

Hebden Bridge Community Association



Media release

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HEBDEN BRIDGE TOWN HALL PASSES INTO COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Hebden Bridge becomes one of the first communities in Britain to take direct control of its Town Hall building this week. Transfer of this landmark listed building from Calderdale council to Hebden Bridge Community Association is scheduled for midnight on Wednesday March 31st.

The transfer marks the culmination of a lengthy campaign to ensure the protection of the long-term future of the Town Hall (known by many as the Council Offices), following the loss of other public buildings in the town in recent years. The Community Association has pledged to maintain the building in public ownership, and to provide new services and community facilities in it.

“This is the moment we’ve been working for, for so long,” says Mr Peter Hirst, chair of the Association. “It’s been distressing to see how the Town Hall has become run-down in the last few years. Now at last we can make a real difference. We’re determined that the Town Hall will become a focal point for the town’s civic and community life.”

The Association says that small changes will be noticed immediately in the Town Hall, with more significant changes over the coming months. The first priority will be

to improve the appearance of the fine Victorian entrance hall and of other public rooms. A decorating party, led by the Rotary Club, is being arranged shortly.

At the same time, builders will be moving in to the former housing department offices at the rear of the building, to create a new Waterfront Hall, capable of accommodating over a hundred people. The Association anticipates that this new facility will be available for events and functions in May this year.

Other changes are also planned to the services available in the Town Hall. The Association has already announced that it has applied for a licence to enable civil weddings and civil partnerships to take place for the first time in Hebden Bridge. Peter Hirst says that the Association is currently finalising a number of other new services, and will be making further announcements shortly.

The Association, a registered charity, is managed by its trustees who are elected by its members, the Friends of the Town Hall. Over 500 local people and groups have signed up as members, and a special members' meeting is taking place on the evening of Thursday April 15th to celebrate the transfer of control "It's very important that the Town Hall is maintained as a public building for all in the town, and our members' meetings are the occasion for the trustees to be held accountable to the community for what we are doing. But it'll also be the occasion to toast the future success of the Town Hall, now that it's community controlled," says Peter Hirst.

The changeover, through a process known as asset transfer, is in line with the government's aim of encouraging greater community engagement and participation in public and community resources. Under the arrangement, the Association acquires the leasehold ownership of the buildings and land from Calderdale, for a nominal £1 a year. Calderdale council will continue to use the building to deliver services, and will become a tenant of the Association, to which it will pay rent. The town and parish council usage of the Town Hall will also be unchanged, and the Light Opera society will continue to have a rehearsal room.

Negotiations with Calderdale council began more than two years ago, when the council pledged to work in partnership with the Hebden Bridge community to maximise the Town Hall's potential for the town. The process of arranging the asset transfer has involved numerous meetings with council officers, as well as the production by the Association of a detailed business plan. Peter Hirst pays tribute to the Calderdale councillors and officers who have helped bring this innovative deal (the first in the borough) to completion.

"A new chapter in the life of our Town Hall starts on Thursday. We'll be working hard to put in place solid foundations, so that the building plays as important a role in the twenty-first century as it did when it was first built in 1897," Peter Hirst says.