

DIRECTORS ANNUAL REPORT April 2022

This is my last report to you as a Director of Fire & Water because I've completed the maximum 3 terms each of 3 years. So before anything else, I want to thank all of Fire & Water's membership and all the community organisations and individuals who have helped and supported me with this wonderful project, for so long. (By the way, it's not "so long" cos I'll still be around, but not as a director!)

This AGM also brings farewell to Viv Jorissen who has also served her 3 x 3 and must also now stand down. Viv has been a stalwart of the organisation, a tour de force, and a vital member of the team from the very beginning – again, she's not disappearing and we fully expect her to continue being involved with this great project.

At this AGM we hope to welcome new blood to the Board – for the first time there'll actually be a vote – so it's very important that as many F&W Members as possible to hear what the candidates have to say and to make their choices.

Fire & Water is all about community, sharing, caring, providing spaces, providing for individuals, groups and how we can strive together to achieve this. In spite of the Covid restrictions we have continued with voluntary work in the buildings, organised activities and are running a major building project. As we emerge from Covid and as the building project comes to an end, we fully expect activities to return, at an even greater scale than pre-Covid because we will have more space available for such activities.

Last year our AGM was held via Zoom. This year it will be a live event and for the first time it will be held at fire & Water. Our Annual Report will still go onto the website as will the accounts.

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.

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 and we'll announce the designated board member taking over from Phil in due course. All previous personal records were properly disposed of once the new system came into operation.

Constitution of the Board:

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 Ann Dower. Isolde's and Freda's terms of office come to an end this time but they are all seeking re-election.

Because Viv and I have to step down, there are overall 4 places to fill including those of Isolde's and Freda's.

The Board meets monthly throughout the year for formal Board Meetings and normally has 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 Building Projects including DIY, Admin & Finance, Funding/Fundraising and Merchandise). As we put Covid behind us we will reconvene our Events, Tenancies & Hiring, Outreach and Community Development Planning sub-groups.

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.

The Annual Report to Members:

Because we have been unable to hold much by way of activity during the past year, this Report is significantly shorter than last year's. However, we have not been inactive and have continued with our Business Development planning, with Community Outreach, the building repairs & refurbishment work, our volunteer DIY work, tenant development, with Fundraising, Merchandising and the Garden Project.

Business Development report: Malcolm Gardner

With the aid of a £15,000 grant from the Architectural Heritage Fund we are currently consulting with Jeff Scales of Locality about our future business model and reviewing our business plan and both of which should be complete in the next 3 or 4 months.

At present Fire and Water is a Company Ltd by Guarantee. Because of the mixed nature of our current activities such as large scale construction work, community activities and fund raising it has proved difficult to agree charitable status with the Charity Commission.

The board has therefore taken the necessary decision to change the current Articles, designed with charitable status envisaged, to another entity. Having taken advice it is clear to the board that the way forward is to form a structure that will be appealing to funders in the short and medium term, before ultimately becoming a charity. The structure we are anticipating to form is either a Community Interest Company or a Community Benefit Society. Both have advantages and drawbacks.

Shortly we will recommend to members the form of structure we propose to take and will be asking for approval of new Articles of Association to achieve this status at an Extraordinary General Meeting.

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 created by a small local team with help from the HAZ Project Manager

Sarah Neville and from some young production assistants. This film 'Why Sowerby Bridge? Why Not?' was launched last year and can be viewed on YouTube.

We fed the conclusions from our film into our community bid for the **HAZ Cultural Programme** and we were successful, being granted £90,000 spread over 3 years ending in March 2024. We were involved with Historic England and Calderdale Council in appointing Grace Scott as **Community Arts Coordinator** and, alongside our Directors Frank and Isolde, the HAZ Cultural Programme is up and running. December's GLOW Event was the start and a programme of cultural events across the years is being established. This summer will see a town-wide Big Splash festival and a number of other events.

We held a very successful Open Day in October 2021 including showing over 80 people around the buildings – this was the first of what we hope to be a regular occurrence and as the buildings become more usable we hope to expand the area of activities dramatically.

Buildings Repairs & Refurbishment:

Thanks to the Historic England's High Street Heritage Action Zone project we were able to pay to have the asbestos and pigeon contamination from the front buildings, to commission a structural engineer to deal with the structural design work and a CDM advisor to help with health & safety documentation. We have gone out to tender for the work in January 2021 but were unable to commission builders until December 2021 because of very complicated dealings over the release of the grant money.

However, thanks to some recently appointed and very helpful council officers we were able to start the current repairs and improvements project which 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.

The original grant offer was just over £500,000 and our worry was that escalating prices would put the full anticipated scope of the work at risk – thankfully we were able to get the grant offer increased to just over £600,000 and with this encouragement the work commenced in January and is due for completion in July 2022.

We have some additional funding (£5,000) from the Community Foundation for Calderdale to go towards fitting out accessible toilets on site and very recently we've been awarded a grant (details not yet available) which will cover the installation and management of our Changing Places facility

Depending how the finances are organised some of the latter stages of work might involve our stalwart DIY team.

At the end of this building contract we will have the use of all parts of the 3 frontage buildings and the 2 inner buildings which will include the 3 function rooms (Fire Station, History Room and Council Chamber) available for community use along with the new courtyard, 2 additional rooms for band rehearsal, toilets and a heating system.

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.

Whilst the pigeons continue to enjoy our facilities in the swimming pool we have cleared out the former Ladies Changing Room, re-opened the escape door from the Baths building, stripped out the former basement Boiler House and raised its floor level to make it more accessible, stripped out tons of redundant steel pipes and ducts (and traded them in), rewired Shed 2 and installed drains and water service pipes, started to alter the layout in the first floor of the Fire Station and a myriad of bits and pieces throughout the site and this work continues every Saturday morning.

It's amazing what can be done little by little with very small numbers and we are immensely grateful to these volunteers for their enthusiasm and commitment.

Tenant Development:

We still have Calderdale Theatre School using part of the Undercroft, the Fire Station Basement and Shed 1 for storing their props, costumes and equipment and we are now planning the move to their permanent spaces on the first floor – they will occupy 2 rooms as their base and will share a variety of function rooms as rehearsal space.

We have Imagineer using part of the Undercroft and Shed 2 as storage in anticipation of them taking over Shed 2 as their headquarters later this year, with an option to take over Shed 1 as well.

We also have the Puzzle Hall Community Pub store in a part of the Undercroft where we also have Phoenix Bowmen continuing to use their archery range.

We are now in talks with a number of other community-oriented groups who we hope to see occupying various parts of the buildings.

Merchandising report and Welcome Back Fund: Clare Nestor

Merchandising

Calendars were produced, late in the day as ever. We had 250 printed and had fewer outlets than previous years but more sponsors! After deducting costs we have raised about £940 which is a fantastic success, bearing in mind the problems we've faced in the past year. We still have some in stock should anyone want one.

We hope to start work on the 2023 calendar earlier this year with a new theme.

Some very good ideas were generated at the October members' meeting and we're working in these – hoping to be able to report later in the year.

Ginnels: Welcome Back fund

Our appetite for a Sowerby Bridge Snicket Saunter/ Stroll/Stumble has been whetted. We're looking into the creation of a ginnel walk around Sowerby Bridge, a bit like what has been created in Golcar, where they had produced a map and plaques, and we're investigating if such a project could be funded through the Welcome Back fund.

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.

The Riverside Garden report

Covid put this project on hold but some progress has been made and our volunteers have started to clear the garden of scrap metal.

Dot Foster and Viv Jorissen produced some ideas for the riverside garden and these plans will be submitted to Calderdale Council for approval.

As the garden will be an outdoor seating area and a meeting place attached to the cafe or community kitchen, the ground will have to be levelled, but first, three 80 foot sycamores plus about 6 smaller sycamores have to be felled.

We have estimates in for this and are currently applying for grant funding. We have already received Ward Forum funding which we used to fell a 10 foot privet hedge.

The paved area outside will use the York stone flags from inside the building and we would like to make an arbour, covered in climbing plants (good for celebration photographs) We will replace the felled trees with espaliered fruit trees along the walls, a balustrade to stop people falling in the river, and hopefully, hundreds of plants and bushes and herbs for use in the kitchen.

There may also be an ice cream shop!

Membership:

Our membership has grown a little during this difficult year and is now at 170. 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. Once the buildings become usable and we 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.

Our annual subscription rates, set in 2018, at £3 (unwaged), £5 (waged) and £20 (group or organisation), each category to be renewed on an annual basis, remain unchanged.

Financial report:

Our financial year is the year June to May so presenting a report up to April 2022 feels well out of date and it is appropriate that we show an up to date snapshot in this Report. The most recent formal accounts are on the F&W website.

Our financial situation remains low key but has been steady, with money coming in from private donations, membership subscriptions and merchandising. Individual donations vary from single sums and monthly arrangements. In addition we have received substantial funding from Historic England for both the HSHAZ building work and the Cultural Programme, from the Community Foundation for Calderdale towards installing assessable toilets, from Calderdale Council's Community Engagement Fund to cover the costs of employing the Community Arts Coordinator, from the Architectural Heritage Fund to cover consultancy fees for the Business Model and Planning work, from Sowerby Bridge Ward Forum towards work in the garden and from LocalGiving towards the installation of a Bike Port.

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 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 25 April 2022:

	Unallocated Funds	Allocated (ring-fenced) Funds
CFFC grant (fitting out toilets)		£5,000.00
HAZ Building Project (to cover remaining invoices)		£27,037.00
HAZ Cultural Programme		£12,549.00
HAZ Main (town-wide) project		£2,000.00
VAT fund		£5,245.00
Other in bank account	£7,171.00	
Funds in pipeline (monthly donations via LocalGiving)	£165.00	
Cash Box	£26.00	
Totals at 25 April 2022:	£7,362.00	£51,831.00

Rents and hiring charges continue to come in each month but obviously this is a worrying time because there has been no income from events - 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 have again been prepared by Wheawill & Sudworth Ltd and are to be found on our website.

VAT: Because of the size of invoices relating to the building contract, it became obvious that we should register for VAT, which we have now done. Malcolm has learned how to make the claims to HMRC – very successfully!

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). This is due to be submitted in the next few weeks.

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, our jam makers and the scores of private individuals who shall remain nameless but you know who you are!

Despite everything, this has still been a 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