

**Sowerby Bridge Town Board**



**Minutes of the meeting 28<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**Foundry Street Community Centre**

**Attendees**

Councillor Dot Foster (Chair)  
Councillor Sarah Courtney  
Councillor Simon Ashton  
Councillor Adam Wilkinson  
Sarah Fanthorpe  
Phil Hawdon  
Sheila Eastwood  
Janice Dawson

**Others in attendance**

Mary Farar  
Richard Seaman  
Sam Saxby  
Emma Carter  
Rob Shipway  
Zakariya Ali

**1. Welcome and apologies**

**a. Declarations of quorum**

The meeting was declared quorate.

**b. Declarations of interest**

Cllr Foster declared an interest in Fire and Water.

**c. New Board member introduction**

Cllr Foster reported that Dan Hobson had joined a new board member. He had been in touch before Christmas and recently moved to the area. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances Dan could not attend but would be at the next meeting.

**2. Minutes of the meeting held 28<sup>th</sup> November 2024**

The minutes were approved as a true record.

**a. Matters Arising**

Sarah Fanthorpe noted that the website was significantly out of date and needed updating to include minutes of meetings.

**Action: Zakariya Ali to improve maintenance of website.**

**3. Local Energy Plan (Sam Saxby, Laura Bramley)**

A presentation was given on the Local Energy Plan, which integrates various data sources to build a comprehensive energy model. The plan identifies energy efficiency indicators and highlights areas where retrofitting is needed.

Cllr Courtney enquired about how energy ratings are collected. It was explained that data is gathered when a house is built and assigned an energy rating. While some data may be outdated, it is the most accurate information available.

The plan outlines that 75,000 homes in Calderdale will require building fabric upgrades. Regarding decarbonisation and low-carbon heating, there are 100,000 properties currently using fossil fuel heating systems, with 98% of properties reliant on gas. In Sowerby Bridge, 944 properties require no retrofit, and heat pumps have been identified as the preferred replacement option. Additionally, 1,400 properties are suitable for solar panel installation.

The discussion also covered community renewable energy schemes and the involvement of community action groups.

PH highlighted that Fire and Water has relevant features and would be happy to showcase them. Cllr Wilkinson raised concerns regarding funding, given the high costs associated with these energy transitions. It was noted that eligibility for funding requires a combined household income of under £35,000. Cheaper installation methods are emerging, and the market is evolving, making loft insulation one of the more accessible improvements. It was acknowledged that this is a national issue, but costs are expected to decline over time.

Community energy companies face challenges in recruiting people. Cllr Ashton noted the difficulty in convincing people to adopt these changes. A comparison was made with London, where waste is being recovered and converted into heat for homes.

There are websites featuring case studies and feasibility reports that may provide useful insights.

### **Actions:**

SS to send the presentation to RS. ZA to circulate the presentation to all board members.

## **4. Market Update**

The Chair requested that plans be shared with the Board. It was noted that major works should be scheduled to take place after the summer holidays when traffic levels are lower.

Efforts are being made to minimise the impact of distribution, particularly in areas with high footfall, such as pubs during busy periods. Footway improvements are planned for Station Road, with chevron parking proceeding as planned. Drawings will be circulated in due course.

Cllr Wilkinson raised concerns about the proposed Toucan crossing near the new market place, as there are concerns about coinciding works with the opening of a large building nearby. The Chair stressed that communication and project delays remain the biggest issues. People are requesting details, but responses are limited due to insufficient information. Providing more updates would improve transparency.

MF confirmed that works are expected to be completed by Easter. Weekly updates will be provided to ensure adequate planning for any events. These updates will be shared with RS, the Chair, and the Board.

Sustainable urban drainage, green spaces, and tree planting are included in the plan, with no significant design changes to date. A briefing on proposed works will be arranged for councillors, with an opportunity for questions. A Teams meeting will be scheduled for further discussion.

MF highlighted that any design changes at this stage would be extremely costly and could disrupt plans and project completion. Constraints have been identified due to cellars located beneath footways. EC enquired about bike storage, and MF will circulate all relevant drawings.

There is continued interest in a coffee van. Information regarding businesses interested in using the space, such as Mustard and Yorkshire Food, has been forwarded to Kate McNicholas. RS raised the need for clarity on engaging with local businesses, potentially through an opening event for the square. Licensing fees and the process for operating on council land need to be reviewed. RS will look into these aspects to ensure transparency.

**Action: Highways to bring ongoing progress updates to the Board.**

## **5. The Bridges Night Club (Mary Farrar)**

The Bridges Inn has been derelict for a long time. Opening the space is expected to create a significant impact. Network Rail had previously made commitments but did not follow through. Community Rail, through Karen Hornby, has shown interest in the site and has been involved in drawing in grants for similar projects.

A Network Rail asset manager is scheduled to conduct a survey of the building within a week and has agreed to lease the site. However, they will not cover the costs of demolition. Heritage Rail has indicated that the site would be eligible for a match-funded grant, provided a formal bid is submitted. Retention of heritage features, such as the balustrade, will be required.

Cllr Courtney requested cost estimates for demolition. MF stated that Network Rail cannot leave the building in its current state. Heritage Rail has expressed interest in funding, and Historic England may also provide support. RS will look into this further.

Groundwork will be necessary due to the uneven terrain. Keys to the site can be provided for surveying purposes. A formal letter may be drafted to Network Rail regarding the site's condition.

Cllr Wilkinson asked whether funding might be available from WYCA. Cllr Courtney noted that funding had been available five years ago. RS suggested that building control could address any dangerous structures, and MF confirmed that they would have secured the site and left it.

MF asked whether building control could conduct a survey of the structure. Richard S responded that a demolition team would need to assess the site and provide cost estimates. MF clarified that the building has no internal features left, including asbestos.

## **6. Dixon Scar Woods (Emma Carter)**

Lease issues have stalled progress. The site, which includes a BMX track and two football pitches, was previously leased to Hollinsmill, an organisation that no longer exists. The football club has expressed interest in taking on a 25-year lease to build a structure on the land. However, lease signatures have been difficult to obtain, and legal processes remain unresolved.

The Friends of Dixon Scar Woods group is concerned about communication issues with the football club. Attempts are being made to organise a meeting, though the group's chair has been unwell.

The Chair enquired about other members of the Friends of Dixon group, which includes Audrey Smith and Warren, a local cycle shop owner.

## **7. Events planning Business support (Rob Shipway)**

RS provided feedback on meetings with the Sowerby Bridge Events Committee, a consortium of local businesses. The Consortium is independent and open to further meetings but recognised the need to coordinate activity with the public and community sector. RS reported he would meet again with the Consortium and discuss a proposal put forward by Councillor Ashton to work with Andy Abbot.

Events were seen as a key opportunity for the town, with key events including the opening of the Square, Rush Bearing, Christmas, and regular markets,

RS highlighted the need to start planning for the square once it opens, considering what events and activities should take place and how they will be resourced. Cllr Ashton shared positive feedback from attending Culturedale and Fire and Water events, noting the good atmosphere and engagement. He suggested prioritising local traders and artists before expanding the reach further.

Cllr Ashton proposed establishing a recurring annual event. Michael Gee. supported the idea, suggesting a borough-wide collaboration across Sowerby Bridge. The Board agreed, with the initial step being a launch event on the square, followed by an annual programme.

Cllr Wilkinson recommended that the Board fund the first year and seek external funding thereafter. Andy was identified as the key person to manage this, with an initial budget of £1,500 for the first event. The Board committed to supporting events coordination but asked for further work between RS and the Consortium.

A July date was proposed for the event, though it was noted that another event is scheduled in the same month, which could lead to a clash. RS suggested conducting an audit of all events in Sowerby Bridge and communicating with other organisers to explore potential collaboration.

**Action: Wednesday for Sarah to meet with Michael Gee.**

## **8. External Funding Support (Rob Shipway)**

RS has identified 15 potential projects and submitted a report outlining four funding options. The Board discussed the benefits of employing an external funding support officer. SF will provide details on hiring processes.

SF raised concerns that the council is currently understaffed and there is uncertainty about the officer being assigned to other areas. The council does not have dedicated project managers, which has led to unexpected changes and a lack of communication with the Board and other stakeholders.

Glassdoor has individuals with relevant costings, and SF has experience working with companies that have hired external personnel for similar roles. EC questioned who the appointed person would be accountable to and requested that this be clarified in the report.

The meeting concluded with discussions on Ambition for Towns, the Fire and Water loan request, and remaining funds. Further updates will be provided at the next meeting.

The Board unanimously agreed to seek further information. There is also a need to determine who will manage the project once funding has been secured.

**Action: SF to share details of external funding consultants.**

## **9. Ambition for Towns**

### **a. Fire and Water request for support**

The Fire and Water project has now reached the two-year mark of its cultural programme and has secured two-stage funding. However, costs have increased significantly, with insurance conditions rising. Over the past 12 months, the project has generated £6,500 in hire charges, while annual running costs outstripping income. Efforts are being made to bridge the financial gap. With no assets available to secure a loan, financial difficulties could lead to the closure of Fire and Water. PH proposed discussing possible solutions with the Board. Grant applications have been pursued for the past eight months, but three applications have been unsuccessful.

The Board asked for Fire and Water to explore further opportunities, such as accessing events, and the item would be discussed at the next meeting of the Board.

## **10. Dates of meetings 2025/26 (Zakariya Ali)**

25th of March,

20th May

22nd July

**11. Any other business**

PH expressed no confidence on going ahead with the Foundations of the gates, SF replied it is a funding issue. Chair requested to put the gates on next agenda and to check if there was an approval already.

**12. Date and venue of next meeting**

Tuesday 25<sup>th</sup> March 2025, Foundry Street Community Centre