

DIRECTORS ANNUAL REPORT August 2025.

BOARD BUSINESS

It's been another eventful year for with some great things to celebrate and some ongoing frustrations!

At last year's AGM, we elected one new board member: Steven Langton and we also re-elected Viv Jorissen and Phil Hawdon. Cas Sewell-Storey stood down but subsequently returned to us as a Co-Opted member and therefore needs to be formally re-elected this time round

The current constitution allows for 10 voting members, the 7 members currently in place are:

Cas Sewell-Storey (co-optee – requiring election as a full member this year)
Clare Nestor (3rd term ends 2027)
Dot Foster (3rd term ends 2026)
Steven Langton (1st term ends 2027)
Phil Hawdon (first term ends 2027)
Viv Jorissen (first term ends 2027)
Zoe Blake (1st term ends 2026).

Of the above, Cas Sewell-Storey is seeking re-election for the next 3-year term. Malcolm Gardner (who has previously served the full 3 x 3-year terms and then stepped down for a year in accordance with the constitution) wishes to seek re-election.

This means that at the AGM, provided there are sufficient candidates, we will seek to appoint/re-appoint a total of 4 board members. Should more candidates be put forward, the unsuccessful ones will be invited to become co-optees for a period of one year.

Whilst the role of board members is to be responsible for our planning and management, because we do not yet have any paid staff, we also have responsibilities to organise and carry out a lot of functions. Currently we have the following sub-committees, each lead by a board member:

1. **Building:** Deciding where to progress building work and what funds are required. Programming building works, running volunteer DIY sessions and preparing space for events and uses of space.
2. **Events:** Activating and facilitating events and community activities and overseeing letting of space.
3. **Media:** Responsible for updating Face Book and other social media and public interfaces thought appropriate for information and advertising, programming
4. **Funding:** Other committees will apply to this committee for funding. They will decide the best way forward for each activity and try to find particular funding for those activities as well as general funding.
5. **Structure:** Responsible for CBS and Business Plan updating, requirement surveys. Will be also responsible for necessary permissions, licencing, dealing with Companies house and e-mailing.
6. **Treasurer and Finance:** Responsible for everyday banking, VAT and insurances.

Board members are expected to have a hands-on approach to these functional areas and therefore individual skills and interests are paramount.

The 2025 AGM will have a 6:30pm start for the business meeting in the Fire Station, followed by an open evening throughout the buildings. This, we hope will bring the project to life.

The Board has been meeting monthly throughout the year 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.

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.

Fire & Water is all about community, sharing, caring, providing spaces, providing for individuals, groups and how we can strive together to achieve this. We have continued with voluntary work in the buildings, organised activities and running a variety of building projects.

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.

We also send out messages via Facebook and other regular social media, we have a regular page in GoLocal, put notices on the Fire Station door and on occasion we circulate fliers.

Our new website has been created to be more inter-active, including the facility for members to sign up remotely and pay their subscriptions – and we would recommend this method of maintaining membership.

Data Protection:

Members' personal data is stored digitally but only under a secure regime, currently under the control of member **Phil Hawdon** and our administrator and we'll announce the designated board member taking over in the current year in due course.

BUILDING WORK:

The scope of building work has decreased significantly over the past year as a result of a variety of grants having been worked through.

Current grant funds still running are

Carbon Zero fund has enabled us to install thermal insulation to the external walls and roofs of much of the frontage buildings - this has continued throughout the year via our DIY volunteers.

Changing Places fund has enabled us to complete the Charging Places facility which is open on Mondays, Thursdays and Saturdays from 9:00am to 5:00pm. A small balance remains to cover the cost of maintenance and materials, cleaning etc.

Other small grants: the Ward Forum grant is paying for completing some internal doors within parts of the building,

Voluntary DIY:

We have a small but regular enthusiastic team of volunteers who have worked most Saturday and Thursday mornings throughout the year and between us we have re-laid drains, installed

plumbing, built temporary screens to protect visitors from the unfinished areas, constructed a mezzanine floor, constructed toilet partitions, plumbed-in toilets and basins, shifted tons of debris, installed the thermal dry-linings and cleared many spaces.

We have almost completed Shed 2 and both ends of the first floor for Calderdale Theatre School and 2 other prospective tenants.

In the past 12 months our DIY volunteers have again put in approximately 2000 hours over 90 separate sessions.

As a result of an enormous amount of this voluntary work we have been able to open the courtyard and alcove for events alongside the Goose Room, the History Room and the Fire Station.

Calderdale College has worked with us but has barely been evident during the last year. We're hoping that they will return in the next academic year.

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT:

Locality has continued to help us develop our business plan, now with our good friend Lucy Darragh who has replaced Jeff Scales, and who is also guiding us through financial planning and our application to become a Community Benefit Society.

Community Outreach:

Our cultural programme has lessened significantly as a result of our cultural grants having dried up, with almost no replacements on the horizon. However, we continue with monthly Open Mic sessions through the highly valued efforts of Ellis Price, our Improv Group meets here every 2 weeks throughout the year, a new theatre group Mizkast meets here every week, and we are running a number of theatrical and music productions.

As a result of our representation of the Sowerby Bridge Development Board we were commissioned to facilitate a pop-up event to mark the opening of the new Town Square for the end of June 2025 but as site wasn't ready, we held our own event on the day, welcoming over 500 visitors. We're hoping that this event will actually happen on 6 September, coincident with Rushbearing. We are delighted that this particular project involves Andy Abbott as creative producer and Lucy Fee as event manager, particularly as we want to maintain their highly valued input for as long as possible.

Over the past year we have seen the continued use by the **community** of the buildings in terms of theatrical and musical performance, arts workshops and interventions, street events and groups hiring the buildings. These include a Mikron Theatre performance (and they're coming back in September!), Northern Broadsides childrens' workshops, Improv Theatre, Talking Walls project, Noise in the Valley, the Reflections event, Sowerby Bridge Festival and we are expecting yoga sessions to be established in our buildings within the new few weeks. We are regularly being approached by outside bodies wishing to use the building for seminars and training sessions.

Tenant Development:

Calderdale Theatre School are continuing to use part of the Undercroft for storage but have now moved their costume department upstairs in the front building, pending the completion of their permanent areas.

Imagineer has stepped down as a potential tenant of Shed 2 but we are currently negotiating with a successor organisation.

We continue to have Sowerby Bridge Rushbearing and the Puzzle Hall Community Pub stores in a part of the Undercroft where we also have Phoenix Bowmen continuing to use their archery range. Libellule and Mizkast theatre companies are now renting basement space for their theatre company storage needs.

Merchandising:

We failed to produce a calendar last year throw lack of volunteers though we hope to remedy this this year. Tee shirts are still available and we have opened our second hand bookshop in the Goose Room.

Media update:

The new website is up and running and we're planning to give a demonstration of this at the AGM

The Riverside Garden update:

The riverside garden has gone on the back-burner through a lack of funds but we hope to resurrect it next year.

MEMBERSHIP:

Our membership continues to grow and is now at 257 though unfortunately a number of members are behind in paying their subs – we hope that paying via the website will be a more efficient way of resolving this problem. Naturally 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. As the buildings become usable and we increase their use we hope that F&W membership will see a dramatic increase.

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.

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).

FINANCIAL REPORT:

Our financial year is the now to year in December so presenting a report up to August 2025 feels well out of date and it is appropriate that we show an up to date snapshot in this Report. We need to bring the date of future AGMs back to the Spring so that the annual accounts have more relevance. The most recent formal accounts are on the F&W website.

Our financial situation needs improvement – we just about cover our running costs with money coming in from private donations, membership subscriptions and merchandising, with individual donations vary from single sums and monthly arrangements. However, until we can commence with eh various leases we are unable to build up a decent working fund. We are in talks with locality about the possibility of taking out a loan with the intention of supporting our management of the project by bringing in a part time administrator but we are at an early stage in this, without a timetable established as yet.

We have submitted grant applications for both capital projects and also revenue funding but are awaiting the result of these. We'll go on applying for funds as relevant ones come to light.

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 over £20,000/year. Our income from rents, donations, memberships is vital but is clearly insufficient without a significant boost.

Financial statement 1st Aug 2024 to 31st July 2025

| | In | Out |
|---|-------------------|-------------------|
| Income: | | |
| Membership subscriptions | £460.00 | |
| Donations: | £9,684.67 | |
| Sales (profit): | £1,443.18 | |
| Rents & hiring: | £3,030.00 | |
| Admin support grant (CMBC): | £6,000.00 | |
| | £20,617.85 | |
| Expenditure: | | |
| General Admin (website, internet, mains services, advertising, Accountants fees, subscriptions & fees, bank charges): | | £6,416.69 |
| Insurances (buildings, trustees, employer and employee liability, events) | | £10,968.28 |
| DIY building work costs: | | <u>£5,787.59</u> |
| | | £23,172.56 |

Financial snapshot on 12 August 2025:

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| <u>Balance of allocated funds remaining:</u> | |
| Carbon Zero Fund | £2,639.78 |
| Changing Places grant | £3,052.16 |
| Calderdale Oral Histories Fund | £221.84 |
| Calderdale Community asset support fund | £2,271.40 |
| Ambitions for Towns | £3,538.00 |
| Ward Forum fire door grant | <u>£500.00</u> |
| Total of allocated funds: | £12,223.18 |

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|-----------------------|----------------|
| <u>Bank balances:</u> | |
| Main Account: | £16,304.81 |
| Cash box: | <u>£120.73</u> |
| | £16,425.54 |

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|---|------------------|
| <u>Unallocated Funds</u> (this sum is agreed by the Board, used as a Reserve but only available to be spent on DIY building work in preparing the buildings for use if the total exceeds £5,000): | £4,202.66 |
|---|------------------|

This means that at present we have no funds to spend on the buildings other than those allocated to specific grants.

Rents and hiring charges continue to come in each month but obviously this is a worrying time because there has been very little 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.

Thank You All:

We owe a great debt to 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: JGH Builders, Denholt Engineering, Halifax Renewable Energy Company, R B Electrical Contractors, Sugden Bros Builders, personnel at CMBC, our events management and administration team, our extraordinary cake and jam makers, our stalwart DIY team and the scores of private individuals who shall remain nameless, but you know who you are!

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 and give us all the support and help that you can!