

Extraordinary General Meeting – Future of HOPS

1th March 2019 – Cedars Hotel Stowmarket 7:30pm

1.1 Welcome - Introductions Trustees

Chair	John Broad
Vice Chair	Mike Powley
Treasurer	Jean Broad
Secretary	Simon Linford-Wood
Trustee	Kim Corcoran

Also present Jackie Markell (Scheme administrator) Amanda Jebb (Play Leader)

Purpose – Future of HOPS

1.2 Where are we

HOPS is a small successful charity providing a unique service to a small but very needy group of carers and children. We celebrate our 40th anniversary this year and have a loyal and committed group of employees and volunteers. HOPS has had to evolve in the past, major changes took place in the early 2000's and many of the few trustees here today joined at that time to support JM in the process of moving the Charity forward and meeting new expectations. This was a major task and at that time JM was fulfilling a voluntary role and gradually we have updated and refined what we do to achieve high care standards and deliver the quality service that HOPS is recognised for today. With the commitment of AJ and fellow play leaders we have developed a service everyone is proud of. This well-oiled machine is kept moving by the sometimes frantic efforts of just a few staff and no one should underestimate the tireless effort JM and AJ put in to keep ahead of the curve and the funding applications, volunteer recruitment and training, activity planning and administration that is managed to keep the scheme running.

1.3 The issue

HOPS faces an existential threat as a consequence of the failure of the Kerrison's trust to renew the lease on our building at Thorndon. This has brought to a head a number of challenges which have affirmed both the strengths and weaknesses of the charity and the resources and expertise we have at our disposal.

It cannot be stressed how important Settles house has been to the success of HOPS – many of you may have viewed care settings where you have come away less than sure that your child would be safe or doubtful about facilities and activity options.

Our children often need space or experience times when they need it to manage anxiety and calm. Settles house has the advantage of providing a mix of large and small internal and external spaces which cater for the broad needs of the children we support and enable the volunteers and play leaders to manage those periods when our children are challenged.

We were given only 24 months' notice that our lease would not be renewed - a surprise given the Kerrison's Trust constitution had committed it to the provision of support to charities catering for children.

In response to this JM has had to divert considerable effort into searching news we have worked extremely hard to identify an alternative setting and **it is this process which has highlighted the magnitude of the challenge and vulnerability of the business model we operate.**

As you are aware HOPS operates relatively infrequently and consequently our

- Rent to use ratio is large
- Shared use of a building is challenging because of our equipment needs and need to find right partners and meet safeguarding obligations
- We need a community hub or urban location to maximise the opportunity to generate rental income but this attracts higher costs
- The setting would need to appeal to a variety of users to be viable
- These facilities appraisal tasks need additional resources and expertise.

The availability of affordable buildings is very limited and those we have viewed would require substantial renovation and modification to achieve even a modest equivalent to that available at Settles.

We have approached many organisations, written to councillors and MP's describing our desperate predicament. You are also aware of our various media campaigns we have been involved in with respect to press and radio. Unfortunately this has generated many suggestions but very few realistic options.

In addition, we have been thwarted by indecision and lack of clarity of expectations of landlords and Local Authorities.

- The former primary school at Mendlesham – looked at architects requirements. Concerns size of project about lease constraints
- The former Opportunity play scheme building in Stowmarket. Initially very positive support for HOPS use but LA indecision made this increasingly difficult and without a firm commitment we were unable to pursue this as a realistic option
- The former bank in Needham market where we entered into discussions looked at building only to find building not owned by bank and ownership of external spaces not transparent
- Former hospital space at Hartismere was offered and viewed but much too small for our needs.

Reviewed numerous farm buildings – most without services of electricity and sanitation

Industrial units – expensive and difficult to sublet and need modification to even approach suitability.

These are tasks outside our main skill sets and JM in particular has had to liaise on the process as well as running the scheme.

There are other factors which have a bearing on our future

1.4 Safeguarding

As you are all aware austerity and economic constraints have impacted heavily on social services and provision of care. This stress and a more pervasive 'blame culture' has demonstrated the challenges we all have in supporting vulnerable children and young adults.

Increasingly staff at HOPS are being expected to contribute to multi-agency reviews and assessment of referrals. We do not in truth have the resources to deal with these critical issues whilst attempting to maintain and deliver the scheme support we do. HOPS staff have been supporting children because we care but cannot spread our help indefinitely.

These pressures are often upsetting and impacting on the well-being of our staff and as Trustees we have Duty-of-care to consider at what point this is unsustainable. As a small charity we rely heavily on a small group of dedicated people and have insufficient capacity to continuously recruit or develop credible succession planning. HOPS operates on the basis of on a reservoir of goodwill but there is a limit to what is sustainable.

1.6 OFSTED accreditation

In order to maintain an Ofsted provision for children of the HOPS age groups, from 4 Years old the registration process takes a minimum of 3 month and could take up to 6 months. HOPS can only register once a suitable location has been found and is of a suitable standard to provide care. The setting cannot open until Ofsted have inspected and given permission.

1.5 Refresh Leadership Team - Skills & Competency

We are a financially stable charity but very small and CC rules prevent us from developing the kind of reserves necessary to enable business planning for purchase and development, financing and project management for a new building. Our own internal assessment of our skill set as trustees using Charity Commission appraisal was good in parts – particularly around funding and service satisfaction but essentially not around the type of skills we need to move forward with building and renovation projects of the scale we are facing.

The present five Trustees have served the charity individually for between 7 -13 years voluntarily. A total of 51 years' service with no breaks from their role. We have been doing "our best" for the charity, but HOPS needs more – fresh blood – different skills and a more professional outlook – we had hopes to pass the torch to a new team but wish to stand down when HOPS comes to an end in August 2019. WE will still have obligations to the Charity for up to six years due to Charity Commission rules.

So we are where we are and it grieves all of us that despite HOPS being financially secure and a very successful and valued service with a heavy heart we think we should celebrate its success but bring the scheme to a close when the lease expires in September this year. If it can rise as a 'phoenix from the ashes' we will be delighted but the charity needs to change with more trustee support - fresh blood – new and more appropriate skills.

1.6 A plea and expression of gratitude

I would like to express on behalf of staff and trustees how we value everyone's support and wish to close in a positive and managed way when our lease expires in September.

It has been a privilege that as Parents and Carers you have trusted HOPS to care for your young people. We know directly and indirectly how much it means to know your child has somewhere safe to go and have fun and make friends.

We also recognise the amazing contribution of our large number of volunteers. HOPS could not run without them as the costs would be prohibitive.

HOPS has helped to encourage and support over 4,000 young people in volunteering roles over the years and over 1,500 of them have subsequently gone into careers in the special needs teaching, health service or care sector. These represent working-life decisions of individuals made partly as direct consequence of caring for children at HOPS and being supported by experienced staff.

We feel immensely proud that many of those volunteers have had their career aspirations influenced by time spent supporting the Children at HOPS. We know from feedback what a rewarding experience it has been and we intend to hold a Volunteers celebration event to reflect on the their achievements and what they have done for HOPS

As trustees we would also like to highlight what a difficult decision this has been for Amanda Jebb and Jackie Markell who have devoted so much time to HOPS and have helped it to grow and flourish. As Trustees most of us volunteered either as a direct result of using the service as Parents and carers or as supporters of JM so we are equally dismayed by the progress of events. Our play staff are brilliant and the teamwork established at HOPS has been exemplary and what makes it such a rewarding place to work.

We would ask Carers and Parents to understand that that this is a difficult time for our staff many of these individuals see caring as a life choice and a lot more than just a job. We will support all staff and volunteers as we wind down and do our utmost to ensure we close in a positive and responsible manner.

Q&A

- a) Parents should contact AU for other services their young people could access.
- b) Volunteers are still needed this year but can join Suffolk volunteering to seek future opportunities.
- c) Volunteers will be offered extended access to training this year to enhance their skill set.

How we will manage closure

The charity will be closing in a positive and managed way. We have sort professional advice to support the staff and we will of course be complying with all the regulations expected of an employer as well as meeting the requirements of the Charity Commission and Ofsted.

Meeting closed at 8:50 pm