

Case Study

Community Cinema for Little Hadham Village Hall



Introduction- Context

The management committee of Little Hadham Village Hall, at an Annual General Meeting in 2019, invited local people to help plan a refurbishment and sustainable future for the Village Hall. Ideas were needed that would help with extending the use of the hall and its facilities and to encourage more community involvement.

A Community Cinema was proposed, and this popular idea was quickly supported and a dedicated team of six film club committee members was formed. The new community cinema gained the invaluable support of the Chair of Little Hadham Management Committee and a new and exciting innovation for Little Hadham and its neighbouring hamlets and villages planned its first meeting.

What the committee planned first

The first couple of meetings discussed key points including a name for the Community Cinema. As the hall had red comfortable chairs suitable for the cinema to use, the Red Chair Community Cinema name was suggested and adopted. Roles of committee members were discussed and a list of things to do and consider drawn up.

Challenges – Key Issues

The new committee recognised the need to consider:

- Roles of committee members to support the work of the community cinema.
- Regular and suitable dates to hold cinema screenings.
- Suitability of films and proposed programme for the year ahead
- Launch event and questionnaire for prospective members.
- Licences for film showings, music and selling alcohol.
- Publicity that would comply with film licencing arrangements.
- Websites where information on community cinemas might be found.
- Annual membership fee or fee payable at the entrance door
- How to manage income and expenditure
- Membership compliance with GDPR requirements
- Grant funding opportunities to support equipment required.
- Opportunities to borrow equipment.
- Opportunities to network with existing community cinemas
- Availability of essential committee members at planned screenings
- Use of publicity e.g Facebook, email, posters, Village Hall website
- Audience seating arrangements and layout
- Health & Safety, including a need for Risk Assessment.

The Hall had a small and rather worn-out screen to the rear of the hall, but no projector and the sound amplification was from 1970's and not up to cinema sound. With support of another village hall a projector was borrowed and following an open day the Rotary Club of Hertford Shires agreed to lend sound equipment and technical support. Work started in earnest in March 2019 and following an appeal to local people, 80 members signed up and the first showing in June 2019 was "Some Like It Hot" During 2019 the Red Chair cinema staged 11 films to cinema club members.

The equipment was quite heavy had to be brought in and set up for each event then dismantled and taken away which took about two hours in total for each event. With the success of the cinema firmly established it would be unreasonable to borrow equipment in the long term, we needed equipment which would be easy to operate and available for other users of the hall.

With the hall closed due to the pandemic in March 2020 we researched the equipment that would be needed for a permanent installation. A grant was applied for and awarded, which was a great boost to getting proper cinema equipment installed.

The expertise gained also helped Rotary Club of Hertford Shires to put on an outdoor Drive-In Cinema event in September 2020. The event provided much needed relief for 130 filmgoers who had been isolating and stimulating activity for 40 volunteers. It also raised funds allowing the Little Hadham Village Hall to be painted externally.

Instead of the small projection screen at the rear of the hall a much larger four metre wide cinema screen has been installed, positioned above the stage at the front of the hall. This will allow the audience to face forward and get an unobstructed view of the screen. The new screen is electrically operated and so easy to setup.

The new sound system is designed for cinema and uses many loudspeakers to give the audience an authentic movie experience surrounded by sound. The sound system is flexible enough to accommodate other important uses such for theatrical productions or Health and Wellbeing classes. The system is permanently installed in the hall so it only needs to be switched on for each cinema event.

The hearing loop system is also being upgraded to ensure access for all users.

What are the aims of your organisation?

The aim of the community cinema is to include the whole community and get people together to enjoy a mutual interest in film and support the use of Little Hadham Village Hall. At our Community Cinema people are guaranteed to meet friends. When our audience arrive from 7pm they get themselves a drink and chat with friends and acquaintances before the film starts and again during a fifteen- minute interval. We consider this to be one of the most important aspects of our evenings and was a key motivation for starting the cinema. A significant number of our members live alone and have said that they love going to see films but would not go the cinema by themselves.

Funding and marketing

We operate a membership scheme which is currently £15 per year for 11 films. Non-members can attend for £3 per ticket. At present we have 90 members and average 3 non-members a screening. The village hall helped with set up costs, until the Cinema could be self-supporting through its membership fees.

In November 2020, we were able to secure a grant from East Herts District Council for £5840, to pay for the equipment needed to provide a proper community cinema for our members. Due to the Covid19 pandemic, we have not been able to open the hall to our cinema goers, so they are yet to enjoy the enhanced cinema experience.

We use Mail Chimp an online marketing tool to present text and pictures via email to promote the latest film showing to our members. This online tool also allows us to ask members to reply to the cinema screening notification and lets us know how many members we expect to attend. From this, we draw up an attendance list and use this list at the film showing to check in members as they arrive and add any non-members to the list to ensure we know how many people are at the screening.

Film programme

We have to date, tended to screen more popular films many of which have been musicals and a couple of films aimed at children. Children's films such as Toy Story and Paddington have not attracted children to the Community Cinema as we had thought but they have proved popular with adults.

Members have been asked to suggest films, but few members have taken up this opportunity. A questionnaire asked members what genre of films they preferred and using this information, we have tried to gauge what films we feel would be a popular with our audience.

Depending on the easing of restrictions on public events, it should be possible to resume our film screenings from Spring 2021.