

Report to the Annual Parish Meeting: May 2026

A Summary: May 2025 to May 2026

The village hall, at the heart of Westhorpe, is well loved and central to bringing people together as part of our community. At the same time we need to oversee the financial sustainability of our village asset in very challenging times and this is a difficult balance to manage. In effect we are running a community business with volunteer staff.

The use of the village hall over the year has been at about the same level at the previous year and it has been an operational year of highs and some lows. The highs have been very good: for example The Longship talk, Music and Elvis nights, Art and Craft Exhibition and the Village Cafe. However, it has been very disappointing to having to cancel three events over the year due to poor ticket sales, especially after much hard work put in by various committee members. This has influenced our planned calendar of events for 2026.

Whilst we need to organise events that bring people together and they enjoy they need to be financially sustainable too. The operation of the hall cannot be maintained solely on current bookings and we need to supplement this with regular fund raising events to boost income. Whilst support from the Westhorpe community is usually good we would always welcome more. Therefore, we will soon be issuing a community survey, in digital and hard copy versions, to find out more about what the local community want to see in our village hall and perhaps find out why they have not supported events in the past. The survey will be issued to Westhorpe and the surrounding communities

We now have efficient systems set up to operate the hall for booking, ticket purchasing and accounting. The running of a bar at events has proved popular and has helped income generation although special event notices need to be purchased on each occasion in advance at a cost. If an event is cancelled we still bear the cost of the licence.

Our Committee members and volunteers

We have a very active and enthusiastic committee plus village members involved in the operation and maintenance of the building, cleaning and running the village lottery which is a vital part of our income. The hall would not be sustainable without this team - all of which help on a voluntary basis. It is worth noting that two new members of the cleaning rota live in Finningham.

Activities

Regular activities are well supported from Westhorpe and just as importantly from surrounding villages. These are: Yoga; Line Dancing; Art Club; Carpet Bowls (now extended to two evenings); Craft Club; Singing for Pleasure; Keep Fit; Exercise Workout: Sounds Fun. Pilates sadly has discontinued due to lack of users.

The regular Westhorpe Café continues to be very popular, thanks to the efforts of two members of the village community, and funds have been raised for a range of charities. One-off birthday party hires have taken place but our insurance exclusion of the use of bouncy castles poses a problem for some.

Our future events for 2026 include: History talk on Haughley Castle; Pub Night; Quiz Night; Art and Craft Sale and Exhibition; Elvis Night. Another Music Night is being planned for January 2027 due to popular demand. We will, as always, promote in village magazines, email and Facebook to spread the news.

The Future

We have reluctantly decided to increase our hire charges by £1 per hour for the first time since we opened. This is still good value when compared to other village halls in the locality. Our running costs continue to rise and we work hard to keep the hall in a good condition which is appreciated by our users and attracts new hirers. We have just had the

hall and lobby repainted which was a significant cost but for which we had forecast. Where possible we carry out repairs using voluntary labour to save money.

We now have maintenance agreements in place for our major building items and we continue to fight the battle against an increasing amount of legislation that continues to be imposed on voluntary organisations such as ours.

Our financial accounts are just being finalised for the period 2025-2026 and so it is too early to say whether we will just about break even for the financial year but we can update the Parish Council when the accounts are completed.

PAUL WESTON.

Paul Weston
Chair: Westhorpe Village Hall Ltd