

Old Town Hall

On Monday 14th March over 50 people squeezed into the History House. They wanted to :

- know what Hastings Council are planning for this precious building
- consider ideas for the future use of the space
- learn what ideas other people had.

Initially there was some frustration as the meeting learnt that Hastings Council are still considering an offer from a Dutch company. They would like a lease, are willing to pay £28,000 rent, want to have retail on the ground floor and offices above. With huge pressures on all local Government budgets Hastings Council must give careful thought to this offer.

People learnt that whoever takes on these premises will need also to insure, maintain, pay all utilities and Business rates. The figures are variable for a range of reasons. A charity would be able to apply for 80% rates relief.

The meeting then heard from people about what they or groups they were linked with want to do there. For example one commercial organiser would like to hold Craft Fairs. He guessed that the charge for repeated use could be £4 - 5,000 per year. The organiser of the Talking Newspaper for the Blind would want part of the building for a few hours every week and would be willing to pay £1,000. Various Arts ideas were suggested with a strong plea for exhibition space. This would attract a premium rent for several days and may include commission on sales. The range of activities suggested was both diverse and compatible to multi use of the spaces. There was a clear possibility that things would be happening throughout each week and through the year. The need to provide activities for young people was well supported.

The meeting then considered a new Charitable Incorporated Organisation which would need to be set up. This could seek funds for a paid manager and assistant who would run the building. They could recruit volunteers and build the profile. This process would take about 6 months. Thereafter applications would be made to significant grant making trusts for funding for 2 to 3 years. This would be a lengthy process but take place alongside the activity programme.

The ambition would be *to enable different people and groups to organise different activities in the building at different times - a community hub.* It was agreed to meet again on 21st March to look at what different groups would want to do. By that time some of the fog should have cleared. Let's hope our local politicians will recognise the strong desire to do something positive with this wonderful old building.