



## Minutes of the Special Trustees Meeting held at 44 Beverley Crescent, Bedford on Tuesday 23 August 2022

**Present:** Peter Snelling (in the Chair), Tessa Cox, Ian Smith, Jeremy Hopkinson, Imogen Allen, Sian Rees and via Zoom, David Roberts and Carol Yirrell

**Apologies:** Julia Dickens, Vanessa Skelton

### Action

Peter opened the meeting by setting out the current financial situation. This season, 2021-2022, we have made a loss of £7,500. Some of the factors contributing to this loss are fewer members and poor ticket sales, especially for the summer concert. He said there was an urgent need to reduce future losses. We would need to consider ways to boost income such as increasing ticket prices, increasing the cost of membership subscriptions and recruiting more members and Friends. We would also need to consider ways to reduce our costs.

### How to increase income

#### 1 Membership subscriptions

Peter had compared our subscription fee for the 2021-2022 season with that of similar local choirs. Our fee was lower than two of the three choirs he had looked at. If we were to increase our fee to £200 for the forthcoming season that might, depending on the number of members, help us to reduce the budgeted deficit by £2.5k (plus Gift Aid).

The general feeling among committee members was that a fee of £200 was too great and would be off-putting for members. Notwithstanding the committee's concern about the effect on members of the cost of living crisis, it was decided to increase the subscription fee to £195 for the 2022-2023 season. It was pointed out that this amounted to approximately £5 per rehearsal and could be considered good value for money. Should any member experience difficulty paying the sub, they should be encouraged to speak in confidence to Peter who would be able to discuss payment options. Given the increase in subs, it was decided that we would no longer charge members for refreshments at rehearsals.

A letter would need to go out to members as soon as possible informing them of the committee's decision to increase the membership subscription. The letter should cover the following points:

- explain the financial situation we find ourselves in and emphasise the seriousness of the situation
- explain that we have decided against increasing ticket prices
- explain that we have decided to raise subscriptions to £195
- emphasise the value for money that represents - £5 per weekly session
- make it clear that if anyone has difficulty paying the sub, they should speak to Peter

- teas & coffees will be free

Carol volunteered to compose a letter. [Subsequent to the meeting it was felt that a message of this importance should be conveyed to members by the chair]

**Carol/[Tessa]**

## 2 Friends

Peter raised concerns that we may lose some existing Friends when we ask them to fill out new Gift Aid forms for the CIO and complete standing orders for the new bank account.

We would need to sell the idea of becoming a Friend to existing choir members and new members as they join and ask them to encourage family and friends to consider becoming Friends.

Imogen said we need to make it easier for people to become Friends, perhaps by having a link on the website.

## 3 Recruitment

Carol reported that two new potential members would be attending the first rehearsal and that Sarah and Jonny Price had been proactive in recruiting new members. Ian knew of a further potential new member. However, with people retiring from the choir it is imperative to recruit new members.

Tessa asked Carol to prioritise email enquiries from prospective members and to find out how they had heard about us and what had attracted them to us.

**Carol, Peter**

Recruitment flyers had been delivered in Flitwick and Ampthill and Peter would be delivering flyers in the Newton Longville area and to a new housing estate in Linslade.

Imogen thought that flyers were not the way to attract younger members. Social media and in particular Facebook were a more effective way of reaching younger people.

We need to raise our profile and optimise our website for search engines to ensure that Danesborough Chorus appears as close to the top of the list of results for any internet search for choirs in Bedfordshire and the surrounding counties. Tessa will speak to Jenny about doing this.

**Tessa**

Our website home page needs to make it clear to visitors where we operate geographically as this is not apparent from our name and it is important that potential new members can find this information easily. Tessa will speak to Jenny and Imogen offered to assist Jenny if necessary.

**Tessa**

Advertising in local publications should be stepped up although it was noted that recruitment adverts had appeared in July editions of publications covering Wavendon, Milton Keynes South, Woburn Sands and Aspley Guise. A recruitment advert would also be appearing in the September issue of *BeeLocal* covering Leighton Buzzard and the surrounding area.

It was noted that there was an urgent need to find a replacement publicity officer. Tessa would speak to Hannah Dixon to see if she might be willing to take on this role.

**Tessa**

#### 4 Fundraising

Tessa felt that it would not be right to ask members to fundraise in addition to increasing their subscriptions.

It was suggested that we might ask a well-known singer to do a fundraising concert on behalf of Danesborough Chorus. Ian said he would be willing to approach Peter Hoare.

Ian

Peter mentioned that Julia Dickens had offered her home as a venue for a potential fundraising activity.

#### 5 Come and sing

It was thought that a 'Come and Sing' event could be a good way of recruiting new members and raising Danesborough's profile. Ian said he would be willing to do a 'Come and Sing' and suggested a programme of well-known works such as choruses from *The Messiah* which would have broad appeal.

Ian

#### 6 Easyfundraising

Members need to be reminded to make purchases through the Easyfundraising website as this has provided useful income in the past.

#### 7 Grants

Leighton and Linslade Arts Forum are offering grants of up to £500 and prior to the meeting Sian had suggested applying for a grant perhaps to purchase sheet music for our Christmas concert in Leighton Buzzard. However, Peter pointed out that we had already purchased Christmas music which we needed to use and the grant could not be used retrospectively.

#### 8 Ticket prices/Increasing ticket sales

The committee decided after some discussion that increasing ticket prices was not desirable in the current financial climate.

There was some discussion about ways to increase audience numbers. Tessa suggested that we alter our programming to appeal to a wider audience, for example pairing a less well-known work with a more popular or accessible work. However, this would have the drawback of requiring more instrumentalists and would increase costs.

Imogen thought that performing a programme of shorter pieces could attract new audience members although Ian said the drawback with this type of programme is that it is harder to rehearse and requires a longer rehearsal period.

#### **How to reduce costs**

##### 1 Using a smaller orchestra

David has been able to source scores with reduced orchestration. For the Dvorak concert in March 2023 he has found a reduced chamber version which we will use.

**Programming  
sub-  
committee**

David suggested a change of programming for the summer concert. Instead of performing Bach's *Magnificat*, he recommended Puccini's *Messa di Gloria* which

will require fewer instrumentalists thereby reducing costs and this was approved by the committee. Other works to be considered for the summer concert are Ola Gjeilo's *Sunrise Mass* and either a Brandenburg concerto or one of Handel's *Concerti Grossi*.

Using a smaller orchestra will allow us to continue doing two concerts with orchestra a year along with a third concert with piano or organ.

2 Choosing works that require fewer soloists and reducing the amount we pay soloists

We have reduced the budgeted costs for soloists this season by altering the programming in the summer concert. Five soloists would have been required for Bach's *Magnificat* but only two are needed for Puccini's *Messa di Gloria*.

The soloists hired for the November 2022 concert are under budget and it is expected that this will also be the case for the March 2023 concert.