



## Annual General Meeting

### Ludlow and District Community Association Limited

Wednesday 23 November at 6.30pm

**Present: Members of the Council** – I Andronov (IA), J Deakin, C Henry (CH), L Johnston(CEO) (Chair), Lindsey Mundy, Mike Penn, Paul Rew, Gareth Williams with Members of the Association (Friends), plus staff members.

**Apologies for absence:** See attached

1. Laura Johnston welcomed everyone to the meeting and opened the meeting by introducing all the Trustees.
2. Minutes of the last Annual General Meeting held on 17 November 2021.

**3. Chair's Report –**

LJ began by reminding everyone that at last year's AGM, she had welcomed them to the newly opened auditorium. With social distancing the auditorium could never be full, but now there are full houses with some of the music and dance events and National Theatre screenings.

CH also explained that Oscars has seen the return of wedding party bookings, christening parties, and music events, with, only the previous week, three fully booked nights for the café theatre by Two Score Theatre, with food from Bill's Kitchen.

Jazz nights at Bill's have proved popular and LJ gave thanks to Bill, Becky and their team who were all a pleasure to work with and that they are building a good working relationship

LJ updated everyone that the studio now has a new roof and is once again being hired out to our community.

LJ advised that the space of the former kitchen, behind the main bar, is being considered by the Trustees to explore how it could be developed.

LJ hoped that people have been able to make good use of the Assembly Rooms and enjoyed the wide variety of films, screenings, talks and live events staged. LJ also drew attention to the exhibitions that have been held, including the recent photographic exhibition and advised that there was plenty more to come.

LJ noted that they had said farewell to Helen as Chief Executive presenting her with the gift of an original beam from the building carved with the dates of her time at the Assembly Rooms.

LJ hoped people had been able to meet the new CEO and Artistic Director, Joel. LJ said that Joel is successfully building on the firm foundations that Helen left and has developed an exciting programme over the autumn and into winter.

LJ concluded by firstly saying a big thank you as if it was not for the Friends and the volunteers and those who have so kindly donated funds, LDCA would not be here today. LJ felt that it was an amazing building, in an amazing town, and supported by an array of amazing people and thanked everyone.

LJ referred to and thanked the fundraising committee who continue to do an amazing job. LJ hoped people had been able to visit the Secret Gardens this year and said that Cy and her team make it look effortless but it was anything but that!

LJ said that the thank you extended to the small staff team, who work so hard and somehow keep smiling.

LJ said her final point was to repeat again what can never be said too often – namely that LDCA have never, since its inception 29 years ago, operated on breakeven terms. It will always need grants, donations, and fundraising to fill the gap between the operational income and the costs. The current year, to the end of March 2022, is no different than other years in this respect – although the scale of the difference, the size of the gap, is significantly greater. LJ reminded all that it had been impacted with the tail end of Covid restrictions, and that LDCA have only traded for less than half a year to the end of March.

Finally LJ emphasised how much LDCA really appreciated all the support given, as Friends, volunteers and customers. LJ said they recognised that a national economic downturn will affect many people, but knowing that LDCA is supported by so many people they remained optimistic about the future – about Ludlow Assembly Rooms being at the vibrant heart of Ludlow.

#### **4. Treasurer's Report**

CH spoke to the circulated summary of the Final Accounts, highlighting a Revenue deficit of £91k and advising that LDCA could never survive without funding from grants and donations. CH stated that there had inevitably been a lot of additional unanticipated costs related to the snagging when the building work was finished and that some of this was reflected in this deficit. CH stated that the Net Income for the year was £181,97k.

CH pointed out that the Fixed Assets figure had increased due to the extensive building work. CH said that it was important to bear in mind the need to hold a healthy sum of cash in the bank as a safety net.

CH stated that he had looked back at LDCA's last full year of operation in 2017-18 and that the surplus had been £575 at the year end, which he felt illustrated the ongoing need for small grants to keep going.

#### **Questions from the Audience**

- It was asked why the fixed assets had increased so significantly. CH explained that it was because of how the accounts were managed with the monies that needed to be paid to Shropshire Council.
- It was asked if could have fuller details of how income derived could be supplied to the audience in the future. CH explained he had tried to summarise the accounts to simplify them and that the full accounts were available.
- It was asked to what the proportion of raised income was to the total required. Tom Evans advised that he had done some previous analysis of this and that in 2011 – 2012 grants made up 40% of income that LDCA knew that wouldn't be sustainable in the long-term. He explained that LDCA had then tried to build a future plan to make the organisation more sustainable but that 5-10% still needed to come in from grants/donations and that raised

income should bring in about 90%. LJ added that they were experiencing huge increase in energy costs, which were currently difficult to quantify. As was the total running costs of the refurbished part of the building which they were still analysing but know it will be a substantial cost. GW advised that selling all of the tickets is unrealistic but that everyone could help by attending events and spending at Bill's Kitchen (who pay a percentage of their profits to LDCA) will help.

## **5. Resolution 1**

### **Adoption of Annual Report and Accounts**

**Mike Penn formally moved the adoption of accounts, seconded by Jeff Rooker. Approved by all present.**

## **6. Resolution 2**

### **Appointment of Auditors and authorisation of Council Members to fix their remuneration.**

(The current auditors, DRE Limited, are available for re-appointment).

LJ recommended the re-appointment of DRE and **GW formally moved to re-appoint Auditors and for the Council of Members to fix their remuneration, seconded by Tom Evans. Approved by all present.**

## **7. Council of Members**

### **Resolution 3**

#### **Election of Council (Board Members):**

Laura Johnston and Gareth Williams retire by rotation, having been elected in 2019. They offers himself for re-election.

**formally moved for Laura Johnston and Gareth Williams to be re-elected. Approved by all present.**

Other Board Members are: Igor Andronov, Jodie Deakin, Laura Johnston, Mike Penn, Lindsey Mundy and Paul Rew.

LJ advised all that there were now some vacancies, as they currently had eight Members of a permitted maximum of twelve and invited anyone interested to talk to her or JB). LJ noted that Lindsey Mundy had recently done work on guidance for Trustee recruitment and that this information would soon be available on the website.

## **6. Report of the Fundraising Committee (LARFE)**

Chris Pike summarised LARFE's work by saying that £14400 had been raised for the LDCA. He said there had been a welcome return to events with the Secret Gardens, an evening soiree hosted by Chris Evans, a coffee morning and a mega book sale. With reference to the later he said that there were still some books being sold, and some had been taken to charity shops. CP added that they had been sorry to see Amana leave the committee due to other commitments but were pleased that they also had new members Shauna Delaney and Dina Webb. CP said they always welcomed new member with new ideas and highlighted that this did not require any financial wizardry. They met about every 2 months at Chris Evans' house. CP gave thanks you to all those who had helped support these events.

## **7. Report of the AD/CEO of Ludlow Assembly Rooms**

### **INTRODUCTION**

JB thanked everyone for attending. He has thanked all the staff, volunteers and Friends that have supported the organisation over the last year and him personally since starting this role in May. JB welcomed the collaborative, can-do attitude and felt it was the reason Ludlow Assembly Rooms continued to thrive as a vibrant and welcoming arts and community centre.

JB was pleased to note that despite the uncertainties remaining after Covid and in the current economic climate, the Assembly Rooms in recent months has returned to good levels of footfall and has seen many events sell out and perform increasingly well since the start of the new season in September.

JB explained that his focus since joining in May had been on: programme and marketing development; integration of new technologies; streamlining processes and improving communications; and developing a team of staff and volunteers that evolves to support an evolving programme—a programme that continues to be artistically eclectic, financially viable, and engaging for all audiences in and around Ludlow.

#### PROGRAMME & PERFORMANCE

JB said that following the reopening of the building after its renovation, the programme had gradually been built up to a full and varied offering of music, theatre, livestreams, films, and community activity. JB noted that whilst this had presented certain challenges, staff and volunteers had adapted well to support this busy programme, and recent audience numbers for core events such as pianist Maki Sekiya, NT Live's Prima Facie, LTA's Matilda, TS's Café Theatre, and Mi Flamenco, to name just a handful of highlights, are proof that there was still an appetite for a diverse programme of live events. JB added that the forthcoming Eliza Carthy gig was sold out and, due to the success such concerts have had in recent months, they would be featuring more folk, rock, jazz, and popular bands next season, as well as even more classical music.

JB stated that they were working in close partnership with Ludwig Theatre Arts to produce a traditional pantomime, *Jack and the Beanstalk*. Running a professional pantomime like this with 20 showings obviously presented many challenges and required a great deal of resources in terms of time, space, staffing, marketing, and technical support, but with over 2000 tickets already sold and an exciting production now taking shape (to include a Santa's Grotto in the foyer), he was confident it would be a great success, and something to learn from and build on next year. Reaching families and schools is a key part of audience development, and in the spring they would be welcoming two other professional family theatre companies to expand school holiday offerings at LAR.

JB continued by saying that other new aspects of programming such as: the Talking of Adventure series of talks; the Battle of the Bands competition; the lunchtime recitals featuring upcoming musicians performing classical and contemporary classical repertoire; and our collaboration with Bill's Café for the pop-up jazz events, are generally performing well and gaining traction too. While it took time for these series to become established, they were encouraged by their reception and would continue to develop them along with some new offerings next season (a film club, folk evenings at Bill's, and band nights in Oscars).

Although lettings had picked up since the summer and there remained good demand for certain regular activities and large-scale external events in the auditorium, JB hoped to see more regular hirers utilising the studio, Oscars, and meeting rooms next year, so would continue to promote this to the local community, advertising more widely.

#### NEW WEBSITE, E-TICKETING, TRELLO

JB advised that a new website had been launched over the summer and, while they were still working to improve aspects of it, it was nonetheless a more modern site displaying event information more clearly and providing certain process efficiencies. It was responsive, cross-device compatible, and is built in a way that will allow them to integrate more features and evolve it to suit our box office and other systems. New videos were currently being developed for the site and they would be updating it with some new content at the start of the next season.

E-ticketing had also been launched recently and they were able to relatively painlessly move to a system that allowed customers, the box office and stewards to operate more efficiently, and with less paper.

JB added that various other technical upgrades, both behind the scenes (particularly in the auditorium)—and in front-of-house (such as the new screen in the VIC window)—had also been installed, and we were gradually working through the newly renovated spaces ensuring the lighting, electrics and other technical equipment is up-to-date and serving them well. Trello—a web-based project management tool—had also been introduced earlier this year to improve communications and workflows within the organisation.

#### STRATEGY UPDATE & OUTLOOK

JB highlighted that in line with their ambitions for audience development and the expansion of the programme—and in light of diminishing grants generally in the sector—it was essential they continued to:

1. Build on the tremendous work of LARFE and the success of the Friends scheme with targeted fundraising activity, and by inviting higher levels of patronage in an appropriate way where possible;
2. Explore new revenue streams, such as increased retail activity (shop and bar), while also looking for strategic lettings that open the building up to new sections of our community in a way that is affordable for the end users but also of benefit to the Assembly Room's own programme of events;
3. Grow the programme through collaboration, sharing resources with local partner organisations that align with LDCA's aims. For example, they would continue to work collaboratively with different flavours of visiting theatre companies, such as Ludwig Theatre Arts, Two Score, and Pentabus, all of whom brought successful productions to LDCA this season and are returning next season; they would host various events as being part of local festivals, such as the established Ludlow Fringe Festival and the new Ludlow Piano Festival, partnering where appropriate on certain aspects of programming, delivery and marketing; and they would remain involved more generally with Ludlow-based artists and organisations to ensure the venue is open to all and that the box office service is attractive and competitive for external users, continually bringing more people to the building and to the website.

JB finished by saying that whilst it would be easy to be despondent about the support and development of arts and community events at this time of economic uncertainty, through these strategies, LAR is in a position to continue to provide an outstanding programme of events and community activity in a sustainable way. He was encouraged to see this growth taking place already—and this was only as a result of the excellent foundations laid by trustees, predecessors and the ongoing support of dedicated staff, volunteers, friends, patrons, fundraisers, and partners. Through these new opportunities and partnerships, they

would weather the difficulties presented by the external pressures on budgets and resources in the current climate.

**Questions from the audience:**

- It was asked if JB could confirm that all events were advertised to all subscribers. JB explained that generally 2-3 e-shots were sent out each week. He said that every event programmed by LDCA event is advertised through a schedule of mailings. If it was an externally organised event this was not promoted by LDCA. JB added that for anyone not receiving emails, they could subscribe to the list by clicking the banner at top of the web page.
- A member of the audience said they felt that there was not a good synopsis of films being offered with only a very brief description on the printed sheets.. JB advised that the best resource is to refer to the website.
- Tony Blench said that he used to come 40-50 times a year but that he was not seeing the information about the films being publicised. He felt there were relatively few emails. TB added that although it was a great live programme that was being pushed with enthusiasm he didn't see this in relation to films. TB said that they used to sell 24K tickets per annum but that it was nowhere near this now. He felt this was partly due to the nature of films how being offered and sometimes films getting pulled late in the day. JB responded that it was useful to hear feedback in terms of finding out about films. JB added that he had the impression that films being produced now were not of consistent quality. JB gave an example of some of the difficulties they were facing with a film that had been filmed locally and that were keen to screen, had been pulled only 10 days before printing sheet.
- Paul Rew asked what JB felt they should be doing to attract younger audiences and younger friends. JB responded that he wanted all ages to have access, and that this is happening slowly. JB felt that the Battle of the Bands project is a move in this direction and they were planning a regular band night in February. They were trying to screen films that would appeal to different sections of society, such as families and young children. JB added that they were trying to work with schools but many schools were struggling with funding to bring the children out.
- PR said that other organisations used 'ambassadors' to help spread the word about the events and urged friends to advocate to others about the friends scheme and the Assembly Room activities.
- Gareth Williams said that the issue of the lack of young people not being very present in the community was something that the Board & JB were concerned about. and hoped everyone would do all they could to encourage young people to come along. GW advised he had now taken over managing the bar volunteers and they needed more help. One of the ways people could make a contribution was to volunteer on the bar as it brought in £1K pcm for the organisation and so made a valuable contribution.
- GW proposed a move to formally give a vote of thanks to Laura Johnston, Chris Henry and Joel Baldwin for their incredible work and enthusiasm.

Ludlow and District Community  
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