

# Hall in a Day's work

When Alan Haselhurst, MP at the time, formally opened the new patio behind Hempstead Village Hall eight years ago, he called it the village's very own amphitheatre.

Since then it has certainly played out his description, with it being used for everything from drama to weddings. But was starting to look a little tired and, more to the point, about a third of the space was taken up by a play area created especially for the Pre-School group, which has now folded. A perfect opportunity to give it a new lease of life.

Here DIANA FROST describes how the project came about....

The patio at Hempstead Village Hall has been exceptionally well used since it was opened in 2013. Adjacent to it lay the old Pre-School Play Area, abandoned since the Pre-School shut in July 2019.

Play areas need constant maintenance and ROSPA approval to make sure equipment is safe for children to use. The play equipment facility introduced at the top of the Glebe three years ago serves all the children of the



◀ Joe Day: Worked tirelessly to complete the job on time.

Remnants of the play area after the Pre-School shut down. ▼



◀ A straight view of the patio along its full length, with playground gone.



village, so the old Pre-School area by the hall, suitable only for small children, was unnecessary once the school had closed. The Management Committee decided to remove it and extend the patio as this would give better service to hirers of the hall.

We accepted a quote from Joe Day, a young man who had recently started out with his own business and who had been involved with the construction of a driveway at a new house in the village. The quality of his work was known to be excellent.

To allow Joe to commence we needed to clear away the old wooden structures and fencing that surrounded the Play Area and a volunteer group did this on September 5. Joe started on site on Monday September 20 anticipating that it would take three weeks to complete.

As with all ideas, when one comes along, there are usually more. A wedding reception had taken place





Interesting perspective on the new patio, taken with a fisheye lens.

## Joe transforms Hempstead's popular patio

earlier in the summer on the patio on a hot day and in a post-event conversation, it was suggested that an awning over the rear patio doors of the hall would have been very useful. Within days, a grant opportunity from RCCE's Covid CB Fund had popped up offering funds for exactly that kind of initiative. We jumped on the chance and were delighted to be awarded all the costs we needed. Thank you Rural Community Council of Essex (RCCE)!

Saffron Shutters and Blinds, a family business in Haverhill, supplied the awning and were very helpful in guiding us through design and installation decisions. With this work, we also decided to add some external lighting to the patio with outdoor sockets and another external light on the building. Now, parties can have twinkly lights, or electric BBQs as part of their evening's entertainment.

Of course, there was muck and upheaval while all this work went on, and we apologised to regular hirers for the disruption which we tried to keep to a minimum. Diggers

and materials deliveries came and went and the old Indian stone slabs which had weathered beautifully, were sold to help with costs. Profits from a bric-a-brac sale in Thaxted also assisted with funding the project, plus a generous contribution from Hempstead Parish Council.

Particular attention was paid to drainage, as the patio is set at the bottom of a sharply sloping bank at the bottom of the sloping Glebe. On time, after three weeks and some back-breaking lifting, Joe delivered our new-look patio with which we are absolutely delighted.

If you wish to book Hempstead Village Hall for an event, all the information and booking forms are on the Hempstead website at [www.hempstead-essex.org.uk](http://www.hempstead-essex.org.uk) and if you would like Joe's contact details for a project of your own, they are:

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*DIANA FROST*