

DIRECTORS ANNUAL REPORT February 2021

Covid-19:

When we wrote our report in March 2020 Covid-19 had only just made its presence known – we never expected that a year later it would still be with us and have such a tragic effect on all of our lives. Our hearts go out to all those who have lost loved ones as a result of these awful times.

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 and whilst things are going on in the background, there is little 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 community events 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 and eventually cancel last year's AGM but the February 2021 AGM will go ahead by Zoom and 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 have face to face meetings – 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. Malcolm's, Tom's and Frank's terms of office are coming to an end but they are all seeking re-election.

Sadly, Jelena had to step down for personal reasons and is sorely missed – but this leaves a space on the board which needs filling.

We meet monthly throughout the year for formal Board Meetings and normally 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, and Merchandise)

Our Articles do not require us to hold an Annual General Meeting but they do require us to provide an annual report to members and they also require us to appoint directors on an annual rotation basis.

Under the extreme conditions, neither could we organise the appointment of directors last year but we are remedying this now.

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.

Covid has meant that all public presence is on hold and our communications with members have been via digital media only.

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.

Community Development Plan Freda Davis

A new subgroup, formed in March 2020, was tasked with work on a Community Development Plan which aims to address the Fire and 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 development plan as well as lessons learned from the programme of events delivered in year 2019 under Fire and Water umbrella.

Where necessary, further planning activities will be supported by engagement with Fire & Water membership, stakeholders and wider community so that the needs and expectations are addressed in the plan.

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

We obtained a grant of £15,000 from the Architectural Heritage Fund to cover the cost of training and mentoring in relation to this activity and in looking at our future business model - hopefully we will be able to start this process later in 2021 and be able to report significant and positive progress before too long.

Community Outreach:

Our involvement in Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone project has an additional benefit to F&W: as the Community Partner, F&W has spearheaded a Pilot Project – a film being created by a small local team with help from the HAZ Project Manager Sarah Neville and from some young production assistants. We carried out interviews in the HAZ area and our film, collating the views and aspirations of local people is scheduled for presentation at the end of March 2021. A grant from Historic England of £10,000 pays for this project.

The conclusions from our film will be fed into our community bid for the HAZ Cultural Programme, a project spread out until March 2024. This is a bid which has been made by the SB Cultural Consortia of which F&W has a major part, and if successful, will see a major community design and assistance hub being set up at F&W and a programme of events across the next 3 years, involving as many community organisations as possible throughout the town. Let's hope our bid is successful!

Buildings Development Plan:

We have received a massive boost because of Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone project and we have already been able to commission essential pre-contract work: we now have a comprehensive Asbestos Refurbishment & Demolition report covering the front and central buildings, the pigeon guano is now out of these buildings as has all the asbestos and we have clearance certificates to prove it, and we have scaffolded temporary floors where some were missing. You can now safely visit parts of the buildings which have been out of bounds for years!

We have also been able to commission a structural engineer to add structural scrutiny to our plans, and a CDM Advisor to help with the preparation of the main contract designs and specifications.

In addition, the work that our successful HAZ bid will enable us to bring the Swimming Baths Reception building, the Council Offices and the Fire Station into a useful state. It will deal with re-roofing and rainwater goods, replacement windows, repairs to the water- and rot-damaged first floors, replacement ground floors and their insulation and underfloor heating, structural alterations and improvements, the new main entrance and the new fire escape door, new emergency wiring systems and basic lighting and power distribution and renewable energy installations. As a result, all floor levels will be accessible (through not yet with a lift to the first floor) and all rooms in each building will be available for use – as meeting rooms, rehearsal space, venues, our F&W office/drop-in point, pop-up shops/display areas, and toilets at each floor level.

We are about to agree details with a building contractor and sign a building contract for this work. Depending on how the finances are organised some of the latter stages of work might involve our stalwart DIY team.

This work cuts into a number of phases in our **Building Development Plan** and during this coming year we will re-assess this Plan and bring it up to date.

The Buildings: Volunteer Work:

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

Pigeons continue to enjoy our facilities in the swimming pool but as we are not able to work in that area they are welcome to stay a little longer.

However, there has been a significant amount of work carried out in the buildings over the past year in spite of the Covid restrictions, some of it as limited DIY jobs and some with the help of a variety of contractors.

In Shed 2 we now have the toilet cubicles and drainage in place, plastered walls and an insulated and screeded floor throughout, including under floor heating pipes. There's still a lot to do (windows, heat pump, electrical installation, plumbing) but things are moving forward bit by bit.

As mentioned earlier, the main frontage buildings (Fire Station, Council Offices and the Swimming Baths Reception building) are now free of pigeon poo and asbestos, and we have temporary floors in place where they were removed a number of years ago.

We installed decorative LED lighting to the first floor windows as part of the Light Up Sowerby Bridge campaign (with grateful thanks to **EPS** for the loan of a cherry picker).

We've been moving mountains of stuff – equipment, materials, furniture, etc out of the frontage buildings in readiness for the main contract to commence – you might not recognise some of these now empty spaces!

It's amazing what can be done little by little with very small numbers. Once we are released from Covid we'll re-start the regular twice-weekly DIY sessions again and we'll see a lot more progress.

Our early 2021 plan is to convert the Fire Station Basement into our admin office and drop-in centre which will mean that our site will at last be occupied and in use during regular hours.

The buildings: Professional work:

Contractor input has moved Shed 2 on apace – Denholt Engineering supplied and erected the new steel doorframe and structural strapping which enabled M J H Builders to re-hang the heavy timber doors as external shutters:

M J H also plastered our dry-lined walls and set up plasterboard on our rather wavy new internal walls, smartening them up considerably:

Halifax Renewable Energy Company supplied and laid the underfloor heating pipework.

M J H have recently completed the new screed floor and we are now able to use this building for essential storage ahead of the main contract project.

We get an amazing amount of support from local businesses and groups providing their services free or at beneficial cost, and we're very grateful.

Our colleagues sharing the buildings:

We still have Calderdale Theatre School using the former gym and dance studio for storage, both Imagineer and the Puzzle Hall group use the Undercroft as a store, Rushbearing are using a part of the Undercroft to garage the Rush Cart, Phoenix Bowmen have their indoor archery range also in the Undercroft and our Winterlight props and creations continue to reside there, so our buildings are being used even though we can't hold events.

Very soon we hope to announce yet another community organisation sharing our space and offering a new element to our community engagement.

The Riverside Garden report Dot Foster & Viv Jorissen

A riverside garden was on our wish-list from the start – the opportunity to create a peaceful area with open views of the river, linked with the Undercroft as an events/celebration/café space and providing a new access to the river itself.

The trees are problematic because they are growing close to our buildings and to the library and the retaining wall boundary and as well as casting a deep shadow they pose a long-term structural threat, so we are currently awaiting prices for their felling and clearance.

Once our plans are finalised we must submit them to the Planning Department as dictated by Planning Condition, and once this is approved we can start in earnest. After the felling is out of the way volunteers could be asked to dig over the ground and clear and level most of it and maybe start planting but we need fundraisers more than anything right now to progress this project.

We met in what will become the riverside garden in November, to look at the possibilities, and the challenges of a slightly sloping site which needs clearing to make the most of the area.

Following our conversation, we put pen to paper, and came up with some ideas and sketches for a gently sloping site, entirely accessible, and with a variety of planting ideas. Our brief was to include fruit trees, and lots of colour and scent, and to make the garden as wildlife friendly as possible.

We now have an extremely long list of plants we would love to include – we will have to rein ourselves in – we doubt very much there will be room for them all!

To give you an idea, we are thinking to create raised beds, and trellises/pergolas/arches with climbers such as Jasmine, Roses, Honeysuckle, Clematis, Wisteria... We have a vision of a beautiful round arbour that will make the perfect backdrop for wedding photos...

In the planters and beds, we hope to plant a wide variety of herbs to help support the kitchen, and plants for wildlife such as lavender, penstemon, alliums, potentilla and teasel.

The paving will not be overlooked either. In the random paving (using, as far as possible, materials reclaimed from within the building) we will grow creeping thymes, and chamomile, creeping savory and creeping helianthemums.

We are really looking forward to getting started. The first task is to get permission to remove the trees – which will be applied for soon - and then we can start. And we hope to use some of the wood from the trees as part of the scheme.

We hope you will agree that it is a very exciting project, with lots of potential. And if any of you have any spare plants you think might be suitable, please do let us know. We don't need them yet but watch this space.

Marketing and fundraising report Clare Nestor

Fundraising calendars

This is the fourth year we have produced a calendar and it's going from strength to strength as a truly community owned project, as befits Sowerby Bridge Fire and Water. We were delighted to

receive so many photos for inclusion that we had to have a judging panel: socially distanced and bundled up outside with scarves and warm coats! Our thanks go to the photographers: Peter Davies, Robert Lloyd, Alex McCune, Stephanie Penny, Jason Sweeney, Paul Whitworth and Katie Sykes, our sponsors, Artichoke, Yorkshire Dama Cheese, Wharf Garage, The Hogshead, Ian Mawer, Temujin, Coversure, Hawdon Russell, Hollins Mill, Yogamill, The Moorings and SOL PV Group and those who sold the calendars on our behalf; Artichoke, Dino's Newsagents, Calderdale Library Service, Coversure, West End Pharmacy, Temujin, Yogamill and Hawdon Russell. Despite being in lockdown for most of the period the calendar has been on sale, we hope to make about £760 from this year's.

Please send your submissions for our 2022 calendar to info@sbfireandwater.co.uk Photos must be in colour and be clearly identifiable as Sowerby Bridge. Winter photos are particularly welcome: everywhere looks stunning on a summer's day with blue skies and reflections, January can be less photogenic!

Collection tins

We have our orange collection tins distributed around shops, pubs and cafes in Sowerby Bridge, but as most of them were closed for much of the year, donations are scant. When businesses reopen, we will be out and about looking for more.

New branding and merchandise

We are delighted with our new logo, designed by Nancy Clare Creative, it sums up exactly what Sowerby Bridge Fire and Water is about: music, geese, our town, fireworks and robots!

We spotted an opportunity when Calder Screenprint offered free printing to local causes if they took and laundered T shirts flood damaged by Ciara which hit in February 2020. We washed and returned 300 and in return took delivery of our first merchandise. We dyed a selection in a rainbow of colours and had some tie dyed by @bangtiedye. Sold at Artichoke and by direct sales, we have made over £400 profit so far.

We'll be expanding our range of merchandise in 2021.

Looking ahead

We are very excited to report that we 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 to be free of Business Rates we know that once parts of our buildings are available for permanent use we will be re-assessed and business rates will kick in. Early in the pandemic this meant that we were not eligible for the initial **Business Support Grant** but thankfully there was a recognition at high level that not every business fitted into the defined support categories and a discretionary business support system was announced – we applied for this and received 2 payments of £5,000 each – grateful thanks to the **Business Support Unit of Calderdale Council**.

These payments meant that financially speaking, we could relax a little, even though we had no income from the events we would normally organise.

Our appeal to members was very successful and we now have a good number of members who have committed to giving monthly donations. This is good news but as always, we need more – so please help if you can.

More positives:

Funding for Projects:

We have ring-fenced sums from the **Community Foundation for Calderdale** to go towards the fitting out of the main toilet suite and via **Imagineer** for the Changing Places facility and we expect that the work involved will follow on immediately from the main contract works.

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.

Events:

All of our events stopped because of Covid but thanks to **Ellis Price** we had regular online Open Mic events through most of 2020 and we hope that these will continue this year. Our post-release events programme is headed up by **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.

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 are growing slowly and are currently about 150, 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 but also vital to our ability to be a real community contributor.

Our project is now over 10 years old but we've only had the buildings for about five years though so much of what we've done, and the enthusiasm generated, was before we got the buildings. Now that more of the buildings are about to become usable and once we can start to use them we hope that F&W membership will see a dramatic increase.

We need many more members 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.

When the restrictions are lifted we will 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.

Financial report:

Our financial year is the year June 2019 to May 2020 so presenting a report up to March 2021 feels well out of date, but it is still valid and the summary will be available on request by emailing info@sbfireandwater.co.uk

Our financial situation remains low key but has been steady, with money coming in from private donations, membership subscriptions and from the Business Support Unit at CMBC. Individual donations vary from single sums and monthly arrangements.

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 is vital and helped us put some money towards building projects and future events.

Financial snapshot at 14 February 2021:

	Unallocated Funds	Allocated (ring-fenced) Funds
CFFC grant (fitting out toilets)		£5,000.00
HAZ Pilot Project (to cover remaining agreed fees)		£5,625.00
HAZ Main Project (to cover remaining invoices)		£2,073.00
Other in bank account	£9,742.78	
Funds in pipeline (monthly donations via LocalGiving & unrepresented cheques)	£173.45	
Cash Box	£44.28	
Totals at 14 February 2021:	£9,960.51	£12,698.00

Rents and hiring charges continue to come in each month but obviously this is a worrying time and we will need increased support during 2021 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 will again be prepared by Wheawill & Sudworth Ltd and will be published on our website.

VAT: Because we are currently not eligible for zero-rating and because of the very large sums passing through our accounts in the coming year from the HAZ project, we have made the decision to register for VAT so that as much as possible can be reclaimed. The corollary of this decision is that we will have to charge VAT on rents and hiring income in the future.

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

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, E P Technical Events, J M H Builders, Denholt Engineering, Halifax Renewable Energy Company, personnel at both Historic England and CMBC, the merchandise donors and designers, the calendar sponsors, Jean Stringfellow cake-maker extraordinaire and the scores of private individuals who shall remain nameless but you know who you are!

Despite everything, this has been another busy year in 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