

## **Amphill Cultural Events – our journey**

### **Origins and Background**

Amphill Concert Orchestra had successfully delivered a well-loved annual Proms Concert as part of the Amphill Festival for over a decade, drawing audiences of up to 1,500. However, in 2023, severe weather forced the cancellation of the concert, and the entire festival weekend was significantly impacted. This disappointment led to the end of the Amphill Festival altogether, leaving a cultural void in the town. A small group of community members, recognising both the gap and the passion in the local community, began exploring how to revive cultural events in Amphill. Their goal was to create a weatherproof, inclusive, and sustainable format that retained the spirit of the original events. And we wanted to ensure transparency in everything we do.

### **Forming a smaller Charitable Organisation**

Early in 2024, initial discussions among three (later five) local individuals led to the idea of hosting a large, tented cultural event. With much encouragement from community members and local councillors, the group began researching and developing a more formal structure to support their broader vision. The group wished to be able to access grants as well as ensure limited liability.

They needed to ensure that a charity was the best option and so they consulted with David Brewer from CVS, who provided critical advice on the various options for an organisation including forming a charity. Also, they sourced more guidance from the Charity Commission and other sources available online. Purpose and public benefit was critically important, as was access to grant funding and ensuring limited liability. They had seen a local CIC go into administration with directors incurring liabilities.

Although their first submission to the Charity Commission was rejected due to an unsuitable constitution, they revised their approach with guidance and were successfully registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) on October 31, 2024.

The founding trustees were Ben Bottone, Mariella Cook, and Nikki Milward, later joined by Jon Digweed and Kirsty Bourne. Registering as a CIO allowed the group to access grants, claim VAT relief, and gain limited liability.

The charity's purpose was officially defined as:

“To promote, improve, develop and maintain public education in, and appreciation of, the art and science of music and the arts in all their aspects...”

On reflection, the three original trustees brought a wealth of community focused experience, with links to schools, churches, sports clubs, many local organisations and businesses together with varied skills and expertise and above all were passionate about what became the charity's purpose. They all shared the vision and trusted each other unconditionally and shared a desire to deliver something very special and lacking in the local community.

With hindsight, the trustees realise they took a huge risk, yet their belief and passion drove them forward.

### **What might they have done differently?**

Continual questioning and checking responses to the Charity Commission requirements and more referral to an independent adviser such as David could have prevented the first rejection of the submission to the Charity Commission and saved reworking and much time.

Perhaps they could have worked at a slower pace and aimed to deliver the large event in the second year, but more motivated local volunteers climbed on board and brought more passion, skills and expertise and the momentum grew. Also businesses and groups as well as the Ampthill Town Council showed support with funding and other expertise which encouraged and motivated them even more.

### **Future Vision and Benefits**

Ampthill Cultural Events aims to deliver a wide-reaching programme of workshops and events to enrich community life, with a strong emphasis on accessibility and inclusion. Their objectives include:

- Inclusivity: Ensuring events are open and welcoming to all.
- Life Enhancement: Using arts to improve quality of life.
- Mental Health: Offering experiences that support well-being.
- Community Cohesion: Bringing people together through shared experiences.
- Talent Development: Nurturing local creativity and potential.

Planned initiatives include educational workshops, collaborative community projects, and cultural performances that expose attendees to diverse perspectives. These activities are designed to deepen appreciation of the arts, encourage empathy, and build community engagement. Volunteer opportunities will also allow residents to contribute meaningfully while gaining insight into local social issues.

### **Goals and Principles**

1. **Success Through Accessibility:** The primary goal is to host events, particularly live classical music performances, in a relaxed, family-friendly setting. Events will be affordable, with options for attendees to bring their own food and drinks and will be held in covered venues to ensure weather resilience.
2. **Sustainability and Longevity:** The charity is not profit-driven. Instead, it seeks local sponsorship to cover operational costs, enabling income from ticket sales to support future events and ensure long-term viability.
3. **Community-Led Approach:** Embodying the mantra, “an event for the community, run by the community,” Ampthill Cultural Events prioritises grassroots involvement. Event planning and delivery will be a collaborative effort with local organisations and volunteers.

### **Ampthill Cultural Events – Achievements to Date**

- Digital Presence: Launched websites and social media platforms for both Ampthill Cultural Events (ACE) [www.ampthillculturalevents.org.uk](http://www.ampthillculturalevents.org.uk) and Big Tent Weekend (BTW). [www.ampthillbtw.co.uk](http://www.ampthillbtw.co.uk)
- Volunteer Growth: Built a strong volunteer network deeply engaged with the community and local businesses.

### **Successful Events**

- VE80 Swing Band concert with 100+ attendees.
- VE80 children’s celebration on Bank Holiday Monday.
- Ceilidh evening a new experience for many May 16th

### **Planned events-**

. Ampthill Big Tent Weekend: A three-day family-friendly festival of live music and arts, hosted in a large weatherproof tent in central Ampthill.

### **Funding Secured:**

- Over £12,000 in grants.
- Over £25,000 in sponsorship from local businesses and community groups.

### **Networking & Support:**

- Hosted a sponsorship evening to connect local organisations and support their business goals.
- Gained strong backing from MP Blake Stephenson, including a letter of support to the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS).

- Sustainability Initiatives: Launched an annual eco-sculpture competition and integrated eco-consciousness into event planning.
- Community Spirit: Delivered all of the above with energy, positivity, and a strong sense of fun.