**Westacre Theatre report to West Acre Parish Assembly 2021 (May 2021)**

The Covid crisis hit the theatre in mid-March 2020 midway through the run of an in-house production and caused the cancellation of our whole planned celebratory programme for our 30th anniversary year. Since then, our survival has depended on retrenchment and adaptability. A June 2020 survey of 3,000 friends and supporters revealed that many would be hesitant for some time to attend indoor events – even with 2m social distancing (30 max in our studio). The government restrictions – lasting right through the winter - made opening up our indoor spaces unviable. However, we are based in an extremely attractive rural setting and within our team we have great experience of managing outdoor events of all kinds. During the initial lockdown, we created an outdoor stage which, despite our current depleted financial and human resources, allowed us to stage several socially distanced events last summer (including a pilot drive-in cinema). These proved extremely popular and were financially viable despite the restrictions on numbers.

In Autumn 2020 we were delighted to receive a substantial cultural recovery grant from Arts Council England to enable us to run an extended outdoor season from April to October 2021. The specialist facilities required include stretch tents, bleacher seating, lighting, audio, cinema and

catering equipment. Once restrictions are fully lifted and normal indoor events can resume, these

additional facilities will continue to hugely increase our programming options and income generation throughout the years to come.

The current directors, as founders, have been in post for 30 years and we are in the process of a planned transition to a new management team to take the venue forward with dynamism and energy to meet the challenge of renewal and to exploit the possibilities of new developments in media and social interaction. The Westacre theatre team remains optimistic, resilient and full of innovative ideas for its future. We have used the short window of opportunity we had last summer to develop experience and ideas for a drive-in cinema, an extended open-air theatre season, for creating a virtual gallery space and for motivating local artists, scriptwriters and other practitioners. We are all indebted to the dedicated and tireless voluntary management team that has had to shoulder most of the burden of the past year’s admin and organisational work whilst the paid staff have been furloughed for long periods. We believe that with the support of the village and our extended community we can emerge from this crisis an even stronger, more energetic and more resilient organisation than ever

Martin Hickey

Secretary to the Board of Trustees

Westacre Arts Foundation