

## Chairman's Report for 2006

2006 has been a year of foundation and preparation work for the future of the Playhouse. The beginnings of a truly secure future.

Most of our achievement and projects, which have taken place in 2006, will be covered by the Secretary's report. I aim to elaborate on our future plans for this year and beyond. However there are a few points I must address before that.

I am not sure how many of you saw the article that stated in the midst of it that The Playhouse was awarded 4 stars for environmental health for general cleanliness of the bar, the cellars and the toilets etc. A higher score than the Queens Hotel and the Everyman!! Be assured you may get MRSA in the operating theatre but not in The Playhouse Theatre!!! (My thanks to Peter Oddy for that thought!) Seriously many thanks must go to Carol Oddy, Peter Harrison and Mary Newman for ensuring we scored so highly.

May I also thank all those members who have given their time and efforts for the benefit of the Playhouse? George Whitford has spent many hours here on regular maintenance and I do not know what we would do without him. I cannot begin to name everyone else; Peter has named a few in his report; but you know who you are and your commitment is greatly appreciated. This thank you should also include the members of your committee and the Strategic team. Hours of discussions and decisions have taken place alongside all the regular stresses! Also with another successful management of our funds by our Treasurer, this is surely a point at which we thank Mrs Chandler for her efforts on your behalf. Her steady hand on the monies is the reason we are in the position we are in, to allow us even to be able to contemplate implementing our plans for the future. So, thank you, Anne.

As many of you are aware, the Cabinet of Cheltenham Borough Council has set aside £200,000 from the sale of the Axiom money for use by the Playhouse in our refurbishment and improvement project. Yes, it has finally happened. The Strategic Committee, about which I reported at the last AGM, spent a considerable time preparing a business plan to present to the Council. This was with the aid of a business consultant, Carolyn Brooks. Business Link provided the majority of the funding for this. The treasurer will further expand in her report. The result was a sound working document, which was well received by the representatives from the Council. They have agreed in principal to help fund our staged improvements up to the £200,000 as we embark on them. Wonderful news I am sure you will agree.

However of course our money, the Council's money, neither will be enough to complete the projects in hand. Thus it is so incredible to have been bequeathed £87,000 by Joan Cross, our President and founder member. This is a vital funding source and I am sure she would be have been thrilled. Thank you, Joan from us all. I cannot believe she has been gone a year now. Gone, but never forgotten, Joan.

Of course, other areas of funding are being explored including lottery funding for the other stages of development. However we are also beginning a series of serious fund raising ourselves – several ideas in the pipeline include buy a seat, a grand raffle – anyone out there prepared to take this on? , frog racing (long story will explain that one after the meeting) etc If anyone has any other ideas and or would be willing to help please see me or contact me later.

Further to this, we are in the process of completing a new lease for 125 years. We are also amending a clause, which will then allow us to hire the Theatre for professional use more often. At last, true security of tenure as a legacy for the generations to come. I probably won't still be around in 100 years but I sure will be checking it all out – and sending thunderbolts down if they get it wrong!!

We had hoped to embark on the Auditorium project in May. However, we have postponed this until 2008, because it would have been imprudent to commission the work at this time. We have engaged an architect and had plans drawn up for the whole project and registered plans for the auditorium as a listed building application. However, to enable us to ensure we get the best value for the money we will have available – Axiom money, Crossie money, Playhouse money and other funds which will be sought. It was felt that to rush decisions and details in order to meet a convenient time window, would be foolhardy and unproductive. Thus the decision to postpone was taken. I must give credit and thanks to Ian Chandler for his role in co-ordinating and implementing the project. Without him, I doubt we would have been as far forward as we are now.

I am happy to report that part of our plan is to install a disabled lift – given listed building permission and funding. We are now in the process of seeking appropriate funding from the Grants for All Lottery Fund.

If you would like to see the plans in more detail then they will be available to look at in the Foyer.

A week after this meeting, work will begin on refurbishing the gent's loos in the Green Room. For those ladies who may never have had the pleasure of entering the said area, this is not before time. It will make hiring rooms during the day a more attractive package. It may mean that gentlemen members may enjoy visiting it too!!

Part of our plan for the future is to increase the usage of the complex during the day, again generating more income. However, a new exciting project has been proposed, which would mean using The Playhouse complex during the day. An international performing arts foundation course is being devised, which would be based at The Playhouse, guaranteeing a minimum of 40 weeks hire, 5 days a week. As an educational venture it is exciting but the benefits to The Playhouse itself are myriad. At present it is not finalised but auditions are happening in May and if there are enough successful candidates, the School will open January 2008. This will be an extremely profitable venture for the Playhouse to be associated with and for the Community at large. We hope all will proceed successfully.

It is with regret that I took possession last week, of the resignation of Peter Harrison from the committee. As you are all aware, Peter had decided to give up being the Bar Manager; he has carried out this duty – poison chalice – for some considerable time. I think you will agree he has done a sterling and admirable job. However, Peter has now decided that the time has come to stand down altogether. I am saddened by his choice but can appreciate it. Peter has served on this committee for at least 20 years! He must need treatment! He was our previous Chairman and held that position for 5 years. So I think perhaps, he deserves a break. Thank you, Peter, on behalf of the membership, the committee and The Playhouse. Thank you, Peter, from me; you have been a steady rock.

May I take this opportunity to thank Adam Bottomley who has agreed to take over from Peter. Many thanks and commiserations!!!!?

2007 is going to be another exciting and evolving year for The Playhouse. Communication is a subject on which I have often waxed lyrical. We are constantly looking for ways to improve communication between them and us and the public. We don't always get it right but please bear with us and if you can suggest anything else we could do, suggest any improvements we could make or simply come up with some fund raising idea you would be willing to organise, then please contact me and we will take it from there.

Thank you all for your continued support.

Sue Bennett

#### **Addendum to this report**

- Farewell to Bishop Cleeve Players – their last show was performed just after the AGM. It is with sadness we say goodbye, but hope they may return in the future?
- I did not say, although I thought I had, that the works for the Auditorium **will** go ahead but in April next year. Depending on funding there maybe more than this carried out, but regardless of that, the Auditorium will be completed!!