

Whetstone Drama Annual Business Plan 2021



Whetstone Drama

In association with Central England Co-operative Society

Vision

To bring the joy and excitement of dramatic art to the community

Strategy

We intend to deliver this goal by: -

- maintaining a regular annual programme of productions
- performing productions with strong audience appeal
- remaining inclusive and welcoming to the whole community
- taking a sound and balanced financial view of our activities
- developing the skills of our members, both on-stage acting and off-stage operations
- organising ourselves and subscribing to the principles of a co-operative society

Charitable Objective

To advance the education of the public in all aspects of the dramatic art and the development of public appreciation of such art by the provision of a theatre and facilities for the presentation of public performances.

Ethos

We are entirely non-profit making and inclusive and embrace the 7 co-operative principles:

1. Open and Voluntary Membership – we welcome members from the whole community
2. Democratic Member Control – one member one vote
3. Member Economic Participation – members contribute to and democratically control our finances
4. Autonomy and Independence – we are independent of any external group or political affiliation
5. Concern for Community – we work for our members and the community
6. Co-operation with other Co-operatives – we work together with the wider co-operative movement and all adult members are members of the co-op
7. Education, Training and Information – we educate our members and the wider community about how our cooperative works

History

Whetstone Drama Group (WDG) was formed in 1962, from the members of three local churches but soon after became a secular organisation. It is possibly the most successful drama group in Leicestershire, having won a multitude of awards in recent years and has both a strong membership and following.

In 2019 we subscribed to the principles of a co-operative society in recognition of our association with the Central England Co-operative.

In 2020 we became a charitable company operating under the name of Whetstone Theatre Company Limited.

Aside from performing 2-3 adult stage plays a year, we have a thriving youth group, bi-annual Christmas variety show and regular murder mysteries. Our murder mysteries are used by community groups to raise funds for a variety of projects. We perform most of our productions at The United Reformed Church Hall in Whetstone or occasionally Countesthorpe College, but our murder mysteries are performed 'on the road' in a variety of locations across the county.

Governance

We are governed by articles of association led by an elected committee of directors including a chair, vice-chair, secretary and treasurer. The committee meets six times a year and minutes are available on request. We have policies for health and safety, safeguarding and public liability insurance.

Finances

A full set of accounts are internally audited on an annual basis and available on request.

Occasionally we seek grants for the purchase of significant items.

We receive an annual revenue grant from the Central England Co-operative to cover the cost of rental storage.

Membership

Membership is open to anyone. There is no age restriction with complete novices as welcome as experienced performers.

We also welcome those who can contribute to our stage crew or in a host of backstage roles such as front of house, costumes, refreshments, and marketing. Acting members are asked to pay a small annual subscription of £15 (non-acting members: £5) and the sum of £1 at each rehearsal. A full membership list is provided as an appendix to this plan.

Prices

Prices are maintained at the minimum needed to cover our costs and provide a small reserve for the purposes of purchasing equipment, hiring costumes and protect against unforeseen losses.

Social Events

Members finance group social events themselves including parties, quizzes and visits to professional productions. These are not funded out of the group's budget. This year we have organised online social events e.g. annual new year's party.

Review of 2020

This was a year like no other.

The global pandemic made face to face performance impossible, effectively cancelling our entire programme. We had to adapt in ways that we could never have imagined a year ago and of course, nothing can replace the excitement of live performance, but necessity has been the mother of invention and it is remarkable how much *has been done* in spite of everything. In some ways, this may prove to be the most important year in the group's history.

2020 began perfectly normally, with rehearsals for Carry on Jeeves, scheduled for performance in April, but having got off to a good start the emerging international crisis forced us into taking the unprecedented decision to suspend rehearsals indefinitely. At first, we talked of performing later in the year, before it became obvious that even that wouldn't be possible. The murder mysteries had also started and the few that took place before the lockdown represent our only performances in 2020. Metaphorically at least, a ghost light shone across the Whetstone stage.

However, out of the darkness came light, and in our case that light took the form of a wave of creativity, in particular the launch of the hugely successful Sunday Night Quiz, by Ben and Steve Cutler-Thomas. This YouTube quiz was their own initiative and they put their heart and soul into it, to the extent that it rapidly became a huge hit. To have the technical expertise to put on these events, never mind the dedication and hard work to make them happen, was truly remarkable and I can only pay tribute to their tremendous success. The first 'run' lasted for 12 weeks and was followed by another 7

weeks in the late autumn to accompany the second lockdown. The quizzes were attended by many outside the group and have attracted new members and a new audience, which is an unexpected bonus.

Elsewhere, we discovered the wonders of zoom and to use it to its full potential several ideas were floated, some more successful than others. A particular success was the first live TV appearance for the group in the form of an advert written and produced by Peter James and performed to an audience of millions watching Britain's Got Talent on ITV. I am fairly certain this will remain Whetstone's largest audience for a long time to come!

The murder mystery group reconvened online, and several readings followed, as did virtual rehearsals for *Carry on Jeeves* and *The Lady In The Van*, all originally scheduled for 2020. However, we have been mindful of the need to keep all our members engaged so other events have been organised such as the recent online New Year's Party, led by Spencer Greasly. complete with cameo performances from several members. The drama group community draws its life from all members and unfortunately not everyone is able to participate in these online events but at least they have kept the spirit of the group going during these difficult times.

The most significant development this year has been our foundation as a Charitable Company, now known as *The Whetstone Theatre Company*. This major step had been mooted for some time, but the challenge of the pandemic brought matters to a head. There are many advantages to becoming a charitable company, not the least of which is increased access to funding opportunities, but it also comes with certain responsibilities. We are now a legal entity with formal articles of

association, required to submit annual accounts and report on progress towards our charitable objective. Committee members are directors, and we are permitted to employ staff, should we so wish. This is important as we consider our long term vision and potential for future growth.

Our finances have undoubtedly been hit by the pandemic, though thankfully less than might have been the case because of the grant we received from Central England Co-operative Society. This generous grant, supplemented by an unexpected but enormously appreciated additional £200 in December, meant that most of our fixed costs for items such as rental storage have been met. Without this vital lifeline we might have been struggling, but as things stand we are financially stable, if somewhat poorer than anticipated. The Central England Co-op have been a great support this year and I would formally like to thank Karen and the team for everything they have done for us. We were also the beneficiaries of a £4000 community grant award from Blaby District Council which was to help us purchase a new projector solution for the hall. The project is still alive, but Blaby have extended the deadline for us to spend it and we need to raise another £5000 to make it a reality. Steve is looking into various options and we hope to move forward on this project in the not too distant future.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to two very sad losses this year, both victims of this awful pandemic.

Graham Ward had been a member of the group for over 20 years as a much valued member of our design and backstage team. Graham was such a decent, dignified man, quiet and incredibly supportive, and he went about his work without fuss or seeking attention. Graham helped the team in so many ways, but he also distributed posters and leaflets, ran the bar at

performances and attended committee meetings. He was an absolute stalwart of the group who never sought the limelight but contributed a great deal and he will be greatly missed.

Martin Lee wasn't actually a member of the group, but he was a great supporter of it and a familiar face at productions and social events for many years. He was one of the many people that we think of as part the drama group community, without whom we are nothing. Martin was a loyal member of our audience and we will miss him greatly.

Both these men had years ahead of them and the tragedy of this awful disease is brought home to us by their passing. I also know several of you have lost loved ones and of course, others have been shielding or suffering in many other ways. It has been an appalling human tragedy and has cast a shadow over us all but now, thanks to the vaccine, the end is in sight and we can look forward to resuming our activities. I would now like to pay tribute to all those people associated with the group who have suffered this year and ask if would join me in a moment of silence to lament their passing.

I believe Whetstone Drama Group will thrive if we look to the future, difficult as that may be at present. In 2022 we will be 60 years old and we want to celebrate it with a big production and a bright new vision. The challenges that lie ahead include growing our membership and improving our facilities, but they are nothing compared to what we have faced.

If we can survive this, we can survive anything.

Carl Smith (Chair) .

Progress Review

Last year we set identified three challenges

- Maintaining and possibly expanding our performance venue base.
- Reversing a small decline in audiences and our reliance on certain major ticket sellers for the bulk of our sales.
- Expanding our membership and attracting new members of the right age and ability to continue to put on the standard and range of productions we would like.

Little did we know what was going to happen, but in spite of everything we have made progress. For instance, we have explored a number of potential options for performance venues including an initial discussion with Tritax, a company working on the proposed garden village development known as Whetstone Pastures, just outside Countesthorpe. At this stage it is too early to say what will come of this or any other of the ideas we have had, suffice to say we are thinking about them seriously because as this year has proven, we never know what the future holds, and we need to be as ready as we can for what lies ahead. Despite the lack of audiences this year, our membership has actually increased and we now have a formal record of members for the first time, another legal requirement of charitable status. Tonight, may I politely request that anyone who hasn't paid their annual membership fee does so immediately, because we are only covered for fully signed up members and must now account for everyone who participates in the group, including those who are friends of the group. Steve and Ben have set up an excellent online payment system and when we do return we will be able to receive

card payments on the door, reducing the need for physical cash. They have also expanded our social media output to such an extent that we now have over 500 followers, which is absolutely fabulous news. These developments are crucial to our future.

May I also remind members of two easy ways they can contribute to our finances, apart from paying their membership fee.

- Blaby Lottery (pay £1 a week and get the chance to win large cash prizes) <https://www.blabylottery.co.uk/>
- Amazon Smile (every time you buy on amazon, the group gets a small contribution and if you use the amazon app, just go to settings and set up amazon smile with Whetstone Theatre Company as your preferred organisation)

Treasurer's Report

With no staged productions, there is of course no surplus or deficit on productions to report. This leaves our annual overheads to meet, to the tune of £2.5k.

This would ordinarily be a huge hit to our reserves and stunt our investment potential for 2021 and beyond, however I am very pleased to report that these overheads were almost all able to be met with income generated as follows:

- £1.4k total contributions from Central England Co-Operative
- £0.3k Blaby Lottery proceeds (largely Ruth Bates Lee and Linda Wright)
- £0.3k annual subscriptions from members
- £0.2k donations received (largely Steve & Ben's contribution towards the Quiz license software, and audience members donating their ticket refund to the group: Rachel Burnham, Mary Sillitoe, Dawn Morley)
- £0.1k murder mystery group income pre-lockdown

We are therefore very fortunate to be able to report only a modest deficit for the year of £153.

We were also very fortunate to have been awarded a Blaby Council capital grant of £4,000 two weeks before lock-down to be used towards our ambitious £10k Projector investment plan, however this project has of course been deferred into 2021 and we are seeking additional funding sources to plug the funding gap.

Despite only a small deficit of £0.2k, our revenue funds at 31 December 2020 (which excludes the £4k grant mentioned above) have actually depleted £0.6k compared to the prior year. The difference of £0.4k is explained by payments and receipts which, under good accounting practice, won't be accounted for until 2021 as follows:

- £0.7k 'good' spend towards rehearsals, scripts, set costs etc which are carried forward to match the timing of the related income when the production is staged.
- £(0.3)k annual & weekly subs income received which are in connection to the 2021 year and therefore shouldn't feature in 2020 results.

All paid-up 2020 members are eligible for a free 12-month extension to their membership through to 31 December 2021, given the reduction in opportunities available during the 2020 year. Despite this, we have received 2021 payments for 27 members so far, due to a combination of (1) brand new members joining, (2) tightening up on unpaid members from 2020 and (3) existing members kindly choosing not to claim the free extension.

The sign-up and payment process is now incredibly important given we are a legal entity, as not completing the membership form means **we are unable to involve you in member activities**. Please therefore do make every effort to sign up as soon as possible if not already, even if you qualify for the free extension.

2020 Committee Membership

Carl Smith	Chair / Actor / Producer
Carrie Wale	Vice-Chair / Actor / Director / NANDA
Steve Cutler-Thomas	Treasurer / Lighting and Sound
Jon Sutcliffe	Secretary / Actor / Prompt
Sandra Sutcliffe	Youth Lead / Actor / Murder Mystery / Costumes / Safeguarding / Director
Ben Cutler-Thomas	Marketing and Sales / Actor / Director / Youth Lead / Safeguarding
Graham Muddimer	Set Designer
Mel Wale	Actor / Writer / Director
Peter James	Actor / Writer
Nicky Voyle	Actor / Props / Costumes

Awards and Nominations

- Broadcast ITV advert on Britain's Got Talent
- NANDA (Nottingham & Nottinghamshire Dramatic Association):
 - Tom Morley won Outstanding Youth Performance for *Harry in The Blitz Club*
 - The Set Team received a 'special mention' and was highly commended for *The Blitz Club*
 - The Costume Team received a 'special mention' and was highly commended for *The Blitz Club*
 - Spencer Greasly received a 'special mention' and was highly commended for *Joe in The Blitz Club*

Membership list (as at 17 January 2021)

Alan	Adams	Paul	Hurford	Carl	Smith
Amanda	Adams	Peter	James	Emma	Smith
Hilary	Allen	Trish	Kenyon	Madeleine	Smith
Louise	Bateman	Ruth	Lakin	Matthew	Smith
Jamie	Bates	Isabel	Longman	Heather	Stokes
Carolyn	Baxter	Ben	Love	Jonathan	Sutcliffe
Kevin	Baxter	Brennen	Maloney	Richard	Sutcliffe
Rebecca	Bunting	Julian	Mason	Sandra	Sutcliffe
Yvonne	Clayton	Jackie	Mitchell	Linda	Tovey
Gregg	Collingham	Sophie	Mitchell	Peter	Tovey
Rod	Cookson	Valerie	Morgan	Nicola	Voyle
Wendy	Cookson	Graham	Muddimer	Eve	Wakely
Jessyca	Crane	Dina	North	Mel	Wale
Lucy-sue	Crane	Eddy	North	Sue	Wale
Rosie	Cusano	Tallulah	North	Bernard	Warner
Steve	Cutler	Carrie	Peters	Jean	Warner
Ben	Cutler-Thomas	Martin	Peters	Karen	Williams
Amie	Davies	Christine	Phillip's c	Alan	Wilson
Spencer	Greasly	Abi	Prince	Lara	Wilson
Kaila	Handley	Louisa	Rimmer	Conner	Woodcock
Alex	Hay	Hazel	Sharp	John	Yates
Kate	Holyland	Alisdair	Smith	Kath	Yates