

Support your Centre



The Sports & Social Centre is looking forward to welcoming its members back from the end of July offering reduced activities which are permissible in accordance with Government Guidelines to keep everyone safe.

But the headaches are not over for Stephen Holland, Treasurer of the Danbury Community Association, the charity that manages the operation. "We have had no income since 21 March," he says, "but have still had out-goings on salaries, maintenance and insurance, for example." Normally, the Centre receives income from a number of sources: the gym, where revenue is shared with long standing partner Lifestyle Fitness which provides and maintains the equipment; fitness classes, social clubs such as badminton, bridge, ballroom dancing and children's clubs; private lettings for parties, weddings and wakes; and social events such as tribute acts and quiz nights.

"We have been able to furlough all staff except manager Adrian Owers and have topped up their salaries to 100% for the first three months. Fortunately, we have received a grant of £25,000 from Chelmsford City Council and business rates have been waived for a year," says Stephen. The Parish Council has waived the rent until October.

But reopening will be the real challenge. From 29 July, the Centre is planning to offer gym sessions, fitness classes and badminton on a limited basis. "When we reopen with part of the revenue, we will have almost the same out-goings plus the costs of enhanced cleaning and materials. We are hopeful the majority of members will return bearing in mind the steps we have taken to keep them safe and we have decided to run a pilot for three months and have a flexible approach to what we offer. We can only hope that things get better."

He is not optimistic about when the regular bridge sessions will recommence, for example. "We normally have over 50 people at a session, all from different households and it is not a game where social distancing is possible. I struggle to see how that would work."

The plan is to be constructive and get new things going, he says. "We are working together with the Parish Council and Lifestyle Fitness to find a way through this. As a limited company we cannot trade if we are consistently making a loss. As a charity we are independent and pay rent to the Parish Council but work very closely with them. Our reason for being is to do the right thing for the community."

Under Charity Commission rules, he says, the DCA – made up of voluntary trustees – has to hold Reserves but these will soon diminish if it is running at a loss. "If we still have the current deficit of £7,000 a month by the end of October, we won't be able to continue."

He is keen that people appreciate what they have in the Centre, sited as it is on a beautiful piece of land donated to the village by the Dawson family in 1948. "Our customers think it is a wonderful facility and it is definitely unusual to have something like this in a village of this size – possibly even unique."

What is also important is that the Centre is responsive to villagers' needs, he adds. "It is your community centre," he says, "and we would welcome ideas on events or activities that people would like to see."

Stephen feels that teenagers in the village are often a forgotten group and would be happy to supply a venue for a youth club of some sort. "What we need is someone to facilitate that," he says.

The major headache, though, is the shortfall in income. "People will give towards a capital project but might not be so keen about giving to top-up revenue. Perhaps those people who do not feel able to continue with their monthly gym membership at this time might consider helping us by donating half of it until they can restart," he says. The figures are stark: "If just 10% of members don't return, we will lose £1,000 a month in revenue."

He continues: "If we cannot find a way to breaking even by the end of October, we won't be able to carry on. The pilot will determine this one way or the other. And if the Centre were to close there would be no more karate, kids' birthday parties, gymnastics, badminton, spinning, cricket and football facilities...the list goes on."

So if you have ever used Danbury's Sports & Social Centre for a quiz night or party, taken part in zumba, spinning or keep fit classes, played badminton or bridge, used the gym or the snooker tables, or tripped the light fantastic around its sprung dancefloor, consider what you can do to support this invaluable village facility.

Why not Join the Centre as a Social Member? It will cost either £15 or £20 for the year depending on your age. The website has details <https://danburysportscentre.co.uk> and the latest news on facilities which are open.

Note: This article first appeared in the August/September edition of Contact Magazine and was written by Mary Huntington. If you would like to subscribe, contribute or advertise in this bi-monthly community magazine please email danburycontact@gmail.com.