

## Whetstone Drama Group – AGM 31<sup>st</sup> January 2024

### Present

Carl Smith - **Chairman**, Jon Sutcliffe – **Secretary**, Steve Cutler-Thomas – **Treasurer**, Sandra Sutcliffe, Paul Hurford, Ben Cutler-Thomas (remotely), Nicola Voyle, Louisa Rimmer, Mel Wale, Alan Wilson, Val Morgan, Skye Erasmus and Ben Love.

Also in attendance Karen Bevan from Central Co-op.

### Apologies

Carrie Peters, Martin Peters, Yvonne Clayton, Pater James, Kate Holyland, Jackie Bingley, David Wortley, Sue Wale, Richard Sutcliffe and Trish Kenyon.

### Minutes of last meeting

Jon Sutcliffe read out the minutes of the last meeting held on 26/01/2023. All agreed to be a true record of the meeting.

### Matters arising from the minutes

Ben Cutler-Thomas and Kate Holyland's originally planned recruitment drive was placed on hold but recent recruitment has been largely successful.

Ben Love praised the new Set Team who are doing great work, led by Steve Cutler-Thomas.

### Appointment of new Secretary

Jon Sutcliffe is stepping down after ten years as secretary. Carl Smith paid tribute to Jon's decades of contribution to the group both on and off-stage whilst noting that he remains an active member of the group.

Paul Hurford has offered to take on the post. There have been no other nominations. Mel Wale seconded the new appointment and all voted unanimously for Paul Hurford to be our new secretary.

### Chairman's Report

Carl Smith is delighted to welcome new members to the group, and notes recent upgrades to sound equipment and enjoyable social events.

Productions in 2023 began with 'A Chorus of Disapproval'. Carrie Peters assembled a diverse cast who successfully depicted a play within a play, including several 18<sup>th</sup> century songs. The cast and crew's hard work was recognised with a range of special mentions at the NANDA Awards in June 2023.

Next was 'The Vicar of Dibley' in early October 2023. Ben Cutler-Thomas brought the best out of the cast, who successfully recreated the warmth of the original piece. It was very well received by a full house each night and we had some lovely feedback. Ben confirms plans for a sequel.

'The Christmas Show' featured a chaotic array of songs and sketches, bringing much-needed cheer to winter evenings. Carl said the production almost felt like the next generation of the group, because of the many new members who brought a fresh feel to the shows.



Sandra led the Youth Group towards a new phase with updated safeguarding measures. Thanks to a number of trained chaperones, we are in a better position to achieve high safeguarding standards. The forthcoming production of 'The Lion, The Witch and The Wardrobe' will be the first youth production since 'Oklahoma' in 2022.

Sundry events related to the group included the Coronation Event at Trinity Park and the Party in the Barn at Whetstone Pastures. These serve to connect with the community and help raise the profile of the group. A big thank you to Central Co-Op for their continued support, both personally and financially. Their help is crucial for the future of Whetstone Drama Group and we hope our members appreciate the wide role that the Co-Op has in the community.

Membership has grown to 59 (now 62) paid members, but there are more people involved in the group who still need to complete the membership process.

Thanks to Steve Cutler-Thomas's proactive work, we obtained a grant of over £1500 from Blaby District Council which went towards a tech trolley, new microphone receivers and other items to upgrade our tech production.

### Membership matters

As the group grows, so does the need for an established code of conduct. Membership and participation of the group comes with an assumed level of behaviour, and this needs to be set out in a formal code of conduct. Members should also be confident that they can report/disclose grievances safely.

Drafts are being made for a written document to establish the framework. This would set out the principles and values of the group and the steps required to seek resolution, should the need arise.

Carl proposed to proceed through the committee for further discussion. Agreed.

Steve stresses the importance of becoming a fully-fledged member of the group, for legal and operational reasons. Without wishing to exclude anyone in the cast, membership fees and subs are vital for covering rehearsal costs. Noting and enforcement of membership/subs shouldn't just fall to producers. The Committee will look at formalising the membership procedure, with certain participation being conditional on payment.

Skye Erasmus raised a concern at over 16s having to pay adult fees. Val Morgan suggested the threshold be moved to 18, and it was agreed that the youth membership discount should apply to under 18s in future.

### Treasurer's report

- Total income of 17063.25
- The three main productions in 2023 made a surplus
- Total net deficit of £1153 but only because of depreciation of assets
- Income from Blaby Lottery set to fall if we withdraw
- Central Co-Op annual grant helps us with non-production expenses

Steve Cutler-Thomas invites suggestions on how to spend surplus money. There's a resistance to invest in the URC building.

Carl explains a periphery blackout curtain for show days which creates hidden walkways, and improves acoustics, appearance and heat retention. Looking at match funding. URC open to the idea.



Sandra said the storage container is almost impossible to open and close manually, so Steve still looking into a personnel door. Also potential income stream with the opportunity to hire out costumes. Mel said toilets need improving, especially access for cast during a show. Suggested a portaloos. Carl said portable conveniences can be quite cheap to rent. Louisa will look into a community DIY/redecoration drive, and how to coordinate. This would be a cost-effective way of improving the venue.

## Central Co-Op

Karen Bevan explained the Co-Op's ethical credentials and how they assist community groups, councils and educational courses. Central Co-Op is the new name for Central England Co-Op. The widening region includes funding for other theatre groups such as RATAI and Thringstone Drama. The more we can champion the Co-Op in Whetstone, the more support they can offer groups such as Whetstone Drama.

## Planned Productions

**The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe** is just days away, on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> of February. The matinee tickets have sold well, but less so for the Saturday evening show.

**Sister Act** on 22<sup>nd</sup> - 25<sup>th</sup> May, including additional matinee performance. Rehearsals are in full swing. Huge challenge, with help from Glenfield Ladies Cooperative Choir, plus a musical director and a choreographer.

Autumn show to be decided.

Two youth plays will feature in the One Act Play Festival at the Little Theatre on 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> of April. These are split by age groups, with Afternoon at the Seaside directed by Sandra and A Universal Sorrow directed by Nicola. Peter James had been preparing a third play but this will be considered for a future entry.

## Murder Mysteries

A WW2-themed Murder Mystery play is planned for 15<sup>th</sup> of March at the URC Hall. Fish and chips will be included in the evening of entertainment and we will begin advertising soon.

The touring Murder Mystery evenings will continue into 2024 and the new theme will be the Wild West. The events are well-received and enjoyable to take part in, but rising costs mean that we need to consider charging more per show.

## AOB

We need to be planning shows for late 2024 and beyond. Louise asked if members could suggest plays and even turn their hands to directing.

Directors have typically been members of the committee, but Spencer did direct Come On Jeeves recently. It does take a lot of commitment and work to lead a production, but we should support new directors going forward.

Nicola Voyle said she would be happy to direct a play alongside a youth member.

Sandra is finalising a fire safety policy to accompany the new safeguarding procedures, and will be carrying out a fire drill during a forthcoming rehearsal.