

Hebden Bridge Community Association



Media release

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NATIONAL COOPERATORS VISIT COOPERATIVELY-RUN TOWN HALL

Members of the National Guild of Co-operators were given a warm welcome on Saturday (August 14th) when they visited Britain's first cooperatively run Town Hall.

The grade II-listed Hebden Bridge Town Hall, built in 1897-8, passed into the ownership and control of Hebden Bridge Community Association in April this year, in a pioneering asset transfer agreement with Calderdale council. The Association, which is a member of Co-operatives UK, has pledged to maintain the Town Hall, formerly in poor conditions, as a public building. About 600 local individuals and organisations have joined the Association as members.

“We are demonstrating here in Hebden Bridge that communities can successfully look after key local buildings. In just a few months, we have already managed to improve the fabric of the building and to create a new public hall from previously empty offices. We also have a planning application in for major new-build works which will turn a fine nineteenth century building into a fantastic twenty-first century resource for our town,” says Andrew Bibby, secretary of the Association and one of the elected trustees. In line with cooperative principles, trustees are elected by the Association's membership, on a one person one vote basis.

The National Guild of Co-operators were shown the wood-panelled Town Hall Chamber, and then visited the Greenwood Room, named by the Association after

the nineteenth century Hebden Bridge fustian cutter and national cooperative leader Joseph Greenwood. The room, previously unnamed, was given its new name by Dame Pauline Green, president of the International Cooperative Alliance, at a ceremony held during Co-operatives Fortnight in June.

Coincidentally, the Guild's visit coincided with the first civil wedding held in the Town Hall. Previously unlicensed for weddings, the Town Hall received its wedding licence earlier in the summer, as part of the Community Association's strategy of bringing new services and facilities to the building.