

Henley Memorial Hall Chairman's Annual Report 2024/25

Introduction

It is my privilege to again present the Chairman's Report. This has been a year of significant momentum we've seen significant growth, and investment this year, and there are signs of post-pandemic recovery amongst some of the regular users.

The report below outlines our achievements during the last financial year (September 2024 – August 2025) and provides an update on the busy start we have had to the current year.

Financials

We had a successful year, with income beating our budget, as such we were able to proceed with various maintenance and building improvements throughout the year.

After detailed analysis of the energy market, we switched our Electricity to a smart tariff called "Shape Shifters" which offers better off-peak rates in exchange for higher rates between 4pm and 7pm (*when the hall is generally quieter*) modelling showed a potential saving of £739; Gas remains our biggest energy expenditure with our energy bills in the winter months (when the hall is busiest) being significantly higher than the summer months, our monthly energy bills range from around -£2 to +£1,400.

Events & Community Engagement

- **National Theatre Live:** We successfully launched *National Theatre Live*, bringing world-class culture to Henley at the lowest price for miles around! Screenings such as *The Importance of Being Earnest*, *Dr Strangelove* and *A Streetcar Named Desire* are not only cultural highlights but a financial success, raising over **£900**.
- **VE Day 80:** In May, we were proud to be one of the only venues locally listed in the official "Tip Top Towns" guide for VE Day 80. We supported **Arts4All** in screening *Darkest Hour* to mark the occasion, also listed on the official website – The Royal British Legion also held their VE Day celebrations at the Hall that Saturday, I was proud that the Memorial Hall was able to mark the occasion so well, living up the original aims of the Memorial Trust.
- **Summer Arts Festival:** We hosted the **Henley Arts4All festival** again in July, this was one of the first opportunities to make use of the fortunate donation of 4 modern, LED stage lights worth around £2,000 and showcase our incredible facilities to the community and professional acts, including through Facebook and social media, reinforcing our position as a hub for local arts,
- **Ad Hoc Bookings:** Once again, our ad-hoc bookings were strong in 2024/25 with plenty of children's parties and charity event bookings and as the year progressed toward 2025/26 we began filling bookings often months in advance.

Infrastructure & Maintenance

Significant renovations took place this year, balancing safety and compliance obligations with community-led improvements and refurbishments.

- **Fire Safety & Compliance:** Safety is our priority. We completed essential work to seal voids and shore up our fire compartmentation, which had been flagged by the County Fire Officer. We also installed 2 new fire doors, replaced expired extinguishers and continue with routine checks and maintenance.
- **We also completed our 5-year EICR (Electrical Installation Condition Report) check** and are now steadily working through its recommendations.
- **Toilet Refurbishment:** In partnership with the Montessori nursery, we refurbished the rear bathrooms, which had been largely untouched since the 1960s, and had begun to leak

significantly. This was cost-shared 50/50 with Merrydays Montessori and will improve visitor experience when used as dressing room, or meeting room.

- **Garden Renovation:** In May, we launched our garden renovation scheme, vastly improving the Hall's "kerb appeal", planting new roses, jet washing, weeding, and clearing – a huge heartfelt thanks must go to all the volunteers who made this possible.
 - **Decorating "Working Party":** The year ended on a high in August with a community painting party. Supported by a materials grant from **EH Smith** (worth ~£800), volunteers repainted the main entrance lobby and side rooms, tackling various patch repairs to leave the Hall looking fresh for the new financial year.
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Update on Current Financial Year (Sept 2025 – Present)

The momentum has continued into the autumn and winter of 2025, with several major events and infrastructure projects coming to fruition, much of the planning took place during 2024/25.

Community Highlights (Autumn/Winter 2025)

- **Heritage Open Day (Sept):** We opened our doors for a landmark Open Day, engaging residents with backstage tours and historical exhibits curated by Kate Smedley, the programme included excerpts from Matilda from the High School, Silhill Morris Dancers, Amy Price Vintage Vocalist, and HADS reprinted a scene from "A Very Public Hall" A play which is all about the Memorial Hall's original founding.
- **Alcester Male Voice Choir (Sept):** We hosted a fantastic evening in a joint fundraiser with the Heritage Centre, strengthening ties with local organisations.
- **Indoor Car Boot** This was very popular with buyers and sellers alike and another is scheduled in.
- **Return of HADS (Dec):** We were delighted to welcome back Henley Drama Society. Their production of the pantomime *Goldilocks and the Four Bears* in December marked their return as an anchor tenant, after a relative dormancy since 2019, the panto bought a unique energy back to the building.

Recent Infrastructure Upgrades

- **Water Supply Resolution:** Following issues with taps running dry during peak times, including to the flat during the summer heatwave, Severn Trent confirmed this was a private supply pipe issue between the High Street, and our meter. Aided by a **£500 grant from the JPC**, we have installed two large accumulator tanks under the stage, the flow is now consistent and better than ever, and we are looking into water-saving features next, so the 490 litres stored in the tanks last the duration.
- **Lobby Improvements:** Thanks to funding from the **Station Bar**, we have replaced the carpet in the lobby, further lifting the entrance's appearance.
- **Green Energy Approval (Oct):** After an initial rejection in the summer, our application to Stratford District Council's Climate Change and Nature Fund for Air Source Heat Pumps (ASHP) was approved in October. This project, co-funded by the **Station Bar**, represents a major step forward in our sustainability, and comfort to users. These are due to be installed in the three side rooms in April, over 4x more efficient than the gas heaters, these will save 1.1 Tonnes of carbon emissions annually.

Hire Changes

The Management Committee agreed to keep the hire charges the same as previous years, but we've added a £2/hr levy for hire periods between September and April to help cover the additional energy costs, while keeping the rates competitive in the quieter summer months. The levy is applied to all hirers, regular or ad-hoc.

Looking Ahead: 2026

As we look forward to the rest of 2026, the Hall is in a strong position with a clear roadmap for the months ahead.

- **Fire Safety:** We have scheduled upgrades for the fire alarm system to ensure we continue to meet the highest safety regulations, and are planning the next phase of fire door upgrades
- **Upcoming Fundraising Events:** The fundraising calendar remains lively.
 - **Feb 14th:** The Trust's "Henley Rocks" fundraiser.
 - **March 28th: Consensus Opera** performing *A Ring of Untruths*.
 - **May 23rd: Grand Regency Ball:** Tickets on sale soon for a Bridgerton regency ball
 - **Ongoing:** *National Theatre Live* and *Rural Cinema* continue to run, with a packed schedule

Acknowledgements

Running this Hall is a collective effort. I would like to thank the committee for their tireless work, Marijana Bainbridge for keeping on top of the bookings and fundraising, Tara Winter for keeping track of the finances, budgets and the Garden, Annette Walker for her wise counsel, and for always turning up and helping out, Helen Everly for her caretaking role, and staying on-top of the increasing compliance requirements, and a special mention to **Heather Jones**, who stepped down from the committee earlier this year, but continues to volunteer her time to run the bar for our National Theatre events, and being a vital part of our volunteer pool.

I again thank all the volunteers, time is valuable and precious, and you have given your time to us, thank you.

Ian Smedley

Chairman, Memorial Hall Management Committee