

CHAIR'S REPORT 2023

As 2024 looms on the horizon like a big, looming thing we have a chance to reflect on what came with 2023.

As ever, the continued success of the Bath House and the services it offers to the community are entirely thanks to those that take such an active part in the project, from the staff to the Trustees to the squads of volunteers that give up their time to keep the centre and its associated projects at the heart of Wolverton and surrounds.

One of our treasured volunteers, Helen Innes, will elaborate further on our food-based projects after I've finished waffling (I did three sides of A4 last year, I promise it will be shorter this year), so the only bit I will add is a massive thankyou from the Trustees to all the hard-working volunteers that turn up regularly to provide the fantastic services to the community that they do. Thank you.

So, what other highlights can I remember? And remember is the key word, because there will be more than I mention here but I've got a bit of a mind fog at the moment – thank you Covid.

Another strong year for regular projects taking place at the Bath House; the monthly craft fayres, the growth of the Repair Café... and we've also had a couple of fine exhibitions downstairs in the Void space with the Wolverton Society of Artists, and for me personally it's been great to see more arts-based activity happening within the centre. If we can just buy a portable stage for upstairs I have even more plans!

The Bike Repair sessions have continued, thanks to Tom, Martyn and Will for that. The group have also been successful in achieving funding for a repair stand and a couple of racks which will enable them to do even more. Well done for that. And there has been more cycle action at the other end of the building as Chris Curtis has transformed a basement space we have been unable to use for a while, which has been great progress.

FoodCycle, Warmer Wolverton... both starting around the time of the last AGM, both still going – but more from Helen on that shortly.

By no means least, 2023 also saw the 30th Anniversary of the Bath House being celebrated, with a party in May which I still do not like to think about because every time I do Chris' 80s outfit and Nadia's extreme Karaoke rap still give me shivers. That evening, we presented many of our Trustees with long-service certificates - 30 years for CJ! – and significant milestones for Colin, Tom and Chris. Angela is a positive newbie in comparison, but thank you to all those Trustees who give of their freetime to do what is, frankly, some pretty demanding and often thankless admin! We have some people in the room today who have expressed interest in becoming a Trustee – welcome, it will be great to speak with you later and hopefully you might be able to bring along some whole new skillsets.

I mentioned the Trustees, but tonight I have to mention one Trustee in particular who is stepping down from the Board after a comparatively fleeting visit of just 20 years here as a Trustee at the Bath House. Chris Bridgman, who passed on the Chair's torch to me in 2020 and taught me everything I pretended to learn, finally feels it's the right time to move on. I obviously can't let that seismic event happen without saying a few words, so here's two:

"Cheers, Chris".

But in all seriousness, thank you for being an integral part of everything the Bath House has been, now is, and will be going forward during your tenure here over the last two decades. An impossible act to follow.

Chris asked that there be no fuss about this, as he hates people making a big deal about him. I notice he didn't refuse his MBE, though. I'm sure we all wish Chris the absolute best as he fails to learn his lesson and almost immediately increases his responsibility on another committee! We'll miss you, fella – don't be a stranger, and feel free to swing by at 5am any weekday morning to have a bit of a sweep of the outside.

Finally, and we'll touch on this later, we must look to the future. You'll all know by now that we've had a challenging year financially. Our funders, supporters and fundraisers have been amazing in helping us get through the pandemic times, and have remained helpful in allowing us to keep our projects running as vital services to the community. However, core funding for the building now needs to be met from our room hires – we are, after all, a hall for hire with benefits – but those benefits will be a challenge to deliver if the building itself is not sustainable. To that end, the Trustees have looked at options and have a plan based on both meeting the inevitable rise in costs which have occurred but also to ensure fairness amongst all those who use the facilities. That may affect some of you more than others, but please take this evening as a chance to talk to Trustees and together we can find a way forward.

As part of the formal AGM I have included "Any Other Business" – if anyone here today would like to say anything that will be duly minuted, then is the time to do it. If, however, you want to speak more casually or off-the-record then please take the opportunity once the formal part has ended to speak to the Trustees, staff and volunteers and we'd be happy to engage.

Thanks for listening! I'll sit down now and give Helen a chance to speak.