

Christchurch Men's Shed Chairman's report for AGM 5th November 2019

I think I can sum up the past year as being a mixture of highs and lows.

All started well when a lady from Willdown Road kindly donated a lot of quality tools and equipment that had belonged to her late father. It was also good to see quite a few members helping to dismantle and move the gear and then clean and tidy her shed.

At this point I would also like to thank the many members and other donors who over the past year have also donated an awful lot of useful materials and equipment. Thank you.

We were fortunate that Asda, Castlepoint, contacted us. After I had three meetings with their community officer, and painstakingly completed their 12 page application form, we were rewarded with a grant of up to £1,000 for equipment. Thanks to Bob Mackinnon for compiling a shopping list that totalled £996.86 and so we now have a small metal milling machine, precision vice and some milling tools.

And of course, we were excited by the offer of a large additional building at Somerford.

This prompted another well supported working party to remove the ivy from the building, tidy up inside and repair the car park fence.

Somerford pretty well dominated the rest of the year for me and Bob Mackinnon. We put a lot of time and effort into progressing the project. I must publicly thank Bob for all his hard work and perseverance. He did far more than I did. He was the prime contact with COAC, the youth centre, he contacted potential building contractors to get quotes for the roof and sewerage connection, arranged asbestos testing, dealt with electric and water suppliers about standing charges, liaised with the architect, and secured the services of Frettons solicitors at a reduced price. As well as all that, he was actively seeking and negotiating funding for the development costs.

The granting of the lease was delayed by several months as a result of foul-ups in communication between COAC, Dorset County Council and COAC's solicitors, all of which we had no control over.

As you can imagine, Bob & I were devastated when a week or so before we expected the final lease to be signed, COAC decided they might want to use the building themselves in the future and so withdrew the offer, leaving us with a solicitors bill of over £1,200.

At this point I would also like to put on record our sincere thanks to an anonymous donor who very kindly gave us £500 so that, with our limited shed funds, we could pay the solicitors' bill without becoming insolvent.

This was a great disappointment to all the members after a year of growing optimism.

I got a small article published in the local Echo newspaper describing our plight in the hopes that it might generate support. Unfortunately, I only received two responses, both from people trying to sell us services at full commercial rates.

However, as one door closes another one opens.

Thanks to a former shed member, Rob Austen, he mentioned our situation to the committee of Highcliffe Residents' Association Community Interest Company (HRA) who own the Old School in Lymington Road. This coincided with the Rainbow Pre-School going into liquidation and vacating part of the school buildings. As a result, HRA approached us to say that were considering offering us one of the large rooms for use as a shed

workshop and social area. At a subsequent AGM of HRA the proposal was agreed and well supported by their members attending. Our committee viewed the building and had brief discussions with HRA's Ian Hartnell. The room on offer is approximately 32ft x 17ft. There would need to be a hole knocked through one wall to create a doorway into the car park. There are also plans to demolish a small annex and build a toilet block that we would have access to. The room would have electricity, water and heating for which we would be expected to pay for our proportion. There would also be an expectation that the Mens' Shed would assist in general maintenance and DIY such as stripping and painting woodwork, assisting in building shelves, cupboards and a small kitchen area in another room. (We would be allowed to build our own small kitchen area in our room).

In addition to the room, there is a wooded area that is partly cleared at the foot of the carpark where we could have at least a 10ft storage container as a material store. The area may also be usable as a summertime outside seating area for tea-breaks.

The Old School building as a whole is surprisingly large but suffering from old age and there are areas of disrepair and HRA anticipate that they may need to get funding in the region of £150K to renovate the whole building, although the room being offered to us is in relatively good condition.

There would be no council tax to pay and the current intention is that HRA would not charge us rent.

We would hope to have a 15 year lease, which HRA are in principal happy with, but due to previous unfortunate relationship and financial problems with the pre-school occupants, they will need to consider the best arrangement to provide us with secure tenure whilst also protecting HRA's interests.

This possibility is in the very early stages and it is likely that it could be a year or so before we could move in, assuming suitable tenure agreements are agreed.

The big disappointment about Somerford has however been balanced by other good news.

You will hear in the Secretary's report about the donations and activities that have been happening in the workshop. I would like to thank John Pegram in particular, but also all the other regulars, who have spent many days incarcerated in the bowels of Greystones, making it into an increasingly well organised and equipped workshop as well as a welcoming place for members to come and socialise.

I would also like to thank John for his consistently entertaining as well as informative newsletters.

Thanks also go to various people who have made and sold things, or done jobs to raise funds for the shed, and to Brian Vaughan who did the bulk of the work of refurbishing the Highcliffe planters as a community project.

And finally thank you to all the members who organised and attended the summer BBQ and made it a great success. This, along with the regularly well attended Mudeford lunches, and last year's Pie & Mash lunch, shows that our members are motivated by tools, conversation and food!

In summary, we have had a major blow to our hopes and aspirations but we still have a successful, active and sociable shed and can still look forward to even better things in the future.

Les Mercer

Chairman.