

WAYLAND PARTNERSHIP DEVELOPMENT TRUST
REPORT TO WATTON TOWN COUNCIL ANNUAL MEETING

APRIL 20TH 2021

In common with all organisations and businesses this has been a difficult year. Our income has been much reduced. Our tenants have either been working from home or, in some cases, not allowed to work at all. We offered reduced rents in an effort to support them, even though this has impacted on our own income. We were unable to furlough our support officer, Amanda, because we needed to ensure that the wages and bills were paid and the building monitored. Furlough conditions would have made this impossible. Amanda has been working from home whenever possible, with occasional visits to the office for tasks which could not be done at home. Our services to tenants, both those with offices and our band of virtual tenants, has been essential. Dealing with their post and making sure packages can be managed safely, for example. We could not have coped so well without Amanda's efficient and cheerful commitment, especially as we trustees are in the vulnerable categories which reduced our physical presence.

The Gallery was closed ahead of the first lockdown due to the inability to get sufficient volunteers as the pandemic escalated. All our volunteers are in various vulnerability categories. It has remained closed during the year. We decided not to furlough Ruth, our gallery co-ordinator, partly because, at the outset no one envisaged us being closed for so long, and partly because we felt that her ideas for online exhibitions were a way of continuing to support artists and keep the Dragonfly name in people's minds. We are able to manage sales through the online sites too. We have been busy behind the scenes to improve the Galley offer and hope to be able to announce plans and small changes in the very near future .

We are very grateful that volunteers have been working on the Sensory garden in order to have it ready for use once more.

We applied for Government grants and were regarded as not eligible in the first round, but have been successful in subsequent rounds. These grants have been a lifeline. We also looked very closely at our expenditure and tightened up on this wherever possible to reduce our outgoings. We also became a lot stricter on making sure we obtained proper payment for some of our services – for example some of those renting car park spaces had become very lax and others were parking there without any permission or payment! We have issued new permits and monitored it but this has proved almost impossible at times with the building largely unoccupied. Tackling people parking without permission has resulted in quite a bit of abuse and in one instance some threatening behaviour. However, casual parking increases wear and tear and therefore potential expense, as well as creating a habit which will impact on our tenants once we are fully operational again. We had an incident in early March when someone drove into the car park wall in the early hours of Sunday 7th. The police have not traced the perpetrator so we have to pay the insurance excess for the repair. An expense we could do without.

In addition to government grants we applied to Norfolk Community Fund for some money towards the new boiler and received £5000. We have also applied to Awards For All for refurbishment funding for the gallery and to top up the boiler fund. This last still to be announced. We have been looking at recently announced funds for marquees and gazebos to improve use of the garden, and have applied to the fund to improve covid safety measures, especially for the gallery. In 2020 we applied to Heritage Lottery for a digitisation fund but were not successful – they were looking for a much broader national project than just Wayland. However, they liked the principle and have

suggested we apply to the smaller HLF funds for this, so we are pulling strands together for an application. The aim would be to digitise local parish magazines, free paper and other local documents, the books published by the Partnership and more, in order to preserve them and to make them more accessible. The magazines in particular tend to be in lofts and attics and stand to be lost forever if action isn't taken. Creating a searchable resource will be of real benefit to future historians, while new heritage with all the Covid articles and news published in the last year will be invaluable to future generations. It is also a project which can cope with any needs for social distancing but still involve the community. Fingers crossed we are successful.

We are extremely proud to have remained solvent during such a terrible time although we do have sleepless nights! The boiler is perhaps the worst problem as it is such a major expense, and essential, but we are confident we have now raised sufficient without depleting the reserves to any worrying degree.

We are conscious that we have not been able to deliver as much community service and projects as we are used to doing, due to the pandemic and the inability to mix. However, we have used the time behind the scenes to plan and try to prepare for a better future of community engagement with covid in mind.

You are aware of the plans under discussion to redevelop the Wayland House site from the presentation we gave to this Council. We have since presented to a number of our partner parish councils with overwhelming support. Recently we had the first of a number of meetings with Breckland, and again received enthusiastic support and a desire to move forward. We are now about to embark on a number of meetings with Breckland, the LEP, Norfolk County Council and others to move the plans forward. A great deal of work still to be done but exciting, especially with the benefits we envisage for Watton and the whole of Wayland.

Once we are back to somewhere near normal, we will revisit the process we had begun in appointing additional trustees. We need to resume the Representatives meetings. In a couple of instances, we are aware that new reps will need to be recruited.

We are confident that after having been left reeling, first by the loss of Jan and then by the pandemic, that 2021 into 2022 holds a much more optimistic future.