**Westacre Theatre report to West Acre Parish Assembly 2020 (June 2020)**

Throughout 2019, Westacre Theatre has continued to serve its community with a varied programme of high quality theatre and creative arts activity against a background of political and financial uncertainty. The deadening impact of austerity last year on our sector has become even more marked. More and more frequently, decisions relating to recreational and cultural experiences are being left until the last minute, making programme planning extremely difficult – especially for smaller venues in rural areas. We continue to believe that the decline and stagnation of our local authority revenue grants over the past few years has significantly hampered our ability to exploit fully the valuable community resource that Westacre has to offer.

Nevertheless, the theatre staged nine in-house productions and events during 2019. Maintaining the quality and quantity of these productions and their impact on the theatre’s financial resources and reputation cannot be sufficiently stressed.

Our film and NT Live screenings (31 in number last year) have generally proved popular.

We were delighted to maintain our relationship with Creative Arts East in relation to theatre productions, village screen and as hosts to their promoters’ days.

The theatre continues to provide exciting drama work for young people across the age groups from five through to early adult and additional opportunities for home educated young people to use Westacre Theatre as an educational resource and socialising hub. We have also excellent relationships with our local schools and present exhibitions of their work and host school productions, as well as welcoming school parties to our own shows. Our bursary scheme is now in its 14th year and continues to be well supported.

Our foyer exhibitions have again been well attended and diverse and our attempts to attract artists from further afield to use the space, supplementary to our local exhibitions, is bearing fruit. The venue has continued to attract attention as a high quality space for one-off events .

Having started the spring 2020 season in high hopes and already planning a series of high profile events to celebrate the theatre’s 30th anniversary, like so many venues, our aspirations ceased in late March with the closure of the theatre, due to Covid-19 restrictions. The theatre is mothballed until we are allowed tentatively to consider bringing audiences back, maybe only outdoors this autumn, indoors maybe not until next year.

Whatever the outcome, Westacre Theatre will survive!

**Addendum to this report, dated 6 August 2020**

West Acre residents may like to know that the theatre has received emergency funding from the Arts Council which together with many generous private donations, has secured its financial position until at least March 2021. Changes to lockdown restrictions means the theatre can now invite limited audiences to attend outside events such as:

**Jazz picnics.**Planned for 22, 23 and 29 August (Bank Holiday). Maximum 120 persons per session, all sold out.

**Theatre productions***.* On the Bank Holiday afternoons of 30th and 31st August,an eclectic show featuring songs and sketches and readings is planned on the new open-air stage.

**Drive-in movies** The theatre is testing the practicalities of offering drive-in movies while social distancing audience restrictions still apply. The test will run on12 August at 19.45. Private function, by invitation only. If the drive-in cinema is judged a success, it will form part of the next Arts Council Cultural Recovery Fund application.

**Group activities***:* Riverside Readershas restarted. The Art Group has formed a new club and will meet soon. Play Readers may start again in September. Youth drama courses, currently offered online, will restart when regulations permit.

It is accepted that until the Studio can fully function and economically (only 30 seats possible with one metre audience social distancing), concrete plans can’t be made. However, the theatre will re-open in 2021 with a ‘big bang’ launch, majoring on the planned 30th anniversary events planned (now 31st).

Martin Hickey

Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Westacre Arts Foundation