

## **DIRECTORS ANNUAL REPORT March 2020**

### **Covid-19:**

When we started writing this report the world seemed a more predictable place than it now does at the end of March. Covid-19 affects us all and in the case of Fire & Water its effects are momentous: all events, activities, meetings, DIY sessions and room hire have stopped. Whilst things are going on in the background, there is nothing to see on the street.

Fire & Water is all about community, sharing, caring, providing spaces, providing for individuals, groups and charities but how we can do this whilst we are all in some form of lock-down is a very great problem and as we write this, there doesn't appear to be a lot we can do together to keep up momentum. We are working on this but we need you to do the same.

What is critical is that we look after one another, we use what resources we have to stay in touch, to listen to each other, to pass on members' needs to those who can best respond to them. We have joined Sowerby Bridge Covid19 Volunteers and will pass to them any urgent calls you might send in to Fire & Water.

Whilst we are unable to do anything in the buildings we are making regular checks to ensure that the buildings remain safe and undisturbed. We hope that all members will take on this responsibility and that if you should see anything untoward or worrying, you report it to us immediately, and to the police if necessary.

Our Annual Report is normally presented to Members at our AGM and then posted on our website, along with our accounts for the previous year. We had to postpone the AGM but the Annual report will still go onto the website as will the accounts. Once the C-19 emergency is over, as it will be one day, we will re-convene the AGM – hopefully sooner rather than later.

### **The Annual Report to Members:**

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, Clare Nestor and Jelena Covic.

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

### 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 something 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 on occasion we 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:**

We would judge Fire & Water's progress against our Community Development aims and associated with this our Buildings Development Plan and in this report we hope to demonstrate that we are making real progress and achieving a great deal.

You will see later in this Report that we have started a review of our Community Aims with the intention of presenting a **Community Development Plan** which will become the lead strategy, with our Buildings Development Plan closely responding to it.

### **The buildings:**

There have been no major building works carried out since the roof repair project in 2017 but there have been a host of minor but still significant other improvements, via our volunteers and partner groups.

Pigeons: Thanks to some critical window patching we can now announce that there is no pigeon access to the first floor of the council offices. Unfortunately their bi-products are still there, and will remain there for some time. Pigeons however continue to enjoy our facilities in the first floors of the fire station and the former caretaker's flat and also in the swimming pool.

Volunteer work in boarding up windows in the Council Offices has (so far) prevented further pigeon ingress into this part of the building and we are currently considering how to deal with the pigeon poo clean-up.

Since the last AGM we lost Happy Days as users of our basement but we still have Calderdale Theatre School using the former gym and dance studio for storage, the Puzzle Hall group have been using the Undercroft as a furniture restoration workshop, Rushbearing are using a part of the Undercroft to garage the Rush Cart and we have welcomed Phoenix Bowmen who have set up an indoor archery range, also in the Undercroft, so in addition to the Winterlight team's permanent presence and the many functions and events in the Fire Station, the Fire & Water site is being increasingly used by the community.

We have established DIY volunteer sessions each Thursday and Saturday morning where a band of stalwarts have been working in Shed 2, the Fire Station basement, the Council Offices ground and basement floors, the Undercroft and the car park, the range of work being as follows:

Shed 2: to get it ready for Imagineer to initiate a building contract, we have cleared out all of the old water filter plant and hot air ducts, installed an electrical supply, built a flood resilient perimeter wall and completed the insulated dry-lining to all 3 external walls. We also have a supply of concrete blocks, sand and cement in readiness for building the new toilet and store room walls;

Fire Station Basement: we have removed some internal walls, the ceiling and wall plaster as a start to opening up this space as our drop-in centre and admin base;

Council Offices: ground floor: we have removed a heavy brick wall separating 2 rooms as a precursor to constructing the new suite of toilets, continued with the communicating doorway between this area and the Fire Station and removed wall plaster from the adjacent room in preparation for converting this space into a Changing Places facility.

basement: we have installed an electrical supply, removed redundant pipework and a boiler, repaired a brick wall, erected a dust-proof ceiling, painted walls and erected shelving, to create 3 spaces initially to be used by Calderdale Theatre School as a dry store, with band rehearsal spaces in mind for the future;

we have also fixed up an internal rainwater pipe which has diverted some of the water leak from the roof;

Undercroft: we have installed an electrical supply, done a lot of sorting out of accumulated stuff, constructed flood-proof storage racks (which meant that we didn't suffer damage in the recent flood), and moved in Phoenix Bowmen's indoor archery range;

Car Park: we have demolished the metal enclosure surrounding the old coal boiler house coal-drop along with its flue and filled in the coal pit, and de-weeded the whole area twice;

Exterior: we have fixed up goose panels to all of the first floor windows facing Hollins Mill Lane plus sealing some first floor windows at the rear and thus prevented pigeon access into the Council Offices, fixed up security panels elsewhere, and cleared accessible gutters;

This has involved nearly 100 volunteer DIY days made up from nearly 400 individual volunteer sessions – that's nearly **1500 volunteer-hours** and that's amazing. Our volunteers are willing and enthusiastic, some might think they're unskilled but they definitely are not! We owe a great deal of thanks to these wonderful people.

That's not counting all of the other volunteer time given freely for events, activities, correspondence, negotiations and meetings.

We should also thank here Sugden Bros Builders for help with the flood walling, Halifax Metals for help in removing the filter plant and EPS Plant Hire for help with high level work. We get an amazing amount of support from local businesses and groups and we're very grateful.

#### Charity Commission application:

We put the idea of applying to register as a charity on hold following from the rebuff we received at the end of 2018 but we are now working towards re-applying. However, we won't do this until we have completed our Community Development Plan and taken a lot more advice about this. We haven't dismissed becoming another form of charitable company but this is an ongoing discussion so at this point we are just flagging it up. Hopefully by the next Annual Report we will know where we are with this thorny question.

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 was approved on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2018 and as it is now “implemented” we are not under any time-constraints in working in our various buildings.

#### **Building Control:**

We will be submitting a Building Regulations application to cover the toilet installations, some roof repair work and some internal alterations but not until we are able to get back into the buildings.

### **Community Development Plan:**

Jelena Covic.

A new subgroup, formed in March 2020, has been tasked to work on a Community Development Plan which aims to address the Fire & Water offer in the 5 year horizon taking into account the programme of community-facing activities and sustainability. The plan will build on Beyond Bricks and Mortar workshop held on 4 May 2019 and the existing Buildings Development Plan as well as lessons learned from the programme of events delivered in year 2019 under the Fire & Water umbrella.

This group is initially made up of some members of the Board but where necessary, further planning activities will be supported by engagement with the Fire & Water membership, stakeholders and the wider community to ensure that their needs and expectations are addressed in the plan.

The subgroup is working towards presenting the Board with a workable first draft available within 6 months.

#### **Buildings Development Plan:**

As part of the Community Development Plan process we will be reviewing the Buildings Development Plan, bring it into line as necessary so that the 2 documents complement each other.

### **Marketing report**

Clare Nestor

### **Fundraising calendars**

This is the third year we have produced a calendar and each year they have made a much needed contribution to our funds. We were delighted to have so many excellent photographs submitted for inclusion this year; it really feels like a community effort. Our thanks go to the photographers: David Johnson, Chris Hasling, (list) this year’s sponsors, Syhiba, Wharf Garage, The Hogshead, Ian Mawer, Temujin, Coversure,

Hawdon Russell, (list) and those who sold the calendars on our behalf; Calderdale Library Service, Hawdon Russell, (xxx). Thanks also to Rob Knight for printing.

Please send your submissions for our 2021 calendar to [info@sbfireandwater.co.uk](mailto:info@sbfireandwater.co.uk)  
Photos must be in colour and be clearly identifiable as Sowerby Bridge.

### **Collection tins**

We have our orange collection tins distributed around shops, pubs and cafes in Sowerby Bridge, but we have plenty more! If you would be willing to take one in your business, please contact us on [info@sbfireandwater.co.uk](mailto:info@sbfireandwater.co.uk) and we'll drop one in. If you've already got one, expect a visit from us very soon, we are hoping to be able to report how much has been collected at our AGM.

### **Looking ahead**

We are very excited to report that we have commissioned a graphic designer to update our logo which we will use for all our marketing and in particular for new merchandise we will be producing this year. Look out for mugs, T-shirts, bags, everything you need for presents this year!

### **Financial Support during the C-19 crisis:**

We continue not being required to pay Business Rates but we know that once parts of our buildings are available for permanent use we will be re-assessed and business rates will kick in.

Unfortunately this means that we are not eligible for a Business Support Grant which would have been very helpful in the current C-19 crisis.

We are seeking financial help wherever we can but at the time of writing this doesn't look hopeful. We are making a public appeal and an appeal to our members because the availability of cash to cover our running costs is approaching a critical level.

### **More positives:**

#### **Funding for Projects:**

In spite of the need to cover our running costs we have been offered ring-fenced sums to go towards the construction of the toilet suite and the Changing Places facility. We are just prevented from moving forward with these 2 project because of C-19.

The High Street Action Zone: this is a proposal to improve Sowerby Bridge's public spaces and the buildings that create them and Fire and Water is the council's community partner in the application to Historic England to take this idea forward. We have worked with the council and with Historic England in developing the scheme which will be far reaching and very visible, and if it goes ahead will make a massive difference to the town, making it a much more pleasant and even exciting place to live and work in.

So far as Fire and Water is concerned we will see massive benefit to the buildings and the street outside and a large proportion of our site will be opened up to a host of uses, activities and events.

Historic England's announcement was delayed because of a number of factors so at the time of writing we still do not know whether we will receive this funding or not. So who knows.....?

## Events:

Our Fire Station events have continued throughout the year with **Music Festivals**, **Spooksville** on Halloween, regular **Open Mic** sessions, our **Community Choir**, **Quiz Nights** and a **Seed Swap**.

These have been run by volunteers and we should particularly thank Ellis and Eloise for their enthusiasm and technical know-how and to Isolde for her endless creative abilities in devising these events.

And of course **Winterlight 2019!** Again this year it looked like we couldn't put it on because local authority and public funding had virtually dried up. However we did obtain business and private sponsorship and we had (just) sufficient funds to put on another spectacular and well-supported show.

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](mailto:info@sbfireandwater.co.uk).

## Financial report:

Our financial year is the year June 2018 to May 2019 so presenting a report up to March 2019 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](mailto:info@sbfireandwater.co.uk)

Our financial situation remains extremely low but has been steady, 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 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.

Regrettably Lloyds Bank changed their policy on bank charges during this year and as we have 2 bank accounts, this looked like it would cost us in the region of £250 per year. Winterlight's finances were precarious this year and we had to deplete our Events Account because one of the planned-for sponsorships didn't materialise. This left so little in the bank account that we decided to close it, but this did reduce our liability for bank charges!

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 is vital and helped us put some money towards building projects covering the cost of plasterboard, thermal insulation, concrete blocks and tools.

Financial snapshot at 28 March 2020:

Main account	£3,191.90
Events account:	closed
LocalGiving (awaiting transfer to bank):	£17.62
Cash box:	<u>£44.46</u>
Total:	£3,253.98

Rents and hiring charges continue to come in each month but obviously this is a worrying time and we will need increased support during 2020 to make sure we survive Covid-19.

So please don't stop donating.

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 2018 to June 2019) have again been prepared by Wheawill & Sudworth Ltd and will be published on our website. We are very grateful to Wheawill & Sudworth for yet again preparing the accounts at no charge.

### Membership:

In 2018 we changed to an annual membership subscription but not wishing to make high financial demands on 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 but they have grown from 129 at the time of the 2018 AGM to 154, in individual and groups. Obviously we'd like a lot more members to add to our representation in the town, particularly when applying for grants and other funds.

Our project is now over 8 years old but we've only had the buildings for about 3 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:

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 have just completed this year's report which can be inspected on request – by contacting us at [info@sbfireandwater.co.uk](mailto:info@sbfireandwater.co.uk)

### Annual General Meeting:

The Annual General Meeting was planned to take place on 28 March 2020 when we will have delivered an illustrated report of our work so far and displayed the plans. We'll still do this once the new AGM date can be announced

There are 4 places on the Board to be filled – all are currently in place but come up for renewal this year. We decided to defer elections to the Board until we can hold the postponed AGM so we'll announce this as soon as we can.

### 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, Sugden Bros, J & C Joel, Event Equipment Hire, Performance Space, E P Technical Events, Calderdale Theatre School, D-Sales, James Clay, Temujin, Flowhire, William Hayes, Ian Mawer, Jean Stringfellow cake-maker extraordinaire and the scores of private individuals who shall remain nameless but you know who you are!

This has been another busy 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