



Project Update 9th December 2020

1. Feasibility Study (Project Viability Report)

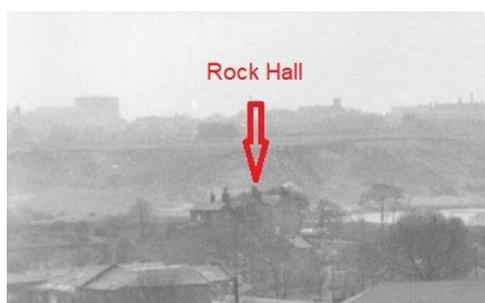
Over the past few weeks, you may have read that we have been preparing a feasibility study for the renovation of Rock Hall. We have now received feedback from the independent Heritage Consultants about our Feasibility Study (also known as a Project Viability Report). The feedback has given the team a real boost. The report we produced has been described as "comprehensive, well-structured and satisfies the requirements of Architectural Heritage Fund for a Project Viability Report". The Consultants have given us some further advice, on the next steps too.

This stage is an important milestone for the team and now we can share the results with you all. The Feasibility Study explored three possible options for Rock Hall (providing we are successful with acquiring it from the Council and planning permission is obtained). The Hall, as you are aware, is in need of substantial renovation work. The study also considered other important matters, including for example, the impact on the park (lighting needed, extra car parking etc.).

Our Architect has produced 3 outline design options for us.

Option 1 - Keep the Hall as it is now and renovate it (at a cost of around £450,000 - final costs will be ascertained in the next stages of our project). The Hall is actually relatively small inside with limited space. There would be a small indoor café area with a very basic menu, a reception/information room (including heritage information/gift shop), a small office and 2 very small community training rooms.

Option 2 – Sympathetically expand the Hall at the rear. In effect, our proposal would be to restore the Hall to approximately the original size as it was during the 20th Century, until its renovation (and reduction in size) which took place in 1981. Our Heritage Steering Group and the very kind people they spoke to in the community, played a huge part in helping us to prove the original size of the Hall. We can now share one of these photographs with you (circa 1960's). As you can see the Hall had not one, but 3 roofs! This is a side view from the canal area:-



This Option would cost an estimated £1million (final costs will be ascertained in the next stages of our project). The reception/heritage/gift shop room would be the same. The Hall would provide a somewhat larger café and kitchen area serving proper lunches, There would be an office, a small meeting room and somewhat larger function/meeting room for seating up to 50 people.

Option 3 - This option would see a further increase in the size of the café and an outdoor terraced café area, a reception/heritage/gift shop room, a larger function/meeting room (seating up to 75 people) and a small office and small meeting room. We are also considering options for the use of the roof space at the rear, with this particular option. The cost of this is estimated at £1.5 million (final costs will be ascertained in the next stages of our project).

The team have produced 5 year financial assessments and income projections for each option based on existing case studies of similar buildings and uses. The Hall must be able to generate enough commercial income to be viable and more importantly, it must be sustainable, otherwise it will just fall into disrepair once again!

Unfortunately, Option 1 and Option 2 would not be viable options with losses each year over the first 5 years. The team were disheartened because it wasn't looking good and if Option 3 was also not viable, it would be the end of the journey to acquire, save and renovate Rock Hall for the community. However, the good news is that Option 3 with its bigger rooms and additional café space, would be a viable and sustainable option and would see a profit from the first year onwards. The Banana Enterprise Network team are therefore continuing with the project idea. It is important to note though, that all options would be subject to planning permission (the Hall is within a Greenbelt area) and there lies another big hurdle for the team!

2. Greenbelt Considerations

Our volunteer Senior Planner has been working very hard on putting together a "Greenbelt Statement" which was submitted to the Council's planning department earlier this week. Now we are awaiting their response.

3. Five year Business Plan

We are now working on another "key" document, which is a 5 year Business Plan. The Council have requested that we produce this. The Business Plan will be based on Option 3, which we have established is the only viable option for the Hall. Once the first draft of the Business Plan is complete it will be sent to an independent Business Consultant for review and final completion. We are aiming to complete the first draft by the end of December and send it to the Consultant.

4. Funding

We have also had good discussions with potential funders of our project. We are going to apply for funding from the National Heritage Lottery for the next stage of the project, which will enable us to get to the "pre-planning submission stage" and enable us to produce 3D drawings and comprehensive architectural plans for the Hall that we can share with you. Rock Hall is your community building and so we want to make sure you are happy with the design ideas we are working on with the Architect.

5. Community Engagement

As you know, once our Charity Banana Enterprise Network "went public" in July about our project idea (which we started in January 2020), we immediately undertook an online public survey. We received 604 responses in just 3 weeks! As a result, 389 people wanted to help us and 212 people wanted to join a steering group. It was a phenomenal response, for which we are very grateful. We set up 4 project steering groups: Main Project Steering Group, Heritage Steering group, Nature & Wildlife Steering Group and Community Engagement Steering Group. The members of the groups are entirely from the local community with the addition of 4 of our charity's Trustees. The groups have been extremely helpful to us and we have kept them up to date on our progress.

Now the result of the Feasibility Study has demonstrated that there is a viable option for our project (subject to planning and funding) we are going to start formalising our steering groups. There will be a leader of each group who will work more closely with us and the main project steering group. We will be working with Bolton CVS on training for volunteers and ensuring our group members are all DBS checked etc. We are also developing a formal "Community Engagement Plan" with lots of exciting community activities for all ages!

From the very beginning, our CEO Jayne said that community support for our project is vital. By working as a team, we can achieve great things together and make a real difference within the community. Our project is already helping to increase the skills, confidence and knowledge of our supporters, the community and the team within our Charity and we are planning a lot more activity for 2021!

6. Project Logo Competition

We had 20 designs submitted from the community and we are very grateful to everyone who spent time on their designs. All of them were winners with some great ideas, but sadly we had to choose just one. The winning logo design was submitted by Adam, a Farnworth resident. We will be working with Adam in future now for all our graphic design requirements. This is his design:-



7. Summary of Achievements so far

These are just a handful of our achievements so far! In what has been an awful year so far for many people (due to the Covid 19 crisis), the team have still managed to make great progress despite the inevitable ups and downs. For example, feasibility studies normally take around 12 weeks or more to complete – we did it in just 7 weeks.

We were very lucky to have a short film produced thanks to local resident Sam who did an amazing job for us! Filmed in less than one day on 25th October and finalised by Sam within 48 hours! It was then released on 29th October. You can see it on our charity's website here <http://www.bananaenterprisenetwork.co.uk/rock-hall-project.html>

Our Heritage Group members have unearthed vital information and photographs and will be working on ideas for presenting the information they have discovered. Bolton Archives have been very helpful to the group as well as other contacts for which we are very grateful.

We have acquired a bronze medallion of TB Crompton (who owned Rock Hall) from Doug, a very kind collector/dealer from the USA. We only know of 4 of these particular medallions in the UK at the moment and it's proving to be a rather interesting research project for our Heritage group.

We have had some amazing support from our various partner organisations for which we are most grateful!

Everyone who is either working with us on a professional basis or volunteering for us, are doing so much to help and often they are going above and beyond to assist us – THANK YOU!

New friendships are being made, knowledge is being shared and the enthusiasm and passion for what we are all doing is shining through in everything we are all doing! Whatever the outcome of our project to acquire Rock Hall for the community, we will be leaving a lasting legacy.

There is still a very long way to go, and a lot of work is going on in the background. We will continue to share information as often as we can. We hope this update will demonstrate the amount of commitment we all have to our Rock Hall project.

We are very passionate about saving Rock Hall and turning it into a viable community venue, serving the needs of the local community.

Dream Believe Achieve!

