

NCA Annual Report 2015

This year has been a year of stability in terms of the committee membership and events. We have continued to hold quarterly Forum meetings to which all Newtown residents have been invited either by announcement in The E&E or NCA website and e-mail to those on our e-mailing list. The management committee has met regularly in the periods between forum meetings and the essential business of the association has been continued. Key items of business have been the programme of monthly events and Cafes run by the NCA. The management of the existing hut including necessary maintenance, monitoring of hut booking arrangements and taking forward the 'Vision' project.

Forum meetings have included talks by Abi Grace from Devon Refugee Support Group, Jo Hawkins on St James' Park Redevelopment Plans, Dr Niall McLeod on strategy for Healthcare in the Community and facilitation of local discussion on proposed new opening hours at the Globe Inn. Café events have included the Healthy Living café which advertised opportunities to take part in local fitness activities offered by individuals and Exeter City FC amongst others. A toy swap café in conjunction with the Scrapstore, Table Top Swap café initiated by Sally and Steve Palmer to encourage the exchange of unwanted items rather than creating more waste. Another successful Food Festival, Craft fayre and the Winter Warmer event featuring the NCA Choir. All events achieved reasonable attendance and financial return. The regular social café and Qijong meetings have continued to grow in attendance during the year resulting in the start up of a second Qigong group. The ever successful Newtown Community Choir has continued weekly rehearsal and performed throughout the year.

Regular user groups have continued to make good use of the hut and alongwith occasional group bookings and private bookings have ensured that the calendar remains busy. Total user footfall is estimated to be 13000 in the year and the diversity of usergroups is a further demonstration of the continued appeal of the hut and its relevance in this city centre location. A slight drop in income has been explained by the greater number of NCA sponsored activities which did not pay the normal user charges and this has been addressed by the committee and agreed in open meeting that NCA sponsored events will pay or attract appropriate grant funding for the Association. Use of the hut as headquarters for both the Exeter Respect Festival and The Great West Run has also continued. Some private events have given rise to complaint about noise late at night from residents in Gordon Road and Belmont Road. The committee has responded to the complaints and is continuing to review the availability of the hut for private late evening events.

The 'Vision' project received an encouraging grant of £20k from The Bernard Sunley Fund last March to add to existing ECC grants bringing funds promised to a total of £167k. However since then grant bids to Exeter Legacy Fund, Jewsons Community Action and Garfield Weston Fund have all been unsuccessful. The Big Lottery Fund is proving too big a challenge despite assistance from a fund raising specialist at the University and so it has been decided by the committee to pursue a less expensive building option and quotes are being sought. The

intention is to maintain the scale of the building but reduce the ambition of the build quality. A significant funding challenge remains but new possibility of grants related to student accommodation development exist. The emergence of Exeter Community Forum and soon to be released Community Strategy will also be helpful in moving the Association forward as part of a network of similar associations across the city ensuring that local people are able to play a part in shaping their own community. The encouragement of more members of our community to get involved in the Association and its activities is also an aim. The key message is to see the opportunity in being involved and to ensure the future of a valuable asset at the centre of our community.

It remains to thank on your behalf all the volunteers who have initiated and helped to run NCA events throughout the year as event organisers, event supporters, user group volunteers, our city and county councillors for their support, and in particular our hut bookings secretary Jackie Holdstock and our Secretary Su Aves both of whom have continued to play a crucial role in the provision of events and activities that lie at the heart of the NCA 's purpose and without who's efforts the annual report would have much less to celebrate. A particular thanks though to Su who is in her third year as secretary and is standing down as Secretary which she had only offered to fill as a 'stopgap' until another volunteer could be found.

Rory McNeile
NCA Chair

20 February 2016