



Eastcott Community Organisation Annual Report 2020/21

Registered Charity 1160538

Covering the period April 2020-March 2021

Our Mission:

To enhance the life of the Eastcott Community through the provision of events, activities and opportunities.

Our Vision:

To be a successful and innovative organisation, managing a vibrant and inclusive community resource.

Our story: Since Eastcott Community Organisation became a constituted group in February 2013, we have organised hundreds of community events and activities, to bring the community together and increase opportunities for residents.

In May 2014 we took over community management of Eastcott Community Centre (formerly Savernake Street Social Hall), with the vision to create a community hub for us all to enjoy. We are a registered charity and Charitable Incorporated Organisation.

Public benefit

We are mindful of our responsibility to run our charity in a way that is beneficial to the public; and to demonstrate this in accordance with the Charities Act 2011.

1. There must be an identifiable benefit or benefits
2. The benefit must be to the public – or a section of the public.

Our mission and aims support our constitutional objectives to increase opportunities for people in our area of benefit, and this is a constant reference point for all our activities.

There are two aspects to our activity;

1. Managing a community resource
2. Organising community events and activities.

We believe that our activities this year have enabled us to follow our **mission**, by increasing opportunities for local residents to:

- attend a range of classes and activities close to home, where covid restrictions have permitted this.
- experience new and innovative events and activities, often at low cost to participants due to grants or other funds. Due to covid, many of these activities have included trails outside the community centre itself, to promote social distancing.
- Access information about other local resources, shared through our social media pages.

THE IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS

Our community centre first closed on 18 March 2020 due to government guidance around coronavirus, and remained closed until a phased re-opening in autumn 2020 for groups that were legally able to meet in community facilities, with covid risk assessments and confirmation that their insurance would cover the activity.

We closed fully during the second lockdown 5 November – 2 December 2020. Following a period of tiered restrictions, the country entered a further period of lockdown at the start of January 2021. The community centre has been effectively closed since then apart from a support group legally allowed to meet under the regulations.

Following the government 4 step roadmap the restrictions eased from 12 April 2021, enabling the centre to re-open for broader activity.

As soon as we were aware of impending closure our aim was to ensure that we prepared financially for a period of complete or partial loss of income, and that we ensured we would be able to re-open for our community when allowed to.

Throughout the year we:

- secured a Retail, Hospitality and Leisure (RHL) grant and Local Restrictions Grants, Additional Restrictions Grants and a Closed Business grant via Swindon Borough Council in recognition of our loss of earnings,
- made use of the furlough scheme,
- carried our business planning and projection exercises to establish our financial viability,
- paused/cancelled services contracts,
- accepted a 3-month rent deferral from Swindon Borough Council,
- continued to plan for events that could be socially distanced and secured funding for Eastcott Window Wanderland 2021 from the Ashley Family Foundation,
- submitted a Serious Incident Report to the Charity Commission based on all our hire income stopping in March 2020 (this was submitted before receipt of the RHL grant, which increased our viability),
- applied for grant funding. We secured £9950 from the National Lottery to enable us to fund our running costs while adapting to new circumstances, though not all of this could be utilised due to closure,
- recalculated our energy bills and received a rebate from Swindon Borough Council,
- increased our reserves policy to £10,000 to provide a higher safety net against future loss of income,
- explored whether our insurance cover would assist with interruption of business losses but we were not eligible for this.

As this financial year concludes, provided that covid restrictions continue to ease, we are confident that we are able to move towards sustainability, and that our financial position enables us to do this.

MANAGING A COMMUNITY RESOURCE:

At the point when the centre first closed due to covid in March 2020 we had the highest ever number of regular hire groups (over 35) and frequent bookings for social gatherings and children's parties.

Following our re-opening in the autumn, there have been continued restrictions on the type of activities allowed to take place at community facilities. In addition to the government requirements, we have been mindful of our facilities and volunteer capacity. For much of the period we focused on supporting our existing hirers to return, gradually extending this to new hirers when we felt we could.

We opened only one of our two halls to promote social distancing and enable the smaller hall to be used as a quarantine space should someone fall ill. Our regular online covid planning meetings considered guidance as it emerged, prepared risk assessments for the building, and agreed the design of signage for the floor, walls and windows. We also considered guidance from professional bodies and issued covid terms and conditions to our hire groups.

Some hirers did return, and were pleased to have the opportunity to use the space. A self-help group, a prenatal group, exercise classes and several parent/baby groups met at various points throughout the year when guidance permitted this.

ORGANISING EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES:

Our usual busy programme of events paused in March 2020 as a result of covid. Our previous annual reports described Repair Cafes, Neighbourhood Parties, and fundraisers, and it will come as no surprise that this year was very different.

However, we focused on what we could do, and our monthly online events meetings looked at the opportunities to provide socially distanced opportunities where we could.

During 2020/21 we have

- used our social media platforms to share news and information of interest to residents.
- based on levels of interest we worked with local residents Marilyn and Royston who designed a local heritage trail map/quiz which we shared on social media and through our website.
- Held a wine tasting fundraiser in October, in partnership with From the Grapevine. This was a small but enjoyable event, with several guests commenting that it was lovely to have the opportunity to do something that they'd enjoyed pre-covid.
- Supported a Halloween Window Trail, enabling residents to register on a downloadable map.
- Worked with the Old Town Library and South Swindon Parish Council to create a festive trail in Queens Park and Town Gardens, for children to find clues to solve a riddle.
- Held the third Eastcott Window Wanderland in March 2021 involving over 175 window makers creating a magical illuminated walking trail for all the community to enjoy. Our suggested theme 'Love the place you live' created some incredible, creative responses. Funded by the Ashley Family Foundation, this was a huge success, with overwhelming support, communicated via nearly 200 online surveys, for it to happen again.

All our activity this year has been organised with covid risk assessments at the forefront of our planning. For Window Wanderland we held weekly planning meetings on the run-up to the event. Special provision was made for delivery of art materials to window makers following quarantining, instead of workshops and collection. We made an event which is usually held in-person, accessible online (the WW artist workshops were done online and videos uploaded to YouTube)
Our messaging focused on this being an event for local residents only, encouraging those outside the immediate area to view the event online.

FINANCE:

Funding and support

We have two main income streams – **grant funding/fundraising** for events, activities, training and running costs; and **revenue from hiring** out the community centre.

Due to covid, the balance of hire fees and grant funding has been very different this year, with £35040 (over 91 %) coming from grants and just £1453 (3.8 %) from hire fees.

Grant funding:

We would like to thank our funders for 2020/21: National Lottery 25th anniversary fund, HM Government (coronavirus community fund, Local and Additional Restrictions Grant, Retail Hospitality and Leisure Grant) Wiltshire Community Foundation (ongoing grant till Nov 2020), and the Ashley Family Foundation.

Revenue from hirers:

We would like to thank all our hirers for supporting a community resource. We recognise that this has been a difficult period for everyone and look forward to welcoming more groups back when possible.

Reserves policy

- Our previous reserves policy was six months running costs for the centre (£1250 x 6), plus
- £1000 unrestricted funds for events/activities

Given our experience during covid we reviewed this, and have increased our reserves policy to:

- £10,000 (£1667 x 6 months running costs)
- £1000 unrestricted reserves for events/activities

We believe that this more accurately represents the risk of reduced income, and needing to open the centre with fewer hirers but increased costs (eg due to cleaning).

COMMITTEE AND STAFFING

At our online AGM in November 2020, nine trustees joined the volunteer board. Seven were re-appointments, and two new trustees. We conclude our current reporting period with eight trustees. Our trustees' experience includes finance, charity work, social work, catering, marketing, administration, IT, journalism, environmental issues and engineering.

Chair: Caroline Davies-Khan

Vice-Chair: Anna Smart

Secretary: Lauren Wallis (Rebecca Campbell until September 2020)

Treasurer: Anne Stone

Health and Safety Officer: Steve Russell

Trustees:

Barrie Hudson

Bhawna Goyal

Laura Holmes (until March 2021)

Abigail Paginton

Our committee is appointed in line with our constitution and has met monthly on Mondays 7.30 – 9pm. Due to covid all out meetings have been held online.

Following Charity Commission guidance our AGM in 2020 was held online.

We have retained two part time positions: A Community Centre Administrator and Events Coordinator.

We use a cleaning company to clean the building.

We are delighted to have increased our trustee board this year and to have added new skills and experience to our board.

We would like to thank trustees who have left the board this year – Rebecca Campbell and Laura Holmes, for their significant contributions throughout their period as trustees.

VOLUNTEERS

Pre-covid we had regular support from volunteers. During this restricted period we have still needed opening and closing volunteers and we thank our team for their support.

FINDING OUT WHAT OUR COMMUNITY WANTS

This year we have conducted surveys which have directly influenced our plans for 2021 and beyond:

- Eastcott Window Wanderland – nearly 200 survey responses to the 2020 event, with an overwhelming support for the event to happen again.
- Survey in summer 2020 to see how community responses to covid may influence our events.

PUBLICITY AND PROMOTION

We have not produced printed newsletters or leaflets during the period under review, due to covid restrictions. Instead we have used social media and printable maps. We have been fortunate to be featured in the Swindon Link magazine and the Swindon Advertiser.

We maintain a Facebook page with over 2000 followers and our hirers use a joint bookings/ promotional website. We have a Twitter account.

THE FUTURE

We continue to learn, grow, and respond to interest within the community.

In the year ahead we plan to:

- Take all possible measures to ensure that we are able to **re-open more fully as the Coronavirus restrictions are lifted.**
- **Continue to proceed towards a lease** to improve our organisational security and ability to access funding.
- Continue discussions about **improvements to the building**
- Offer **innovative community activities** when it is safe to do so, within relevant Coronavirus guidelines.
- Continue to **advertise for trustees and volunteers** as appropriate, to strengthen our skills base.
- **Buy in specialist help** where appropriate

Thank you to the following for help this year :

The **members of our community** who have participated in our activities and supported us.

Our hire groups

Our staff: Jo and Anish

Our centre and event volunteers

Our funders

ACRE and Community First - whose guidance regarding COVID regulations has been excellent.

Annual report approved by committee at a meeting held on 9/8/21