. Their legal representative, Kevin Janes, is currently processing an application on our behalf.

Chris Davenport at the charity has kindly helped us by printing flyers which we distributed to try to gain more committee members and promote rental of the hall. She has also helped us

with links to online fund-raising courses, which I have attended, and suggestions for grant funding opportunities to assist with our aim of purchasing a community defibrillator.

Since the leaflet distribution, there are two local people who are very kindly helping outside of the committee. One of these volunteers has suggested that she may be interested in joining the committee in the future if we are able to achieve a charitable status.

We have also managed to secure another regular weekly hall booking. (We previously had just 1 regular weekly booking, plus occasional parties, and polling station income)

We have recently held community events to help raise funds for the defibrillator. The funding raised so far is ring fenced for the purpose, but we are still a long way off achieving our target. Our initial grant application to The British Heart Foundation was unfortunately unsuccessful, but we aim to try again with the help of some demographic statistics which we are hoping Janet Clowes can provide for us.

We have established a Facebook page, "Blakenhall and District Village Hall" which is growing in followers, to help us to advertise events at the hall and reach a wider community. Some visible roadside advertising of events would also be beneficial if possible. Currently we use a sandwich board at the roadside to promote activities to passers-by, but it isn't proving very resilient in bad weather.

We have recently invested a large proportion of our available funds into replacing the main floor in the hall which needed urgent repair to maintain safe use of the hall. We have also undertaken some essential electrical safety checks. As our funds were depleted, the Parish Council very kindly donated funding to pay for interior decoration of the hall which was carried out last year.

As well as the work already carried out, we have a list of further essential maintenance jobs to be done when funding allows. Hence our need to reach out for support.

Blakenhall and District Village Hall is a valuable resource for our small rural parishes, but with challenges in recruiting volunteers and in raising sufficient funds to effectively maintain the building, we are concerned for its future.

We would very much like to re-establish our visibility in the community and connection with the Parish Council. We feel we need support, both in terms of people and finance, to help with the running of the hall.

We would welcome a conversation with members of The Parish Council to explore any possible ideas that may help us move forward on a secure footing for the benefit of our community.

We look forward to hearing your thoughts.

Kind Regards

Gina Jackson.