



THE CITY OF WELLS ALMSHOUSES



Annual Report 2021-2022

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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 the Regulator of Social Housing.

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 Charles Cain, Chair of the Trustees

In the Annual Report for 2021/2 we looked forward with optimism as life returned to a greater degree of normality. Sadly, Covid continued to dominate and we returned to Zoom meetings and our second Open Day of the summer was cancelled as a new wave hit Somerset. Throughout it all our staff team of Caroline, Mike, Patrick, and Martin have dealt with the day-to-day running of the place despite the many challenges and the Almshouses continued to provide a neighbourly way of life for all our residents. As we approach this winter we face new challenges in supporting our residents through the cost of living crisis and the energy crisis feeling safe and secure – and warm.

This year has seen a number of ways in which the Almshouses have continued to develop and position themselves well for further change. After a long time - and after patient hard work - we have finally secured permission to restore the Chapel so that it becomes more fitting for worship and more suited to wider community use. This is a remarkable achievement and I must thank Chris Vigar who has led this project with extraordinary tenacity and drive. We are enormously grateful to him for enabling us to reach this vital stage in the preservation of our heritage. Under Martin's dynamic leadership we have reviewed our agricultural land holdings. This has enabled us to move forwards with the sale of some land and this is providing capital which will enable us to develop more residential accommodation and thus continue to fulfil our primary purpose. In these challenging economic times it is vital that we maintain the vision of our predecessors who have loved and nurtured this place. Thanks to Patrick's work we have a better understanding of our finances and investments which means we are well positioned to support any development.

We have continued to maintain and improve the site helping to create a safe and secure environment. We are about to undertake a Quinquennial Review to ensure that we continue this good stewardship. Amongst other projects completed this year have been the pointing of the Chamberlain Street Wall, secondary glazing in the window in the Guild Room, the pathways in Llewellyn's and continued refurbishment of our properties. I am grateful to Caroline for all her careful work in organising this essential work. Looking to the future we are exploring more sustainable energy sources and the better insulation of our buildings within the considerable constraints of our historic environment. We are also hoping to purchase land adjacent to Llewellyn's which will enable us to build much need new residential property.

This year we held one very successful Open Day from which all our monies went to support Ukrainian families living in the area. Sadly a resurgence of Covid in the area meant that we had to cancel our second Open Day and the death of her late Majesty Queen Elizabeth II meant that we cancelled our Heritage Open Day

The trustee body continues to change and evolve. This year Nick Wilson, our longest serving trustee and former Chair, stood down; we are enormously grateful for his tireless work in supporting the work of the Almshouses for over 11 years. Claire Green, a resident trustee, also stood down as have Chris Vigar and Richard Quarry. I am grateful to all of them for their many contributions and their energy and wisdom. We welcome Philip Welch, a former mayor of Wells and Mark Shelton, an accountant to the Board.

The next twelve months will be exciting times for the board as the Almshouses continue to shape the vision of Nicholas Bubwith and our other founders and benefactors.

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

Architects:

Hill Reading
Chamberlain
Street, Wells,
BA5 2PG

Annual Review

Martin Thomas, CEO

This has been a very successful year for the Almshouses; our residents have been kept safe and warm, the charity managed efficiently, the buildings maintained and upgraded, and a wide range of new initiatives begun. We have successfully pushed forward our capital works programme completing several large-scale projects. We have installed secondary glazing in the Guild Room which will help conserve heat and has done so with no aesthetic impact at all. The Chamberlain Street wall has been repaired and, perhaps most significantly, beautiful new paving was introduced at the front of the Llewellyn's almshouses. There are further works planned for the year to come and their success, as those mentioned here, is largely down to the expert way in which Caroline, our scheme manager, has handled contractors through a period when it was difficult to find the right people.

Following consultation with committee members and the Board, I restructured the way our committees operate, streamlining our processes to avoid duplication of both content and personnel. We now have a Finance and Land Committee which considers all matter to do with financial planning, reserves, investments, and land management. There is also a Management Group which is a less formal meeting and is designed as support for me in planning my work. In addition the staff have a meeting to discuss operational concerns and Caroline hosts a Residents' Meeting every six weeks which I attend to report back from the Board and to allow residents to ask me questions.

The most significant development this year was a change of strategy for land and investment holdings. We commissioned a survey of all our land and categorised the pieces of land highlighting any we would be wise to sell. This report became our 'Road Map' for future actions over land and in following this through we have sold three parcels of land at Ashton, are in good negotiations with a developer over land at Wedmore, and are auctioning three further pieces of land at Snipefield. There are also some very positive signs that we will be able to unblock the Old Mortuary planning application by planting forestry on a further strip of land that we own. This work involved the commissioning of several reports and we are grateful to Hill Reading for their help with this. In addition, we are in the process of trying to buy a small plot of land at the rear of Llewellyn's which will provide a site for further development of almshouses. In all these actions, we are fulfilling our objectives when we agreed the change of direction earlier this year and in line with our new Five Year Business Plan. If we are successful with the Old Mortuary and the land behind Llewellyn's, the Board will be the first to add almshouses to the site in over 400 years, a significant and lasting achievement which will benefit residents of Wells for generations to come. You will see elsewhere that we have also finally achieved Listed Building Consent for the Chapel Restoration and I will be taking this forwards now as Chris steps back after a fantastic stint as the driving force behind the project. As I come to the end of my first year the charity is exceeding its aims in many areas and the Trustees should be thanked for their bold steps towards providing more safe, warm, and beautiful buildings for the people of Wells to inhabit when they are in need.

Martin Thomas, CEO

Looking to
the Future

by
Martin
Thomas
CEO

Board of Trustees



Charles Cain—Chair of Trustees
Retired Deputy Headmaster
appointed October 2017.



John North, Vice Chair
Director, JGN Consulting Ltd.
Appointed July 2018.



Stella Ainsworth
Resident appointed in July 2018.



Philip Welch
Former Mayor of Wells
Ex-officio trustee since 2021



The Very Reverend, Dr John Davies
The Dean of Wells, ex-officio Trustee
since November 2016.



Chris Vigar MBE
Retired Marketing Consultant
Appointed July 2018.



Shirley Watt
Retired Chartered Accountant
Appointed in 2015.



Sarah Powell
Council Nominee



Stewart Cursley
Mayor of Wells



Tony Robbins
Council Nominee



Mark Shelton
Appointed 2022

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

Mike Andrews
Handyman



Appointed 2022
Previously worked in care homes



A Year In the life of...

OUR CHAPEL RESTORATION:

We are delighted that the renovation plans for the Bubwith Chapel have finally been approved by



East Window

Mendip District Council. The process took many months, mainly due to the unique nature of the medieval chapel with its Victorian pews, its ancient purpose and history and other special features. A compromise was reached regarding all outstanding issues and now the trustees will finalise the submissions to the Heritage Lottery Fund and other grant-giving bodies to continue the fundraising process before launching a general appeal in due course. Something in the region of £45,000 has already been raised through various charitable grants, the Isle of Wight Coastal Path walk of one of the trustees last year, which raised around £5750, and other smaller donations.

Whereas the Chapel will remain primarily a place of worship, the plans will allow for it not only to be secured in a safe and pleasant condition for future generations (there is much fairly urgent work to be done to preserve the building in a good state), but also to make it a comfortable and flexible space for use by the local community as we all continue to recover from the effects of the pandemic. The trustees are very grateful to Jayne Boldy of Mendip District Council Conservation and Rhiannon Rhys of Historic England, as well as to Marcus Chantry of *benjamin+beauchamp architects ltd* for their help and patience in the consent process.

Chris Vigar MBE.

THE ALMSHOUSE COMMUNITY:

It has been a busy year at the almshouses, residents held a Jubilee "Street party" in Llewellyn's and a Jubilee BBQ in the Bubwith site. These events were much enjoyed by all, and many glasses of Prosecco were raised to Her Majesty in this, her Platinum Jubilee year.

The Somerset branch of the Richard III Society have been holding their book club meetings here once a month and have loved the fact that our Bubwith House is of the right era for them.

At Christmas we went to the Courtyard restaurant for a wonderful Christmas lunch and there were several visits to Whitstone's in Shepton Mallett and Salt and Malt in the Chew Valley for fish and chips, during the year.

We re-planted our Willes and Stills courtyard garden, which had fallen behind a little during the COVID years and it is really looking beautiful.

We are now busy deciding the next venue for the Christmas lunch!



The Finances for the Financial Year Ended 31 March 2020

INCOME AND EXPENDITURE

INCOME

Our total income for the year was approximately £282,000 comprising housing charges to residents, investment income and grants.

EXPENDITURE

Our total expenditure during the year was £223,000 mainly comprised of property upkeep costs, property improvements and staff remuneration.

OUR RESOURCES

OVERALL OUTCOME

Our net income of £59,000 together with gains on our investments of approximately £89,000, meant that our total surplus for the year was £148,000. In the last 10 years we have spent approximately £1,300,000 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 potential adverse events as well as ensuring that our residents are housed in comfortable, secure and pleasant accommodation that meets current day standards and expectations.





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:

