

Castle Eaton Village Hall – A Brief History

The Reading Room

A Reading Room has been on this site since about 1910. Its original purpose was to provide a restroom for workers on the estate, where they could read newspapers, etc., which were provided. It also served as a meeting place, polling station, etc., for the village.



When the estate was sold-off in 1928, the Reading Room and its land were gifted to Castle Eaton Parish Council, who were then responsible for its running and maintenance. The Reading Room was utilised during both World Wars for recruitment, Home Guard, etc.

The Charity

The Parish Council continued to operate the Reading Room, but due to the age of the wooden framed building and its infrastructure, it was needing more and more maintenance and attention. In 1974, the Parish Council set up a Trust Deed and formed a Registered Charity (269083) – Castle Eaton Reading Room, with the purpose of ‘providing meeting and leisure facilities for the residents of Castle Eaton Parish’. The charity must report to the Charity Commission on an annual basis. The Trust Deed laid out how the charity was to be run (see Management Committee below), who the Trustees would be and the ownership of the land. The land was to be retained by Castle Eaton Parish Council and a peppercorn rent of £1 p.a. is to be paid every year. The land was later vested with the Charity Commissioner, so that it could not be used for any other purpose.

The Post Office

When the village shop and Post Office were closed and the premises sold in 1994, The Parish Council asked the Reading Room if they could provide space for a Post Office, in order to provide this service to Villagers. However, under the rules of a Registered Charity, any area of the building that is used for commercial purposes (HMRC and the Charity Commission classify a Post Office as a commercial venture) has to be charged at a commercial rent. With the relatively low turnover in the village, it was not viable for the Post Office to pay this rent. Consequently, a deal was struck for the Parish Council to pay the rent (£250 p.a.) on an on-going basis and the Reading Room converted its lobby into a Post Office.

The New Village Hall

By about 1996, the costs for maintaining the old Reading Room were becoming prohibitive and consideration was being given to re-building it. The trigger-point for action was when Swindon Borough Council (then Thamesdown BC) cancelled all maintenance grants for village halls and community centres not owned by them and transferred this responsibility to the Parish Councils. Castle Eaton Parish Council agreed to continue to pay the maintenance grant (£1500 p.a.) and, although welcomed, this barely covers insurance and basic fixed costs. The Reading Room Committee, together with the Parish Council, then embarked on a major project to design and cost a new Village Hall. Plans were finally agreed and applications to the National Lottery Fund and other local charities were successful, plus some £40,000 was raised through local fund-raising efforts. The plans also included a new Post Office area and secure counter. The new Village Hall was built during 1999 and opened in 2000. The Registered Charity name was then changed to Castle Eaton Village Hall.



The Computer Room

As part of the National Lottery Fund grant, a 'tele-cottage' was required. This was to give residents an opportunity to use computers, but also to help village groups and students to access IT facilities. Now renamed the Computer Room, this facility has recently been re-equipped by a resident with a new computer and photocopier and is available for all residents to use. The room is also used for the storage of Parish Council records.

The Management Committee

As stated earlier, the terms for the Management Committee (normally referred to as The Committee) are laid out in the Trust Deed. It is formed from representatives of the key users of the hall, an Elected Member and Co-opted members, who may bring special skills. All members of The Committee are re-elected each year at the AGM and are automatically Trustees of the Registered Charity. The members elect a Chairman, a Secretary and a Treasurer. The Committee sets the charges for hire of the hall, agrees the terms and conditions of hire and manages all maintenance. It meets regularly to review the accounts and running matters. The Village Hall has benefitted greatly from the Community Benefit Fund, which has provided a new efficient boiler, a dishwasher, triple glazed windows, a security system, a refurbished hall floor, LED lighting and extra storage facilities.