

**Minutes of the High Lea Hall Committee Meeting
held in The Council Chambers, New Mills Town Hall, New Mills
At 7.00pm on Monday 23 September 2024**

Councillors Present Margaret Ritchie, (Chair) Steve Davey, Andrew Denton, Beth Eadie, and Lyn Bannister.

In Attendance Clare Wild (Clerk) Tom Tucker (Hospitality Lead and Communications Officer) 1 member of the public.

Meeting Opened at 7.00pm

HLH/24/01 Introductions and Apologies for Absence

Absent Cllrs: John Reed, Katy Pearson, Matthew Donovan, Simon Evans, David Aris-Sutton and Michelle Bancroft had presented apologies.

HLH/24/02 Variation of Business

RESOLVED: Council agreed to discuss elements of the five year plan that did not involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in The Local Government Act, Schedule 12A, Part 1. Would be discussed with the public and press present.

HLH/24/03 Declaration of Members Interests & Dispensation Applications

None

HLH/24/04 Public Participation

Member of Public (MOP) in attendance expressed an interest in High Lea Hall's development due to experience of working in the hospitality sector, at management level. They also wanted to understand the community's option to have an input on matters relating to future plans, as this could have an impact on increase in Council Tax. The Committee welcomed their contributions to the discussions at the meeting.

HLH/24/05 Review of activity since opening to the public

Hospitality Lead and Communications Officer (HLCO) opened the discussion by advising that High Lea Hall (HLH) had seen 4700 visitors since opening in June. Committee noted that this had been with only minimal social media advertising, limited menu and railway line closure into the Town. The Hall had been open every day Thursday- Sunday as stated and the feedback from visitors had been overwhelmingly positive. Wastage rate so far had been low. Visitors varied seeing one third from out of the Town, but from nearby locations such as Marple and Whaley Bridge.

The Council advised that, following the investment in High Lea Hall to provide the Heritage Collection with a permanent home, it had been agreed that High Lea Hall would be subject to opening, without

consultation, in order to gain key information for further decisions to be based. The Council's aim is that HLH will be financially sustainable in the long term.

The café operated with the HLCO and paid member of staff supporting, this had also been complimented by volunteers that had been recruited by the launch of NMTC Volunteer Policy.

The 1.5K budget that the Council had been allocated for events, marketing etc to the HLCO had been used lightly with £1,000 still remaining.

HLH/24/06

Operational considerations moving forward

HLCO advised that there had been great scope for 'bringing the history of New Mills to life' with ideas such as a series of podcasts and history days. Committee expressed a view that they would like to develop the heritage collection and how it could be presented to visitors.

Opening hours, including opening and closing procedures took majority of allocated working hours for the HLCO leaving minimal time to plan events, increase marketing and work on strategic development. However the small number of events such as the Bubbles and Chalk Launch and the Pimms in the Park weekend had seen an increase in sales and interest of new visitors to HLH.

HLCO expressed that in order for HLH to progress it would need to develop an expanded menu for food moving into the colder months, which would enable an increase in takings per sale and would increase interest when the park would not be as accessible due to the weather. HLCO highlighted that electrical work hindered the position to make wider changes currently and the Committee explained that it had submitted a grant application for the High Peak Bough Council's Cultural Capital Spend to fund upgrades.

Committee had been confident that the menu offer (with continued limited wastage) could expand without high levels of investment, in the shorter term, and reducing opening hours at HLH over the winter months would reduce operational costs.

All present discussed and understood that without opening as a café and Heritage Centre that HLH would still have overheads, repairs and maintenance costs to cover, therefore this could be offset by income generation.

The Committee confirmed that the council had previously rejected the idea to 'out-source' the café operation and still believed that sharing the heritage of New Mills is important.

Recruitment of volunteers continued to be developed, hoping to reduce the cost of salary cost.

Regarding Bonfire Night HLCO had considered providing a service but this would not be possible as HLH sat within the exclusion zone.

HLH/24/07

Formulation of a Five Year Plan

Following a recent meeting of the High Lea Hall Working Party an initial document had been drawn up and circulated but required further work before being presented for Council approval.

Committee acknowledged the potential risk in the council operating a business of this nature but had been confident from staff experience, knowledge and information gathered to date that further progression could be made.

The social value to the community in opening HLH had also been discussed by the Committee and it was noted that it had been an achievement to enable the community to enjoy HLH as a public building. The increasing numbers of visitors to the Town combined with looking at similar establishments operating models would play an important factor in the Five Year Plan.

The Committee would want the Council to gather public opinion over the long term proposals for HLH.

ACTION: High Lea Hall Working Party to continue to develop the five year plan to present to the Council. The Clerk would support in providing financial information.

HLH/24/08

Exclusion of the Press and Public

RESOLVED: The press and public to be excluded from the meeting of the following matters on the grounds that they could involve the disclosure of exempt information as defined in The Local Government Act, Schedule 12A, Part 1.

HLH/24/09

Formulation of a Five Year Plan

As the Committee could see the benefit to the community, understood the responsibility of being the custodians of the heritage collection and hoping that High Lea Hall could be financially self-sufficient in the future they wanted to explore this opportunity further, using existing staff employed by New Mills Town Council, whilst opening to the public at weekends only, over the winter months.

HLCO left the meeting at 8.25pm

The Committee discussed and agreed it would be best to recommend employment focused solely on the development of, internal procedures, and planning for the future of HLH plus activities for 2025-2026, once the fixed term contract for the Hospitality Lead and Communications Lead ended.

The Committee advised that there should be some agreed objectives that would form part of the role and that the HLH working group would meet with HLH staff on a monthly to report back to the Council between HLH Committee Meetings with updates and any matters for consideration to support the development during the year ahead.

ACTION: Committee to recommend internal recruitment to dedicate sole focus on the development of HLH and operational control when High Lea Hall is open to the public for a fixed term 12 month period.

RESOLVED: New Mills Town Council closed the meeting as all the agenda items had been discussed.

The meeting closed at 8.50pm

Signed as a true and correct record of the meeting

Chair _____ Date _____

** Please ensure that each page is signed and dated**

DRAFT