

MUCH Chair's Report for the year 2021 / 22

As we entered the second year of the great COVID-19 pandemic, and all the disruption that was bringing, MUCH continued to work closely with Monmouthshire County Council. In May 2021, we learnt that MCC had accepted a large grant from Welsh Government (from the Economic Stimulus Fund) and that it would make a major contribution to closing the 'funding gap' in the cost of building The Hub. By July, MCC had given the go ahead to commence procuring contractors to start the detailed design for the build and its final cost.

As MCC took this major step forward, the MUCH group prepared and submitted an application to the 'People and Places Lottery' for a grant of £350k which, if successful, would in theory completely close the funding gap. The application contained the 'community's requirements' identified in the surveys of 2016 and 2019/20, with a promise of a further survey to see if those needs had changed, perhaps as a consequence of the pandemic.

By October, MCC had appointed Keir Construction as the prime contractor and MUCH had completed its follow up residents' survey. The survey confirmed the previously identified requirements and if anything, it identified that there would be a greater need for The Hub after the pandemic had subsided. By this time MUCH were actively involved with MCC in defining the detailed design of the building with the thought of it being an 'available to all' centre very much in mind.

By the beginning of 2022, MUCH had received the 'much' hoped for offer of a £350k grant from the Lottery, which meant that at long last the £2m project was fully funded. The offer was accepted, at the same time as providing the Lottery with a business plan and a project delivery schedule, which suggested a build completion by late 2022 or early 2023 (recognising the pressures COVID was putting on the contractor market and the materials supply chain). MUCH's main duty now was to work closely with MCC to ensure the design meets the original requirements and keep the community informed of progress and continue to gather and act on feedback.

As well as the focus on the building design, MUCH has developed a great working relationship with 'The Living Levels Project', to help restore and develop the Ancient Orchard on the Three Field Site. The group has been active in clearing brambles, replacing dead trees with the same or similar apple tree varieties, and the installation of an information board and a carved seat in the shape of an apple. Also, the group has purchased other trees, temporarily planting them in a sheltered area of the site for later transplanting to specified areas detailed in the landscaping plan.

So, as we enter the 2022/23 year with the vision of the completed building on the horizon, the pressure is still on both MCC and MUCH. The council will need to work hard to keep the project within budget as inflation rises and materials and manpower costs increase. MUCH has similar challenges. It will need to be confident and assure MCC that it can operate the centre in a self-funding way. This of course will be a challenge as escalating energy costs impact on its operating cost and potential users' disposable income reduces as inflation bites. Part of the lottery grant will help with this in the first few years but we will need to quickly become self-sufficient. Having gained experience in running the Undy Memorial Hall and in the knowledge that the design of the building is sure to be popular with all sections of the community, the Trustees are confident that these challenges can be met.

I am proud to have been part of the group that has brought the project this far and am sure, with the continuing support of the community, The Hub will very soon be a reality.

Paul Turner (MUCH Trustee and Chair of Group)

MUCH 2021/22 Accounts – To be Audited / Verified

Opening Balance 01/04/2021 **£ 17,567.11**

Income

Amazon Smile Donations	£	39.95
LDC Trust Donation	£	250.00
Total	£	289.95

Expenditure

Web Domain	£	19.20
Survey Monkey	£	99.00
Orchard Ladders	£	383.70
Vinyl Signage	£	25.03
Landscape trees and fixings etc	£	1,364.60
Total	£	1,891.53

Year End 31/3/22

Closing Bank Balance		£ 15,965.53
Petty Cash		£ 26.00
Total		£ 15,991.53