

**SUMMARY OF LOCAL RESIDENTS OPINIONS FROM PUBLIC MEETING ABOUT THE FUTURE OF  
MEERSBROOK HALL OF 30 SEPT 2014**

The most popular facilities requested by local residents were: a cafe, toilets, child-centred activities, education and training facilities and room hire. Venue hire was suggested for all sorts of activities: from weddings and civil partnerships to art classes, choir practice, and Luncheon Clubs for the elderly.

Many people felt that the Hall could become an important centre for the community, for people of all ages, and some that it should also be used in the evenings and weekends.

Another popular suggestion, possibly reflecting the number of artists living in the area, was for an art gallery, as well as studio and workshop spaces.

Other requests were for a museum or visitor centre; an advice centre and/or library; and a health-centred venue.

Space for local businesses including office space and hot desks was also felt to be needed.

Other inventive possible uses for the Hall, including a community cinema, are listed on the following page.

Being dog friendly was also emphasised.

The local residents especially feared the Hall becoming vacant and/or vandalised, and also it being sold for residential development. Flats were especially unwelcome, but so were council or student housing, a gated community or expensive housing.

Many people were resistant to the sale of the building to private developers feeling that it should remain a public asset. And they were concerned that sale of the Hall could lead to loss of part of the park, or of access around the building.

Noise, parking and visual impact were also important as was no important architectural changes.

Additional residents concerns are also listed in a separate table.

One person was concerned that the council will split the local residents by offering money from the sale of Meersbrook Hall to rebuild the Pavilion, although two others suggested that the sale of the Hall could/should generate sufficient funds in order to rebuild the Pavilion.

### **Positives about SCC or Community ownership of Meersbrook Hall:**

Not surprisingly there was a lot of support for these options with an emphasis on linking together the park, Meersbrook Hall, the walled garden and Bishops House; and also upon increasing the numbers of users and visitors to the park.

Residents were keen to have a safe meeting place for people of all ages and at all times of day, and importantly in a green space. They felt that this would encourage community cohesion, interaction and involvement, and be good for people's mental health and wellbeing. One person talked of "making the area 'alive' and not just residential", and another of "harnessing and building upon the strong sense of identity that Meersbrook already has".

Other positives include the potential for economic benefits, and training and volunteering opportunities.

Residents emphasised the importance of local ownership, sustainability, equality, and happiness.

Suggestions included: "Create a space inspired by Ruskin's ideas" and "Create an amazing, light historic building within a green space".

### **Concerns about SCC or Community ownership of Meersbrook Hall:**

Again the biggest fear was vacancy / vandalism. Security was mentioned twice. Other concerns include:

Generating enough income for it to be viable; the cost of upkeep and difficulties in managing such a large building.

"It's a huge multi-million pound project requiring serious business and project management skills".

"Funding for community use may be a problem – Heeley/Meersbrook has many community spaces already".

That profits will be prioritised over community interest.

SCC's lack of money, its possible lack of consultation before changing the Hall's use or its future withdrawal from a business plan.

"The project could be set up to fail and then SCC would have the excuse of selling it to private developers".

"That if we make it a good asset, SCC will want to sell it".

Community run may not be viable /could fail to attract enough funding, or alternatively it could become too clique-y.

Disruption to residents or reduced house values

**Positives around Private Development:**

The biggest is that it **preserves** the Hall

Sale money could rebuild the Pavilion and enhance the walled garden/other parts of the community

Increase jobs and trade to the area

“Easiest and cheapest” option.

One suggestion is that “an educator is interested in using all / part use to set up a ‘community school’ expanding upon the forest school she already runs”

**Additional comments:**

“This is a Sheffield resource and not just a local community one” (families regularly visit from S13)

Harness the publicity and potential funding associated with the centenary of Ruskin’s birth in 2019

Many suggestions about the Hall being used partly for the community and partly private use (residential or business although far more in favour of business)

“Unrealistic to maintain both Hall and Pavilion”

“Don’t double up what you provide with others, eg churches, or you could fail”

Be environmentally sound eg solar panels, grey water use

**Moving forward:**

“We need an active committee to preserve the Hall and promote activities”

“Work hard to make it easy for the council to pass the building over to you”

We need “strong community leadership that also recognises financial reality and manages community and commercial activity”

“Not to rush things and learn from others”

“Consider partnering with an established organisation like Heeley Development Trust”

“Concern that won’t work with HDT” and “I believe that HDT must be involved in the process. Their model at SUM Studios is a fantastic model to emulate”

**Look at:**

Sharrow Regather

St Mary's Church

Thornbridge Outdoor Centre (profits return to SCC)

Lease of Curators House in Botanical Gardens

Is there a co-op model that will work?

Create a Sheffield Town Trust (semi -private trust plus community)

Look at structures of Friends of Millhouses / Graves Parks

Possible model in Ruskin Mill Education?

Norfolk Park Cafe

Private lease of Mansion House, Rounday Park, Leeds which was rebuilt as a restaurant and wedding venue

**Questions asked:**

Do you have a Facebook page or Twitter to spread your news?

Can we get the council to arrange an "open day" to allow local people to see the space?

Would it be feasible for the Parks and Countryside dept to remain in the building using a portion of the rooms while the rest of the rooms are hired out to community groups thereby raising revenue to support the running of the building?