

DIRECTORS ANNUAL REPORT March 2019

The Board has up to 10 Directors who must be members of Sowerby Bridge Fire & Water, each serving a 3 year period before standing down or being re-elected. At the last AGM the Board was made up of Viv Jorissen, Tom Stringfellow, Phil Hawdon, Malcolm Gardner, Isolde Davey, Freda Davis, Frank Darnley, Dot Foster, Dave Pugh and Clare Nestor.

During the succeeding year Dave Pugh felt that he had to resign due to pressure of work, leaving one seat vacant. It is hoped that this vacancy will be filled at the March 2019 AGM.

We meet monthly throughout the year for formal Board Meetings and have additional meetings and workshops as required. All Directors have inputs into all of our dealings and are asked to ratify as appropriate the findings or recommendations from our sub-groups (currently covering Buildings projects, Tenancies and Hiring, Events, Fundraising, Outreach)

Communications to Members:

Most members have opted to allow us to contact them by email and this is by far our preferred method. We use MailChimp to do this which gives us confirmation of how many members received the email. It also tells us of recipients who have for some reason or another been unable to receive such correspondence and we try to remedy this as best we can.

To those members who do not receive emails we post letters but this is very time-consuming and a drain on our low finances so naturally we would prefer a simpler way of dealing with this. This is not work we can share with volunteers because of the data protection issues involved.

We also send out messages via facebook and other regular social media, we put notices on the Fire Station door and we on occasion circulate fliers.

We usually have a stall at the quarterly markets in the town, we announce events at Sowerby Bridge Ward Forum, are represented on Sowerby Bridge Development Board and the Calderdale CAN (Community Anchors network) and we also address local organisations and groups by invitation.

Review of the past year:

Unfortunately this will sound a bit like last year's report with regard to both the state of the buildings and our application for charitable status. However, we are making progress as will be seen later in this report.

The buildings:

Apart from the limited area roof repair we carried out in 2017 the buildings remain in a sorry state as a result of roof leaks, pigeon contamination and dry rot in various places and our efforts to raise funds to deal with these matters have not enabled us to make any significant progress.

What we have been doing is devising a way of consolidating the presence of our 2 existing co-user organisations (Happy Days and Calderdale Theatre School) in the buildings and moving some other community-related organisations into the buildings, as well as opening up some spaces for new activities.

What this will mean is that we will have 4 or 5 organisations each carrying out work on the buildings to enable them to occupy and add their particular speciality to the community, at the same time improving areas of the buildings which will benefit the larger project in the long run. These are all compatible organisations who are Fire & Water group members and who share our aspirations and aims.

This work is in the discussion stage but we are hopeful that 2019 will see more activities and a significant increase in what Fire & Water can offer the community of Sowerby Bridge. We can't announce anything specific at the time of writing this report but we expect to make an announcement about this fairly soon.

Charity Commission application:

The expert advice we took, generously paid for by 2 of our members, has not solved the problems we encountered and our latest attempt at becoming a charity has hit the buffers. The quandary now is: Do we appeal against the Charity Commission's ruling? Do we re-form and re-apply? Do we reconsider whether we should become a charity at all?

This is a very complex issue and these questions are taxing us enormously and will be debated for some time to come. We will bring members up to date at the AGM.

At this point, for the avoidance of any doubt, Sowerby Bridge Fire & Water has never claimed at any time to be a charity, it is, and has been since 2012, a not-for-profit company limited by guarantee. We have stated this time and time again but there has been a persistent rumour albeit only from a small number of people that we claim to be a charity – this is simply not so. Virtually from the start we hoped to become a charity but have never managed this yet.

Fire & Water is run entirely by volunteers and is without any employees. We owe a great debt to all those members who put in time, in mucking in, DIY, helping with events, helping with administration, and showing up and supporting all of our efforts.

Progress:

Planning Application:

The planning application, submitted late in 2017, was approved on 15th October 2018. Attached to it are 21 conditions but as we were able to negotiate the content of all of these with the planning department, none of these are a hindrance to progress. The planning approval is now "implemented" and so we are not under any time-constraints in working in our various buildings.

Development Plan:

Alongside our planning-approved scheme we have defined a Development Plan which sets out a process of working through the buildings in an orderly way with clear community benefits gained at each stage.

Phase 1 of this Plan revolves around the Fire Station and as we develop the Fire Station and adjoining building more and more space will be available and we hope to see the first floor coming into use, as meeting rooms, teaching spaces and studios and the basement as a workshop.

Business Rates:

When we signed the lease we took on responsibility for paying Business Rates which, partly because there were 4 separate rates across the site, were in the tens of thousands. Thanks to the sympathetic approach by Calderdale Council we received 100% Discretionary Rate Relief but the prospect of having to pay rates was always there so we embarked on an appeal to the Valuation Office to have the buildings re-assessed and in August 2018 we had confirmation from the Valuation Office that all the rateable values had been reduced to zero which was wonderful news and a massive relief.

We know that once we start to bring the buildings more into use we will face the fact that new valuations will be set and business rates will have to be paid but we are not at that stage yet.

As parts of the buildings become occupied by community companies they will become responsible for the business rates appropriate to the parts of the buildings involved.

More positives:

DIY projects:

Our other efforts have concentrated on DIY volunteer projects: clearing out junk and re-organising spaces in the undercroft and basements, a big clean-up of the car park and we have started on the toilet block project by cutting an opening between the Fire Station and the Council Offices. Once the toilets are in place (assuming we can find the necessary funding) we will have a much better facility for events in the Fire Station and elsewhere in the buildings.

Events:

What has increased massively is the number and variety of events now taking place in the Fire Station. This started with an approach from a group of young people to put on a gig which became the **Ignite Mini-Festival** in September, produced 9 young soloist performers or groups, in a 4 hours musical extravaganza. Basking in their success the same group then put on a **Spooksville** on Halloween and a **Santa's Grotto** in December. At this point we say a very big thank you to Eloise Butler and Ellis Price, 2 young people who organised both of these events and who are continuing with monthly Open Mic sessions and other events throughout the year.

In between these Fire & Water hosted a part of the **Oxjam** festival in mid-October, a **Vintage and Collectables** fair in November. Throughout the last few weeks of the year we also ran a **Community Choir**, geared towards performing over the Christmas period and this has now developed into a regular commitment, running right through the year.

All of these events were well supported and raised funds for the project. We are extremely grateful to all who helped produce these events and to the young group in particular.

What these events showed was that there was interest and support and a number of our members put together a programme of events which started at the beginning of January, which a very full timetable covering **Community Choir** (weekly), **Open Mic** (monthly), **Soxov Dance** (fortnightly), **Monthly Makes** (yes, monthly), **Table Top Sales** (monthly), **Sparks Writers Forum** (monthly), **Fix and Fettle Shop** (monthly) and **3-6-9 Scratch Club** (quarterly).

And of course **Winterlight 2018!** This year it looked like we couldn't put it on because local authority and public funding had virtually dried up. However at a late stage we were offered a substantial sum as sponsorship from a local business and with more business and private sponsorship coming in, match funding and then at the last minute a small

Projects Grant from Calderdale Council and an arts intervention grant from the Arts Council we had the funds we needed to put on another spectacular show which even the rain could not stop.

All our events are for the community of Sowerby Bridge and are open to all. Winterlight has always been free entry but even with the other events we have kept them as free as possible, mainly getting income from donations on the night and from the proceeds of our catering and our occasional bar.

All of our events are put on by volunteers and their enthusiastic support should never be taken for granted. Much respect and thanks is due to some very dedicated people!

Our events programme is headed up by one of our directors **Isolde Davey** – please get in touch with her for any detailed information or if you'd be willing to volunteer as a helper or to organise an event yourself, either direct or via info@sbfireandwater.co.uk.

Fundraising Sub-Group:

The fundraising committee is comprised of Directors Tom Stringfellow, Clare Nestor and Isolde Davey with input from various others. Their report is as follows:

2018-19 has been a mixed year, however the granting of planning permission for the different stages of development of the buildings has allowed us to commence fundraising in a more focused manner.

Frustratingly, our applications with both the Lottery's Reaching Communities fund and Creative Civic Change were unsuccessful, however income from the increased number of events we're hosting, along with rental charges and the renewed annual subscriptions, has meant we can more comfortably cover our month on month costs than in previous years.

Once again our team acquired funding to stage December's Winterlight festival and produced our second Fire & Water calendar which has raised between them £2,500 to date.

We have identified a good number of funders who support organizations like ours including the Tudor Trust and the Asda Foundation. Our recently formed Fundraising Sub-group have already set about pursuing these possibilities along with more locally-based crowdfunding initiatives.

As we look to step up our level of fundraising into 2019, it would be great to expand our team. Should any members wish to join the Fundraising sub-group, please make yourself known to the Board.

Fundraising Calendars

One of the fundraising suggestions to come from our 2017 AGM was a calendar. We launched the 2018 Fire & Water calendar in late 2017 with very kind help from our resident photographer Darren Fleming and its sales of just over £2,000 contributed greatly to the general funds.

Sales of our current 2019 calendar have also gone well, we are currently on £1,500 and still have a few left at our stockists for £3.50.

We are very grateful to the calendar sponsors Ian Mawer, Hollins Mill, Temujin, Poppies Florist, The Village, Syhiba, The Hogshead, Wharf Garage, Yoga Mill, Blue Bird Café,

Coversure and The Moorings as well as to Trinkette, Calderdale Library Service, Dino's newsagents, Christ Church, St Peter's, The Blind Pig, Yoga Mill, Sowerby Bridge post Office and Hawdon Russell for selling them.

Final thanks go to local photographers Alan Wrigley, Andy Gregson and David Johnston for their scenes of Sowerby Bridge.

We're starting work on the 2020 calendar now so if you want to submit photographs for consideration, would like to sponsor a month or sell them please get in touch.

We've also got some snazzy orange collection tins dotted around the town. If you'd like one for your business, let us know.

Clare Nestor is the director who has organised the calendars and the collection boxes.

Financial report:

Our financial year is the year June 2017 to May 2018 so presenting a report up to May 2018 feels well out of date, but it is still valid and the summary will be available at the AGM and on request by emailing info@sbfireandwater.co.uk

The legal fees incurred in relation to our application to the Charity Commission have been paid by 2 of our members and the trustees insurances were also paid last summer by a member, both as long term loans to be re-paid when funds allow. We have factored into our running costs the re-payment of these 2 items over a 3-year basis although it would be good to clear them earlier.

Our financial situation remains extremely low but it is improving, with money coming in from private donations, membership subscriptions and from the takings at our various events and we have also benefited from a distribution from Rushbearing and from Rotary, but with no major grants for any building work this year. Individual donations vary from single sums and monthly arrangements. We have been greatly encouraged by receiving some large personal donations which is really appreciated and has helped greatly with our running costs.

Some of these personal donations were specifically for Winterlight which also benefited to a massive extent from **local business sponsorship**, and we received grants from the Arts Council and from Calderdale Council towards Winterlight as well.

Our regular income has this year covered the running costs but there is seldom any spare cash and grant applications take an awful long time to come to anything. Our general running costs, mainly for insurances and for mains services and factoring in the repayment of the loans mentioned above, amount to about £9,000/year. Our income from rents, donations, memberships and takings from events means that this year we are starting to build up a small amount of capital to go towards building improvement work.

Financial snapshot at 22 March 2019:

Main account	£5,019.57
Events account:	£1,920.70
Cash box:	<u>£44.85</u>
Total:	£6,985.12

This gives us a cushion against running costs into the next financial year but we must never become complacent. Please don't stop donating – building improvements are not cheap, even with a high level of DIY help.

We would encourage all waged members who wish to donate to Fire & Water to use the LocalGiving route so that we benefit from Gift Aid – increasing your donation by 25%.

Our certified accounts for the last financial year (July 2017 to June 2018) have again been prepared by Wheawill & Sudworth Ltd and will be published on our website in time for the AGM. We are very grateful to Wheawill & Sudworth for yet again preparing the accounts at no charge.

Membership:

Early in 2018 we proposed a change to an annual membership subscription which was approved by members at the Extraordinary General Meeting immediately following the AGM in March 2018.

The reason for this decision came out of growing concerns from members as well as from the Board that the original search for members which started over 4 years before we had obtained the lease was no longer appropriate in that many had fallen by the wayside and we no longer had an up to date list of supporters. We also had to update our records in the light of the General Data Protection Regulations, so had to obtain a new commitment from members with a new list and with member's permission to hold their personal data.

Not wishing to make high financial demands from members we set the subscription rates at £3 (unwaged), £5 (waged) and £20 (group or organisation), each category to be renewed on an annual basis.

Inevitably this resulted in a reduction in numbers which to date totals 129 in individual and groups. Membership recruitment is steady, increasing month by month and obviously we'd like a lot more to add to our representation in the town, particularly when applying for grants and other funds.

Our project is now over 7 years old but we've only had the buildings for about 2 and a half years and so much of what we've done, and the enthusiasm generated, was before we got the buildings.

Whilst membership has grown during this year but we need many more and we need members to do more than support, we need committed members willing to take on individual issues, whether it be helping formulate policies, writing grant applications, doing the accounts, organising voluntary sessions, running events or anything else.

We need any member with a speciality whether it be in handiwork, plumbing, electrical, joinery, building work, in fundraising, helping with events, administration – most of what we are doing falls on the shoulders of a small group of enthusiasts but we need much more than this for the sake of the whole project.

Data Protection:

We discussed our responsibilities under the new General Data Protection Regulations and realised that we had to start afresh with a list of members in order to ensure that it is up to date and that the method of communication with members is agreed on an individual basis and we have also developed a Privacy Policy. Members personal data is stored digitally but only under a secure regime, under the control of 1 board member **Phil Hawdon** and our administrator. All previous personal records were properly disposed of once the new system came into operation.

Our commitment to Calderdale MBC as our Landlord:

Under the terms of the joint working Agreement which was attached to our lease, we have to fulfil certain obligations to an agreed timetable and to present an annual report to the landlord (Calderdale MBC). We met with the council officer recently to review our commitment and presented our latest report. This report can be inspected on request – by contacting us at info@sbfireandwater.co.uk

Annual General Meeting:

The Annual General Meeting will take place on 30 March 2019 when we will deliver an illustrated report of our work so far and will display the plans.

There are 2 places on the Board to be filled – 1 is currently in place but comes up for renewal this year, one is vacant. We set a deadline of 22 March 2019 for the receipt of new nominations to the Board and one member has come forward. The current Board member whose 3-year term is coming to an end is also standing for re-election. At the AGM we will therefore ask you to vote on these 2 candidates.

Thank You:

We owe a great debt to Wheawill & Sudworth Ltd chartered accountants who have prepared our annual accounts each year since the company was formed in 2012 and have done this at no cost. They are one of the many companies, groups and individuals who support us and have donated often significant amounts of time and effort to our project, freely, and we are extremely grateful to them all.

In no particular order we acknowledge the following groups, companies, businesses and organisations for the enormous help they have given us throughout the year:

EPS Plant Hire, Skyblazers, O & W Crawshaw, J & C Joel, Event Equipment Hire, Performance Space, E P Technical Events, Calderdale Theatre School, D-Sales, Abram Pulman, Reynard Electronics, James Clay, Temujin, Flowhire, Dean Clough, Willow Tree Cafe, William Hayes, Ian Mawer, Barkyard, Calderdale MBC, the Arts Council and the scores of private individuals who shall remain nameless but you know who you are!

This has been an even busier year than last year in outreach, activities and support for the community of Sowerby Bridge. We owe so much to our members, our volunteers, our supporters – all of you.

Please continue with us.

Phil Hawdon
Director
SOWERBY BRIDGE FIRE & WATER