SHINFIELD PLAYERS THEATRE
PATRON: JODIE PRENGER
REGISTERED CHARITY NUMBER 1154841

Chair's Report - AGM 2026 – Cate Naylor

Trustees, members & guests, welcome to the 2026 Shinfield Players Theatre AGM. This year has been quite a challenge, because as well as delivering a busy and varied schedule of productions and fundraising events, we have had the toilet building project to manage. I am as always grateful to the committee for their support, and to the large number of members working behind the scenes to help with these varied projects.

Productions

At the heart of everything we do is our theatre's programme of productions, and I'd like to thank Maggie Smith for coordinating our production liaison team and for making sure that each show makes its journey successfully from proposal to rehearsal, and finally to the stage.

This year, we have produced two plays, two musicals, our annual pantomime and the summer youth group shows, and it is down to the hard work of each of the teams involved that they have been so successful. It has been wonderful to welcome many new members to SPT, some of whom have been in more than one show this year and I look forward to welcoming both them and our long-standing members back for this coming season. We have been lucky to perform to full houses, sharing in all the excitement and energy that comes with a live audience. But, most importantly, we have experienced first-hand the wonderful sense of connection, joy and shared experience that live theatre brings to both casts and audiences alike.

Our last seasons' shows will be celebrated later in the evening at our Shinnies award ceremony, but I want to mention and send congratulations to Oliver Alexander and the cast and production team of And Then There Were None who were awarded District 14 NODA awards at the NODA Celebration Day in June. Also, to the cast of The Regina Monologues who came second at the Maidenhead Drama Festival this year. Congratulations to all of you.

Our set build team and scenic painters led by Sam Turner have once again produced some excellent sets which have enhanced the shows and our wardrobe team led by Debbie Wheeler has costumed our actors in a variety of costumes from different eras and genres including over 90 different costumes for panto. This year has been especially heavy on props, in particular Calendar Girls which required a florist shop worth of flowers and sunflowers and The Great British Bake Off which needed a huge number of realistic cakes, breads and biscuits. I am extremely grateful to Graham Smith for co-ordinating props and to Jess Wilkins and her family for producing some incredible bakes for The Great British Bake Off.

Also, thanks to Pete Ashton and his team who with their technical know-how have provided lighting, sound and projections for all our productions and more recently have been working hard to improve the efficiency of our tech equipment.

I am very grateful to Heidi and Pete Ashton for running front of house again this year, to Barbara Richards for running the box office and to all our members who have helped on the night. We have had a good number of people who have undertaken front of house, bar and front of house manager training this year and we look forward to working with you all next season. We would love to hear from you if you would like to get involved with the front of house, backstage, costume or props teams and I am grateful to Sharon Young who will be presenting more information after the AGM on the help we need and how you can get involved.

Our youth groups are a very valuable part of SPT, and we have just enjoyed their summer shows. I am always impressed with the confidence and talent that they show when performing on stage. We are lucky to have a group of dedicated leaders, and it is under their guidance that the young people gain a love of theatre. Their creativity and commitment have made such a wonderful contribution to the group and to the young people they have worked with.

This year, we say goodbye to senior youth group leaders Rachel and Millie. As well as working with the Senior Youth Group, Rachel previously led our Juniors and Middles groups, inspiring and supporting our younger members along the way. Millie has played a huge part in the success of our Senior Youth Group, choreographing all their shows and reviews over the past few years.

We will also be saying goodbye to Gordon who has run the senior youth group for more than 20 years as he moves to pastures new. He has informed the committee that he will be stepping down at the youth group review in December. He will be sorely missed, and I am sure that everyone in the theatre will want to thank him for his tireless dedication to the senior youth group over the years. He will be celebrating his time in the senior youth group both with the current members, but also with previous youth group members and leaders at a reunion in October.

We look forward next year to welcoming back Lara who will continue to be a leader in both groups. Lara and Sam will be joined in Juniors and Middles by Katie Thrussell and Helen Cuthbertson. We also welcome Nickie Clarke and Alana Smith who will be joining the Senior Youth Group team.

Fund Raising

As you will be aware, the past year has been one of dedicated fundraising for the toilet refurbishment, and for other much needed projects around the building. We introduced our fundraising goal of £70,000 for 70 years and have run several fundraising events to that end. The need for fund raising has not gone away and as we look ahead, we will need to continue to raise vital funds essential for sustaining and expanding the work of the theatre.

This year, we have set up a just giving page and signed up to a variety of money raising initiatives such as Easy Giving and the Wokingham lottery. We have also been investigating grant applications for both general funding and for more specific grants for things such as tech.

We have successfully attracted a few hires this year including Woodley Light Operatic Society, who performed their summer show in our theatre as well as a Pocket Floyd gig and Hokus Jokus, collaborative events with Dan Hudson. We hope to continue to expand our hires working around our busy schedule of rehearsals and shows. Our fundraising work is being led by Sharon Young so please do get in touch with her with ideas to raise money.

This year we celebrated 70 years of Shinfield Players Theatre with a celebration and fundraising event. This was a huge success, and we were delighted to welcome our president, two previous chairs and lots of longstanding members and supporters to the event. We were entertained with a short one act play and some monologues as well as songs from shows that we have performed over the years and were treated to canapes and prosecco. I would like to thank everyone involved and particularly, Sharon, Maggie and Karen who directed the entertainments and Heidi and Cara with their team who provided the delicious canapes.

We have also been donated a new piano by the electronic musical instrument company Roland, thank you to Scott for organising this generous donation. Thank you also to Gary for his generous donation of a new washing machine and tumble dryer. This has made the wardrobe team very happy as they will no longer have to take the costumes home to wash!

The Building

As I mentioned last year, we have had a problem with the floor and other structural elements in the foyer toilet block which have required major works. We have been working closely with our surveyor who identified several issues and produced plans for the work. We applied for retrospective planning permission, which was granted, and subsequently we went out to tender for the works. We also gained permission from Shinfield Parish Council to temporarily divert the grant they gave us for new dressing rooms to this project We appointed a builder and the work to refurbish the toilets started in July straight after Made in Dagenham and we hope to have it completed in time for our October show.

The cost of the works will be around £65,000 plus other fees which is why we have needed to focus on raising money and to be careful about our spending this year.

We have received two generous offers of temporary loans from members, which will provide additional support should we run short of operating funds during the build. The repair costs for the toilets will use all our remaining reserves, but delaying the work on the toilets was not a viable option as they were deteriorating rapidly, putting the existing building at risk of damp and potentially leading to significantly higher repair costs if left unresolved. Fortunately, we have not yet needed to call on the loans as the build costs are currently running to schedule and we will be adding funds with our autumn shows. However, it is extremely reassuring to know that this additional financial support is available should we need it during the project and I am hugely grateful for these offfers.

For context and to explain why the cost is so high, I thought it would be helpful to detail the work that has been necessary

The floor was removed due to damp and rotten wood across the entire toilet block. Some of the floor joists were replaced, and a damp proof membrane installed across the floor area with a concrete base poured.

Due to the effect of the damp across the lower section of the timber framework and an area of dry rot in the new part of the frame, a section at the bottom of the entire framework was removed and three courses of block work built on top of the foundations to raise the bottom of the wooden frame above the tarmac of the car park. New insulation has been fitted into the walls to meet current building regulations.

Because of the damp in the toilets, the plasterboard in the ceiling was found to be soft and bouncy so has had to be replaced with new plasterboard and extra joists inserted into the roof area to give more structure. The outside cladding is being replaced as due to age it fractured when removed.

Managing the build and all the logistics that go into such a project has been a huge amount of work and time and I am extremely grateful to Maggie Smith for her help and support as together we have negotiated this project and all its challenges. Thank you also to Keith Walker our surveyor and to Steve Smith for their knowledge, advice and calmness in the storm, all of which have been invaluable.

Alongside the work on the toilets, Pete Ashton and the tech team have been very busy sorting and improving our audio and lighting systems, although we will need to spend money going forward to improve our tech for the future. They along with the facilities team have also undertaken PAT testing for us.

Unfortunately, this year, we have had some issues with trespassing, dumping of items and theft from the building site and I am grateful to Gary Pollington for reviewing and managing our CCTV. We will be reviewing our security going forward.

Communications

This year, we have been continuing to improve our use of IT to ensure that we can run the theatre admin as efficiently as possible and are compliant with the necessary data protection and GDPR regulations. You will be aware that we have an electronic data base for membership which also enables us to send out member emails and you will hopefully have seen and joined our new WhatsApp community. We couldn’t have done all this without our secretary Sandra’s skill set and technical knowledge.

Our Facebook page now has over 1.8k followers, and we are grateful to Catherine Wilkins for running that.

We are though looking for someone to take over producing our Spotlight emails and Boardtreader newsletter, so if anyone is interested in taking these on, please get in touch.

Committee

I would like to thank my fellow committee members for all their hard work and positivity over the year as we have met the challenges, and for the support that they have given me in my second year as Chair. Theatre is at the heart of everything we do, and our shared passion gives me confidence that, together, we can continue to do wonderful things here at SPT.

Maggie Smith has come to the end of her second term on committee is standing down. Maggie has worked tirelessly both as lead for productions and on the building project. She has also been an invaluable help to me, and I will miss her voice of reason her sanity checks and her support. Lucy Watkins is also standing down from committee due to work commitments. I am happy to say that both Maggie and Lucy will be staying in the productions team

As you will have seen, Sue Gowen our treasurer and Sandra Miall our secretary are also up for re-election, and I will address this when we come to the election of trustees and officers.

This year, we are planning to further develop the teams that that focus on all the different elements that go into running our theatre and I hope that many of you will want to get involved. I know that our members have very many different skills and I am sure that together we can do great things!

The Future

Looking forward, we have a full season for 2026/27 with lots of exciting shows and fund-raising events planned. We start the season with Battle of the Musicals in October, followed by “Last Panto in Little Grimley” and “The Real Inspector Hound”, two wonderful one-act plays in November. These are followed by our January pantomime “Jack and the Queenstalk”, our March play “Three Bags Full” and our spring musical “9 to 5”. Our summer youth group shows will be in June and July as usual and will be announced in due course. Rehearsals for the first two of our next seasons’ shows have started already and the pantomime read throughs and auditions will be held later this month.

We look forward to welcoming you all both on and off the stage next year and to sharing in this wonderful theatre.