

I would like to begin by expressing my thanks to the Town Council for allowing us, free of charge, to hold an evening meeting in this wonderful building. I congratulate Dennis Holmes and his team for doing such a great job on the Borough Gardens Redevelopment. I hope you are all pleased with the results and I am sure Arts Forum members will all agree this is a most excellent venue.

In spite of the fact that our main duty, the purchase of equipment to support the arts in Dorchester, has long since been discharged, it has been a busy year for the Arts Forum. As discussed at the 2006 AGM we have also been working towards greater sustainability for the equipment, and are building up a small pot of money to be used for running repairs, PAT testing and the purchase of spare parts.

Towards the end of 2006 Councillor Trevor Jones asked for a review of the equipment to be presented to the Town Council Committee. At the time of writing the report there had been 14 paying bookings since the equipment was purchased in September 2005, yielding a total income of £1,160. Our review revealed that the equipment is being used by such diverse groups as the Hardy Society, Summer Music Society, Music Society, Game Conservancy Trust, Choral Society and Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra.

We are constantly reviewing our hire prices and modus operandi and remain in close touch with our members. Assessment sheets have been sent to all those who have used the equipment. Though the response has been predictably poor (I myself bin questionnaires almost daily) I like to think that no news is good news. Some anecdotal feedback (for example from the Piddle Valley Players who used the entire kit) has been extremely positive. However, we are aware that some clients have experienced problems (for example the lighting rig will not fit in anything smaller than an estate car) and will continue to review the use of the equipment and its suitability.

However, it was apparent that there were some issues that needed to be addressed and we responded by arranging hire charges/deposits for single items such as microphones. We are also aware that we need to go to greater lengths to promote the use of the equipment. The Arts Development Officer for Dorset was asked to promote the equipment through her email network and we are working on a redesign of the brochure for wider distribution.

The report concluded that the Arts Forum was confident that the equipment was fulfilling its initial purpose of improving the arts offer in Dorchester, and that user statistics proved that in many performances the audience experience had been greatly enhanced by its usage.

So – that was the year that was, and now we must look to the future. The long awaited feasibility study for the Brewery Site Arts Centre has now been published and we are delighted to welcome Andrew Wadsworth (the Developer) and Linda Screen (the author) are here this evening to discuss the potential development of a new Arts Centre for Dorchester. I look forward to hearing what Andrew and Linda have to say.

I'd like to thank the Steering Committee for all their help over the past year, particularly Julia Critchley for her secretarial assistance and Roger Regan as Treasurer.