



THE CITY OF WELLS ALMSHOUSES



Annual Report 2020-2021

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The City of Wells Almshouses (CWA) is an unincorporated trust administered by the City of Wells Almshouses Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO). Both are registered charities numbers: 1040554 and 1159162 respectively. The CIO is the corporate trustee of CWA and the CIO is governed by a Board of Trustees—see page 5 for details.

CWA is a registered provider, of social housing, regulated by Homes England.

Our aim is to provide good quality, affordable social housing for older people who have a housing need and who have a connection with the City of Wells.

Foreword

By Nick Wilson, Chair of the Trustees

In my last Foreword for the Annual Report for 2019/20, I started with words about the pandemic which had inflicted its damage on communities around the world. I am writing this with more optimism that we are returning to a greater degree of normality than we might have expected a year ago.

At the beginning of last winter, when the nights were drawing in, all residents of Almshouses in Somerset received a letter from Annie Maw, the Lord Lieutenant of Somerset, with encouraging words for those living on their own. Included in it was this paragraph:

"Almshouse foundations provide a neighbourly way of life. The establishment and longevity of these communities is confirmation of the wisdom of our medieval forbears who were their founders. The need for human companionship, which they recognised, is unchanged. Almshouses became the legacy of benefactors whose intention was to support and respect the older people amongst whom they had lived or who were, for some other reason, important to them. Their concept, despite the many centuries which have passed since their foundations were opened, has proved itself as a most visionary idea and a lasting contribution from which many, many generations have benefited."

In the spring, vaccinations started to be rolled out and by late April, people were becoming happier with the situation. Thankfully, no one at the Almshouses was adversely affected by Covid. As with last year, the pandemic impacted on us. Our staff team of Caroline, Graham, Patrick and Althea dealt with the day to day running of the place efficiently, albeit for long periods from a distance. Systems in place meant that residents could contact them immediately in case of emergencies or the next day for repairs and general maintenance or questions. The residents themselves looked out for each other and the CWA community responded tremendously.

This year has seen two staff changes. It was very sad that Althea Howarth, who had been CEO here for 5 years resigned in May as a result of ill health. She had been a tremendous servant of CWA and loved working here. She took us through a very important phase in our development and started a number of projects, which we will continue to work on and implement. We thank her for her loyalty and dedication. From May until the appointment in August of her successor The Revd Dr Martin Thomas, Caroline, Graham and Patrick worked hard to ensure that life at CWA continued to run smoothly. I must thank them for all they did during this period (and of course for the whole year). Very sadly we will say goodbye to Graham, our fantastic handyman, in November. He has been with us for 11 years and was not only a talented man, fixing the unfixable, but was a great friend to the residents whom he would always put himself out to help. His successor is Michael Andrews and we look forward to working with him.

Zoom meetings are now a thing of the past as far as trustee meetings and sub committees go. How much better it is to see people "live"! Martin and the trustees will be looking at many things over this next year including reviewing systems and processes within the organisation. Of course, our top priority is the welfare of our residents and ensuring that they have good comfortable accommodation. We will be continuing work on the Chapel Restoration project; we are currently awaiting listed building consent before we can progress things. Two long serving trustees retired this year. Andrew Fawcett and Carol Cox have been very active trustees who have contributed practically at Open Days and other events. They have both offered great wisdom in trustee meetings.

I hope that the next twelve months will be fruitful and that we can ensure that the Almshouses continue to go from strength to strength.

Accountants :

MHA Monahans
Fortescue House
Court Street
Trowbridge
BA14 8FA

Bankers:

NatWest
7 High Street
Wells
BA5 2AD

The Charity Bank

182 High Street
Tonbridge
TN9 1BE

Solicitors:

Tozers
Broadwalk House
Southernhay
West
Exeter
EX1 1UA

Land Agents:

Carter Jonas
Third Floor,
St James House,
Lower Bristol
Road,
BA2 3BH

Looking to the Future

By Martin Thomas, CEO

This is an exciting time to be joining City of Wells Almshouses! There are lots of signs of new life as we move cautiously out of the pandemic, and it is very good to hear of all that has been taking place at the Almshouses to keep residents as safe and as warm and comfortable as possible.

During lockdown great efforts were made to prevent isolation creeping in; regular telephone calls were made to residents, meals were brought in on wheels (including a full Christmas dinner!), hymns have been sung outside, the NHS has been applauded, and residents and staff have pulled together through a challenging time.

As we look to the future it is great to be able to report that chapel services have now resumed, as have gardening activities supported by local mental health charity 'Heads Up', and we were glad to welcome visits from the High Sheriff Thomas Sheppard, the University of the Third Age, and the Wells WI.

Large-scale capital projects were put on hold through lockdown, but some projects are moving forwards now with a contract being agreed for the secondary glazing in the Guild Room and gradual progress towards our goal of restoring the Chapel and converting the Old Mortuary into an almshouse. We also hope to take forward the paving of the front of Llewellyn's in the next year.

We have maintained and improved our housing throughout the year including the completion of two new wet rooms, the installation of two new boilers, and one full property upgrade. We have also installed a French drain around the base of the sedilia to allow for better drainage and by re-using materials this blends very smoothly into the existing architectural setting.

We said a very sad farewell to both Althea, the outgoing CEO, and we will soon lose Graham our expert handyman. We look forward to working with his successor Michael Andrews. The City's mayor, Philip Welch, who replaced John Osman joins our board of trustees, and we thank outgoing trustees Andrew Fawcett and Carol Cox for their dedication and commitment.

Our financial situation is stable and our longer-term goals include the expansion of the number of units of housing that we can offer. We have a healthy waiting list, and it would be great to be able to further the aims of the charity by increasing our stock of housing where possible.

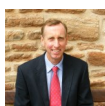
I look forward to leading the charity into the future and trust that we are entering a time of hope after significant adversity.

Martin Thomas
CEO

Looking to
the Future

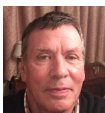
by
Martin
Thomas
CEO

Board of Trustees



Nick Wilson - Chair of Trustees

Retired Headmaster and a member of the Board since 2012. A Chapter nominee.



Charles Cain—Vice Chair

Retired Deputy Headmaster
Appointed October 2017.



Stella Ainsworth

Resident appointed in July 2018.



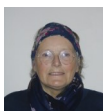
Philip Welch

The Mayor
Ex-officio trustee since 2021



The Very Reverend, Dr John Davies

The Dean of Wells, ex-officio Trustee since November 2016.



Claire Green

Resident appointed January 2020.



John North

Director, JGN Consulting Ltd.
Appointed July 2018.



Richard Quarry

Chartered Quantity Surveyor
Appointed January 2019.



Chris Vigar MBE

Retired Marketing Consultant
Appointed July 2018.



Shirley Watt

Retired Chartered Accountant
Appointed in 2015.

Staff Team

Martin Thomas

Chief Executive Officer

Joined CWA in August 2021. A former Church of England parish priest, Martin holds degrees from Edinburgh and Oxford Universities and a PhD from UEA. He has extensive experience working with housing associations and listed buildings.



Patrick McMahon

Finance Controller & Charity Secretary

Chartered Accountant.
Joined CWA May 2019.



Caroline Tollworthy

Scheme Manager

Joined the Trust in January 2013. Had previously worked in residential lettings and voluntary sector housing posts.



Graham Perry

Handyman

Previously worked for BT.
Joined CWA in June 2010.



A Year In the life of...

OUR CHAPEL RESTORATION:

We are awaiting planning permission from Mendip District Council. The application went in on 9th April 2021. On May 6th, our plans received enthusiastic support from the Wells City Council's planning committee. The initial response from Mendip was also very positive, with some minor reservations, which we have altered in our application to satisfy their concerns. The application to Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) is prepared and will be submitted as soon as we have definitive positive news from Mendip.



East Window

The timing and content of other applications to relevant trusts and grant-giving bodies can then be confirmed and will follow on quickly. In addition, we are planning the more general public "appeal" once we have at least half the target reached.

We therefore remain hopeful that planning permission will soon be granted, that the HLF bid will be successful,

and that further bids, combined with a general public appeal, will raise the balance of funds required to complete the majority of the project by the end of 2022.

We continued to move forward with our plans to turn the Old Mortuary into a new almshouse and hope to begin that work in the next few months

THE ALMSHOUSE COMMUNITY:

We have welcomed two new residents to our community recently and we wish them every happiness in their new homes.

During the lockdowns, visits from and to family and friends were greatly missed but residents took comfort in the (socially distanced) company of their neighbours. There was hymn singing in the Willes/Stills courtyard and outdoor parties for birthdays in Llewellyn's. Christmas was a combined effort, the communal areas were decorated and the tree was up, as usual in the Guildroom, Llewellyn's residents had beautiful wreaths on their doors made by Lindsay Kelly, which cheered them up no end and Christmas presents were distributed by staff and residents, as well as delicious Christmas roasts courtesy of Andres Kitchen #2 and sponsored by db & Paul. Trustees helped by giving lifts for vaccinations and the WCN and Trustees and staff did shopping for those who needed to isolate.

Mavis made an amazing 75 metres of what we think was the best bunting for the Project Factory initiative, "Buntiful Wells" She received a well-deserved prize and the BBC posted a picture of it on their site!

It is wonderful for us to once again engage in trips and events and residents recently visited Stoberry House and Milton Lodge gardens, where they were given a very interesting talk by owner Simon Tudway Quilter. Next on our list is lunch at the Chew Valley fish restaurant, Salt & Malt.

Llewellyn's residents once more opened their gardens every Wednesday morning and visitors thoroughly enjoyed what has been an especially good year for their flowers.



The Finances for the Financial Year Ended 31 March 2021

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

Our income for the financial year as a registered provider of social housing amounted to £203,000 comprising housing and service charges to residents. Expenditure was £197,000 and was mainly comprised of property upkeep costs, property improvements and staff remuneration. This resulted in a net surplus on operational activities of £6,000. We realised £64,000 in income from investments and donations down from £78,000 in the previous year. In the calendar years 2020 & 2021 we sold a parcel of land from our agricultural land portfolio which resulted in a small overall loss after all transaction costs were taken into account. Our securities investment portfolio increased in value sufficiently to offset the disastrous declines we experienced in the preceding year; until actually realised these investments are exposed to positive and negative market movements.

OUR RESOURCES

Over the last five years we have spent approximately £830,000 on improvements to our properties by way of upgrading facilities, installing double glazing, improving access and installing wet rooms. The Trustees are confident that they have the resources to cope with a number of potentially adverse events as well as ensuring that our residents are housed in comfortable, secure and pleasant accommodation that meets current-day standards and specifications.





About the City of Wells Almshouses

There are five almshouse buildings in the City of Wells providing 33 units of accommodation for older people in housing need. There is a mix of one bedroom flats and cottages on two sites either side of Priest Row in the centre of the city.

The earliest of the five almshouses was founded in the fifteenth century through a legacy provided from the estate of the former Bishop of Bath and Wells and Treasurer to King Henry IV, Nicholas Bubwith. Bubwith's Almshouse is located to the rear of St Cuthbert's Churchyard and includes a Chapel and Guild Room. In the early seventeenth century an alderman of the city, Henry Llewellyn, left a legacy to build a further series of almshouses, on a separate site

in Priest Row, to the east of St Cuthbert's Church.

More accommodation was provided through legacies from Bishop Still and Bishop Willes and in 1637 the Bubwith site was expanded again through a legacy from Walter Brick, a Burgess of the city.

The almshouse buildings have been rebuilt many times in their history but are still known by their original names by the people of Wells.

See our website for more about us, our organisation and our buildings:

