

Florence Park Community Association Annual Report from the Chair, March 2016

Our beautiful community goes from strength to strength

It's been another great year for the community of Florence Park. Far from things calming down following the 80th birthday celebrations, community activity seems to go from strength to strength.

As at 31st December 2015 there were 285 members of the Associate, 134 of whom live in the area of benefit this is down slightly. This shows a small drop off of 11 members from the previous year.

We ceded across to the new CIO in March of last year, and the process of notifying suppliers and switching bank accounts and financial processes has gone relatively smoothly. You may remember that at last year's meeting we presented only interim accounts, as we planned to have the entire year verified at the end of the financial year (a full 15 months from January 2014 to March 2015), so that we could use these to close down the old charity. So as well as providing those for completeness, Viv will be presenting to you the accounts for the new organisation for the nine month period from March-December 2015.

You'll see from the accounts that Sara, our Centre Manager, continues to build the bookings and provide us with excellent value – in the last nine months of 2015 she was bringing in an impressive average monthly income from room hire of £1,378, up from the £1,091 in the 14/15 period (which in turn was up from £605 per month in our 2013 accounts). These bookings not only provide us with the income we need to keep the centre running, but deliver essential services that meet the objectives of the charity – music lessons, tuition for children, language lessons and lots of sports and leisure activities, as well as providing a regular space for a number of local businesses to conduct training sessions and meetings.

We've recently had a new projector, screen and sound system fitted, which makes the place even more attractive to hirers, and once we've worked out the most effective way to pay for the licences to watch films, we hope to get some movie evenings up and running.

This year we've managed to get our over 60s group started (many thanks to Sara for doing this herself during the quieter period over the summer and then successfully recruiting Justine Glazebrook to take over from her). We have a core of around 15 who come and enjoy a warm space, good food and excellent company each week. The group tries to offer activities too – we even received funding to buy tablets from the city council and Derek and Lance have been delivering training to our over 60s group, so we can get them wired.

January saw the return of the Florence Park Players with their production of Sleeping Beauty – another rip-roaring success, with Viv our Treasurer as Panto Producer and Emma Webb, the director increasing the number of performances from three to four in order that more of the community be able to enjoy the entertainment. They raised enough money from the production to set aside a little for next year's offering and donated a whopping £1,000 to the Association (although that's not reflected in the accounts as this happened after the end of the calendar year covered by the accounts). With a maximum fire limit of 100 in the main room, we are limited to selling 80 tickets per performance when the space is also full of performers. Despite the extra performance, the show was a sell-out and many still missed out, emphasising the limitations of the space that we have, particularly frustrating given our expanded area of benefit. We are hoping to work to address this issue over the coming year.

You'll have seen from our resolution that we intend to do all we can to bring the building behind the centre back into use. This is something that has been discussed with the council ever since it went into disuse, but which was put on hold while they put together the Community Centres' Strategy, however the committee is keen to do all we can to incorporate the space into the building so that we have more space, can reduce the conflicts which exist amongst current users and so that we can provide services to more of the community.

We did manage to gain some extra space when the community came out in force to dig, plant and turf the garden at the back last summer and make the outdoor space useable once more. This not only provides a space for the community to enjoy (we will be holding an Easter Friday bring and share for all the community – please put it in your diaries and come along) but is useful for hiring out the centre during the summer, when people don't want to hire for a children's party unless they also have an outdoor space just on the off chance that the British weather is good to them! We've also successfully fundraised for gazebos to make the space usable during rainy days in the summer

and we'll be ordering a number of benches so that people have somewhere to sit and eat during parties and Aunt Sally evenings throughout the summer months.

We are currently in the process of writing our Business Plan, which will soon be available on the website. This sets our aspirations for the next five years and how we plan to achieve them. We've looked at both our income generating activities and those that deliver the charity's objects (not always mutually exclusive). The development of the plan has required us to look back to our survey from last year, to see what sort of activities the membership is asking for, as well as a study of the 2011 census data to ensure that we are addressing the needs of all the local population.

We have also decided to use the AGM to consult with you further about possible activities for the coming year. We've come up with a few suggestions already, so let us know what you think about them, whether you think you can help us organise them and please feel free to throw in any ideas that you have that you think we've missed.

There are still groups in the community that we're failing to attract into the centre – the census data tells us that by far the biggest non-British population in the area is the Polish community, and we will work next year to do more to ensure that we are attracting them and other ethnic groups living in our lovely community into the centre to enjoy the services we offer.

A couple of sessions with crafting activities combined with a café (in order to cover costs) has proven very popular and we have decided that this 'community café' will become a regular monthly feature. These events generate income for the centre, and bring the community together. If anyone is keen to offer their cooking skills, waiting skills or are happy simply to bake cakes, please let us know.

But it's not just about delivering services in the centre – we're the community's Association and for a second year running we enjoyed a street party together, closing off Florence Park Road (thanks to Abby, last year's Association Secretary), sharing food, music and watching the children enjoy the paddling pool. On the same theme – following on from the success of last year's Open Doors, local people opened their houses to the community to show how our homes that started out so similar have changed over the years – people really seem to enjoy these tours, so if any are interested in opening their houses this year – again, please let us know.

The Friends of Florence Park (one of our affiliated groups, who are entitled to free use of the centre once a month for four hours) organised their third Festival in the Park – successfully taking on the branding of FloFest. Alan, Sara and Abi are just incredible and despite some torrential rain throughout the day, it was beautiful celebration of our wonderful and creative community, with, for me personally, the talent tent a real highlight. They're looking for much needed funding for this year's event, so if you are happy to donate even a small amount, let us know and we'll send you the link to all the details.

Dave Noble continues to organise the ever popular Sunday Sessions which bring high quality live music, and in some cases local talent, to the centre on the last Sunday of the month throughout autumn and winter. Each session is a bit like a mini indoor festival – with music, the bar and homemade food, the friendly events welcome all ages.

Our request that was in process at last year's AGM to extend the licence brought up considerable concerns from the additional noise and inconvenience to residents whose houses back onto the centre, so a decision was made not to extend the licence. We still have the option of applying for 15 Temporary Events Notices should hirers or indeed, the Association, wish to extend beyond our licensed hours.

Our regular events that happen throughout the year continue to be popular – Sara's Hallowe'en party is always filled to the rafters, provides great entertainment for the children and also brings in money for the centre. The craft and Christmas fairs are ever-popular.

But it hasn't been all plain sailing. You may or may not know that the centre was broken into twice – once just before Christmas and again in the new year. The culprits got away with very little, but the damage caused was costly for us and not really enough to justify an insurance claim given our excess. We're still finalising details on this, but it makes us aware that we need to renegotiate our insurance to ensure we're not stung with such a sizeable excess should it happen again.

As in previous years, the relationship between the Community Association and the Social Club this year has not always been easy. The plan to negotiate a rental agreement between us did not progress because the council, who were to oversee the process, did not have the staff available to do so. Now that Sue Taylor is in post as Communities Officer, we're looking forward to addressing this which will help put the relationship between the Association and the Social Club on a clearer and surer footing. In addition, we aim to put in place a new agreement with the council and move forward on our aspiration to increase the space available for activities as soon as possible.

Finally we'd like to thank our funders and supporters – and those who've worked tirelessly to achieve all that we have done over the last year - particularly Sara, our Centre Manager, the committee: Viv, Matt, Sue, Prue, Elena (who had to leave the committee half way through the year), Chris, Richard, Jane and Fiona, our local Councillors, Christine and David, who are always there to help out when we need them, despite their busy and hectic schedules. Thanks must also go to Dave, our trusty barman for his help with ensuring that the evening hirers get a fantastic welcome and service, we receive many compliments about how helpful and friendly he is – the place wouldn't be the same without you Dave, so thank you! We also acknowledge the hard work of the Social Club Committee – we don't always see eye to eye, but we appreciate the hard work you do to keep the bar and related activities running.