Good evening and once again, welcome to the AGM of Thruxton Memorial Hall.

Although I am entering my fourth year as Chair of the Trustees, this is only the second time I have addressed the AGM and I am sure I do not need to explain why. Covid has had an impact on the lives of our community and so many have suffered loss and hardship as a result of its incessant march. The Hall stands at the heart of our village and has, in its own way done its best to help.

As you will hear, our finances are sound thanks to the hard work of all the Trustees, both past and present and particularly due to the efforts in keeping us on track by Graham Harris, our hard working and long-suffering Treasurer. Graham works tirelessly on our behalf and the village is tremendously in his debt for all that he does for us.

The loss of revenue to the Hall over the last 2 years would have been catastrophic were it not for the grants given to us, and many other community buildings and businesses by TVBC through the government. These grants have not only made up for a loss of revenue, but have enabled us to undertake some of the maintenance works that we expected not be able to undertake for many years. In the summer we had the main hall decorated and when the roof developed a major leak, we were able to get it fixed immediately and without concern about where the money was to come from.

With the exception of line dancing, all our hirers returned to us in September and we have seen a marked increase in the number of enquiries and indeed bookings, for parties and other events.

Thanks to the efforts of Cat and Annabel, we held several fundraising events which were not only great fun but also taught us a lot about raising chickens.

Over the year we have lost three Trustees, Cat Boslem, Annabel Humphrey and Jo Lees. As already mentioned, Cat and Annabel worked very hard on fundraising and putting together some magnificent marketing material for the Hall. Their input will be very much missed but family and careers must take precedence over voluntary work and we quite understand their decision to stand down. Jo, I know was looking forward to working with them but again, family, work and puppies have to come first. We will miss their input tremendously but are extremely grateful for what they achieved.

I must offer thanks also to the wonderful Alison Richardson who took over cleaning the Hall at a time when it must be said that standards had slipped somewhat during lock down. Alison, the Hall has never looked better and we are so grateful that you took us on.

Over the year we have continued to run our community café “Thruxton Loves Cake”. Every Wednesday morning Janet Mitchell, Brenda Jarman and Natasha Novak open up the hall to anyone who wants to join in and have a cup of tea or coffee and a slice of Louise Cushine’s excellent cake. Janet, Brenda and Natasha, I thank you from the bottom of my heart for what you do and can only hope that you realise what a great job you do and how much you are appreciated by everyone who has come to see Wednesday in the Hall as a regular date.

Thanks also to Louise who without doubt makes the best Victoria Sponge this side of Norfolk and makes my husband a very happy man every Wednesday.

Although I am the one who gets to stand up and deliver this speech, I am only the figurehead, behind me (and usually way ahead of me) are the other Trustees who all work so hard to keep the Hall going.

I have already mentioned Graham, whom I should add, has this year allowed himself to be dragged in to the 21st Century and we now have internet banking. (Something else we have Cat and Annabel to thank for!) Gill Odling has the completely unenviable job of sorting out any building and maintenance issues. Gill has been nothing short of brilliant this year, getting hold of builders at a moment’s notice and overseeing all the work that been undertaken. The redoubtable Keith Edwards is always on hand for any emergency (usually involving a light bulb! Keith holds the Health and Safety brief and whilst not the most exciting job on the block is certainly the most important. Nick Williams has assumed the mantle (whether he likes it or not) of IT guru. He also manages the monthly Movie night offering and was instrumental in persuading us to get our own screen for showings. Ably abetted by Keith at the Bar, he is making the last Friday of every month something to look forward to. Margaret Davis remains a Trustee for which anyone sitting on one of the new and much more comfortable armchairs should be grateful. Margaret is the wonderful voice of wisdom and reason at our meetings and we are all truly delighted she remains with us (although sadly, not tonight). Please John, take her our very best wishes for a speedy recovery. Our latest recruit is Clare Oliver. I have long thought that someone who actually hires the Hall should be a Trustee and I am delighted that Clare, who runs the Andover Ladies Choir, has agreed to join us. One meeting in and she has already made a terrific impact. I should also like to take this opportunity of thanking my daughter Beth, who has stood in and taken the minutes of our meetings for some time now. At last she has moved to Winchester and we are actively seeking someone who could take on this task.

Trustees, my sincere thanks go to each and every one of you. You are a great team to work with and I can only hope that you each know how much you are valued.

My special thanks must also go to the partners of the Trustees. Tricia Harris puts up with far too many calls from me, Will Odling is forever being asked to ‘just have a look at this” and poor Peter seems to spend as much time in the Hall as I do. Rob Oliver has yet to be dragged into the Hall machine – but he will be!!

Usually at the AGM we look back on the previous financial year, but his year I want to look the future. The leaking roof was a huge shot across the boughs and when it was repaired we also asked for an assessment of its condition for the long term. For now, at least, I think we need not supply umbrellas with bookings but we have been warned that at some point in the not too distant future the roof may well need replacing. As you can imagine this would be a very expensive undertaking and, in effect use up all the reserves we currently hold. Of course, this is precisely why these reserves have been built up over the years but fund raising will increase in importance as we move forward as there are other parts of the building that require attention. During the summer, we plan to finish the decoration programme, having the balcony, lobby and corridor areas painted and also giving the windows the care and attention that is much needed.

The challenges for 22/23 are considerably heightened by the increase in the cost of heating the Hall. In March this year we increased our hiring charge to mitigate some of this increased expenditure but it looks like the coming months are going to be very tough.

In September we will bid farewell the Louise Vincent Ballet School. Louise has been a loyal and much-loved hirer of the Hall for over 12 years and we will miss her enormously. She has now found premises of her own in Charlton and wish her well for the future. Whilst this is a tremendous blow for the Hall, it also represents a huge opportunity for growth and development as we will be able to offer considerably more space and availability to others and the Trustees are currently working hard to increase our marketing efforts and letting offer. We are currently talking to website developers to increase our social media presence and improve the publicity for the many events that are held in the Hall.

In summary therefore, 2021/22 was a unique experience, hopefully never to be repeated but we survived and have both the resources and the enthusiasm to go forward and build on the foundations that we and our predecessors have laid for us.