Advertising feature

NEW BEGINNINGS: *Right: The villagers of Leigh open their hall. Above: site supervisor Rupert Smith with the constructors and landscapers of the village who helped with Leigh village hall. Below: The new village hall.* ***Pictures by Laura Jones***

Village's 20 year wait is over

LEIGH villagers marked an historic occasion this weekend with the ceremonial opening of a top-class amenity.

Last Saturday, at 2.30pm the ceremonial opening of Leigh's new village hall marked an historical occasion.

This is a truly inspirational story of a small Dorset village determined to build a new village hall, in spite of the odds being stacked against them.

For more than 80 years, the original village hall has served the whole community, including the Brownies, Women's Institute, young farmers, senior citizens and line dancers.

But a structural survey showed it would need replacing by 2012, and without a hall, there would be nowhere for the community to meet. Many people could become isolated.

With the failure of DEFRA and National Lottery bids, things were looking hopeless, but that didn't deter the ever-resourceful villagers, who devised a plan to go it alone.

They started a fundraising campaign, involving various activities, in June 2006, and the following year, sold the old village hall with planning permission for two cottages.

This raised just enough money to enable work to commence in September 2007 and with the continuing programme of innovative, fundraising events and local authority grants, the new village hall was complete.

This remarkable project has been recognised by the Dorset Business Awards 2008, selected as one of the three finalists to be Dorset Charity Of The Year 2008. The Awards Ceremony was held on Tuesday 18 at the BIC in Bournemouth.

There is immense pride amongst the village – the project could not have been achieved without the support of many local villages and the conviction, determination and teamwork between the volunteer project management teams, professional site supervisor, contractors and the hoards of volunteers giving up their time to assist with everything from landscaping to painting.

Although £440K has been raised to date, it's not a time to be complacent as there is still a wish list of items needed. These will give the hall the wow factor, and meet all the needs of the existing and new clubs using the it, so fundraising will continue into the future.

■ FOR details or to donate, visit www.leighvillage.org.uk

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