

# FRIENDS OF RAMSBOTTOM CIVIC HALL PUBLIC MEETING ~ 22<sup>nd</sup> February 2024

*These notes follow the meeting, which was held at the Civic Hall, and are not a comprehensive record of events, but can help to inform further progress.*

Attendance 14 Apologies 9

- 1) General Introduction by Eddie Jones (Chair of FORCH) who mentioned the previous public meeting on 18<sup>th</sup> January with 40 people, very enthusiastic, keen and confident about possibilities for Hall use which was seen as a vital Ramsbottom facility
- 2) FORCH members needed to enable a FORCH + Council + community plan for the Civic Hall  
(At this 22<sup>nd</sup> February meeting 12 people, keen to find out how to help, became new FORCH members.)

*Following the introduction, the meeting was split up into groups to allow wider discussion.*

## SOME OF THE POINTS MADE

As at previous meetings there was strong appreciation of the Hall's ambience and facilities, especially the excellent sprung dance floor.

The historical use of the Hall - as the town's premier community venue for – eg works and community functions

### Bury Council's Perspective on the Civic Hall

- Council hold the asset and currently cover maintenance
- Council cover rent, rates and 1.5 whole time equivalent staff. The energy costs are the largest outlay in running the Hall.
- No current Council budget for promotion.
- Previous loss on Civic Hall currently running £90k deficit. Community use may free the Hall from bureaucracy costs.
- Post Covid Council operate full cost recovery to run events
- Ramsbottom Civic Hall is less active at present which has led to loss of income, with Society is only now beginning to recover from Covid

### Hall use: Publicity and Marketing

Hall needs to be used more

Consider trial events working with others such as the Met.

Working with the Ramsbottom Events Group (REG) may work to integrate the Civic Hall into events.

What are FORCH's objectives? Can the group re-organise to become an events promotion and Civic Hall group?

Re Social Media. Use needs to be much better.

Need to break the cycle of not being able to run events because of shortage of staff.

### What will be the new model for running the Civic Hall how do we begin to move away from the old model?

What is the strategy who will manage and how will it be run.

Council can support governance by volunteer group and compliance (risk assessments, training etc).

Bury VCFA (Helen Tomlinson) can also be involved with volunteer group in risk assessments, training etc. and helping to gain grant funding to invest - Income from volunteer run events could be re-invested.

Looking into visible models of support activity elsewhere eg Greenmount Old School – a local example of community use. (Many other examples exist of Council-owned venues being run by a community group.)

Get a picture of the costings and details of expenses at Ramsbottom Civic Hall.

### How can Bury Council achieve the change in the Hall's management structure?

Can the Civic Hall become a hub of the Community?

FORCH to do more - move from previous role ie monitoring & supporting Council to eventually managing the Hall and its volunteers

Volunteers brought in at all levels to help to support the operation

#### FORCH's tasks

- To encourage users' support and that of the wider public in order to strengthen the group. Much of the original FORCH membership, some dating from 2007, lapsed during the pandemic so a fresh start is needed. How do we recruit members/volunteers?
- To work on increasing Hall use.
- To get a better understanding of existing and potential proposals of models of support for the hall and raise public awareness
- Carry out a close examination of the details of a) FORCH's Company Ltd by Guarantee and b) FORCH's agreement with Bury Council

#### Some of the many offers of help received

John Leyland, one of our original members set up the Friends of Ramsbottom Civic Hall website and maintains it with regular updates. He offered to continue with this task. (See [www.forch.uk](http://www.forch.uk))

Also already providing help: Julie Lomas, regular Hall user for many years, now carries out some tasks that used to be done by Hall staff for her dance sessions and has been working with the FORCH committee.

Cath Harrop has been providing a bar at the Hall (since the Council has stopped providing a bar themselves).

Cath apologised for being unable to attend the meeting and beforehand she wrote to FORCH. She believes that the 22<sup>nd</sup> February meeting would be good for community support etc.

#### **Cath's recommendations:**

**Arrange a strategy meeting**, earlier rather than later, with about 12 people who want to be involved, to move the community group forward. (To avoid affecting Hall bookings or incurring heating costs the meeting could be held elsewhere.) At the strategy meeting, she suggests using a business planning and strategy spreadsheet (which she assures us is easy to put together and would help with). The spreadsheet could then be shared with the Council and other parties to truly show what and how real actions are needed and by whom. Plus, for fundraising purposes, it would provide really good proof.

**Set up a Facebook or Whatsapp group** so information can be shared quickly, with which she is also keen to help.

Dean Knight, Landlord, The Oaks, Bridge Street: is keen to offer advice from experience in events industry and pub industry, arranging festivals including in towns beyond local area and abroad. He offered to develop an app/QR code for local people and visitors – to tell everyone what Ramsbottom has to offer.

Need to bring together the community groups in Ramsbottom.

(NB CH bar equipment would have had to be dismantled because of safety risks.)

#### **Bury VCFA - recommended for getting advice by Ramsbottom Co-op Hall Heritage Trust:**

(The trust have set up a Charity Community Benefit Society and will be launching a membership scheme and a community share offer to match the £296K funding they've had to purchase the building. (The project is to bring the Co-op Hall back into community use for the people of Ramsbottom and the surrounding areas.)

On Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> September 2024 the trust is hosting a one-day event (local musicians, poets, artists) across a range of Ramsbottom venues, including the CH.)

**Chief Officer, Bury VCFA Helen Tomlinson offered 2 places for FORCH at Bury VCFA's Strategic Planning training session** (7th March 10am – 4.30pm) and details were on view at the meeting. (Helen has attended the two previous CH public meetings on 9th November 2023 and 18th January 2024 and her apologies were received for this meeting.

Janet (Friends group secretary) has taken up the offer of a place.

David McCarthy (after the meeting) background is banking and technology – now retired - happy to get involved with both technology, and with ideas. Will be asking friends to help also

.

.

.