

**Report on Public Meeting held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014 at St Paul's Church**

Following a hastily arranged public meeting in May (with approx. 60 attendees) about concerns for the future of Meersbrook Hall a group of residents formed and have met regularly since then. This group discussed their Aims and Objectives (see below), but wanted to ensure there was a mandate from the wider community to proceed with these, and capture other ideas about the future of the Hall. A more formal public meeting was held on 30<sup>th</sup> September 2014. Over 150 people attended, including children and young people. The majority of attendees stated they wanted to be included in the future.

**Aims and objectives of the Friends of Meersbrook Hall**

- Bring Meersbrook Hall back into community use, securing and promoting new facilities for the benefit of Meersbrook Park and local residents.
- Ensure that facilities and activities currently provided at the Pavilion are maintained in suitable premises.
- Ensure that the restrictive covenants on buildings within the Park are upheld in any future development of Meersbrook Hall.
- Produce sustainable and viable options for the future of Meersbrook Hall and positively engage with Sheffield City Council to reach the best solution for local communities.
- Involve a wide range of local people in developing a plan for Meersbrook Hall and ensure that our organisation is representative of the diversity of life in Meersbrook and surrounding areas.

The following report is summary of the meeting. It is difficult to convey here the buzz and energy at the meeting, but the overall message was 'if anywhere can make this happen, it's here in Meersbrook!'. There was a real understanding that for this project to progress a viable business plan will need to be developed for the use of the Hall. This will involve establishing a management structure, working with SCC on their project management approach, raising funds for a feasibility study and working with appropriately skilled people to undertake this, raising capital funds to bring the Hall back into a good state of repair and undertake any alterations. Ultimately the aim is for the Hall to be self sufficient through getting the right mix of businesses/groups/users. One scenario is that all the activity currently undertaken in the pavilion could be moved to the Hall, thus removing the liability of the pavilion.

It was important to us that meeting attendees were actively engaged in discussion about the future of the Hall. The meeting was organised to give maximum opportunity for this.

Meeting running order:

- Welcome and background – why did we organise a public meeting?
- About Meersbrook Hall – why is it important to the people of Sheffield?
- What can be achieved – overview of other successful projects – we can do it!

- *Ideas, hopes and concerns* - the majority of the meeting was spent discussing these in 7 facilitated groups . Detailed write up is below.
- Refreshments and opportunity to contribute to other groups.
- Next steps

### **Group discussions**

Each group was asked to consider these points:

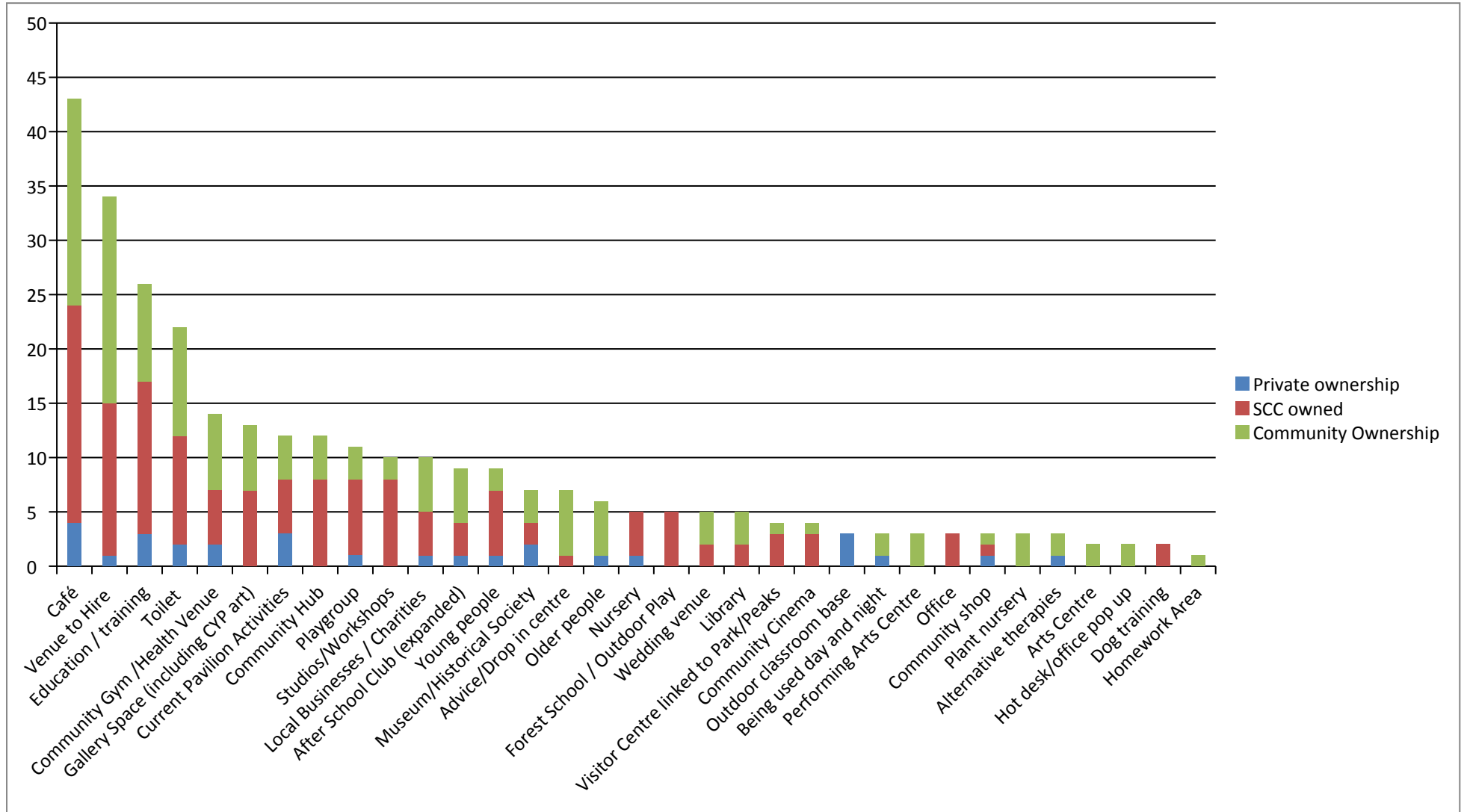
1. I would love to see the Hall used for/as....
2. This would be great for our community because....
3. I would not like to see....
4. I would be worried that....

The seven groups were assigned a context.....

- Hall sold to private developer (2 groups)
- SCC retain ownership of the Hall (3 groups)
- Community group own the Hall (2 groups)



## I would love to see the Hall used for/as....



In addition to the activities in the chart above the following single suggestions were also made:

Space for Activity Sheffield  
Restaurant  
Bar  
Bakery  
Women only activities  
City suburb hostel  
Catering kitchen to hire like Tideswell School  
of Catering  
Local business support  
IT centre  
Care home  
Dancing  
Bike workshops  
Exchange shop  
Small school  
Music rehearsal space  
Respite provider  
Housing co-operative  
Leisure centre  
Multi-cultural facilities  
Prayer room  
Swimming pool  
Conference rooms  
Fathers' groups

### **This would be great for our community because....**

#### **SCC retaining ownership and/or community ownership**

Meeting participants were particularly keen to embrace the opportunity to link the Park, Meersbrook Hall, the Walled Garden and Bishops' House (initial suggestions were as a wedding venue, education venue, events). 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"

Participants were more in favour of a business use for the Hall, rather than residential use due to the potential opportunities it would offer.

The participants thought that by providing a safe meeting place for people of all ages and at all times of day, community cohesion, interaction and involvement would be encouraged and this would 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

### Positives outcomes around Private Development

The Hall will be preserved.

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

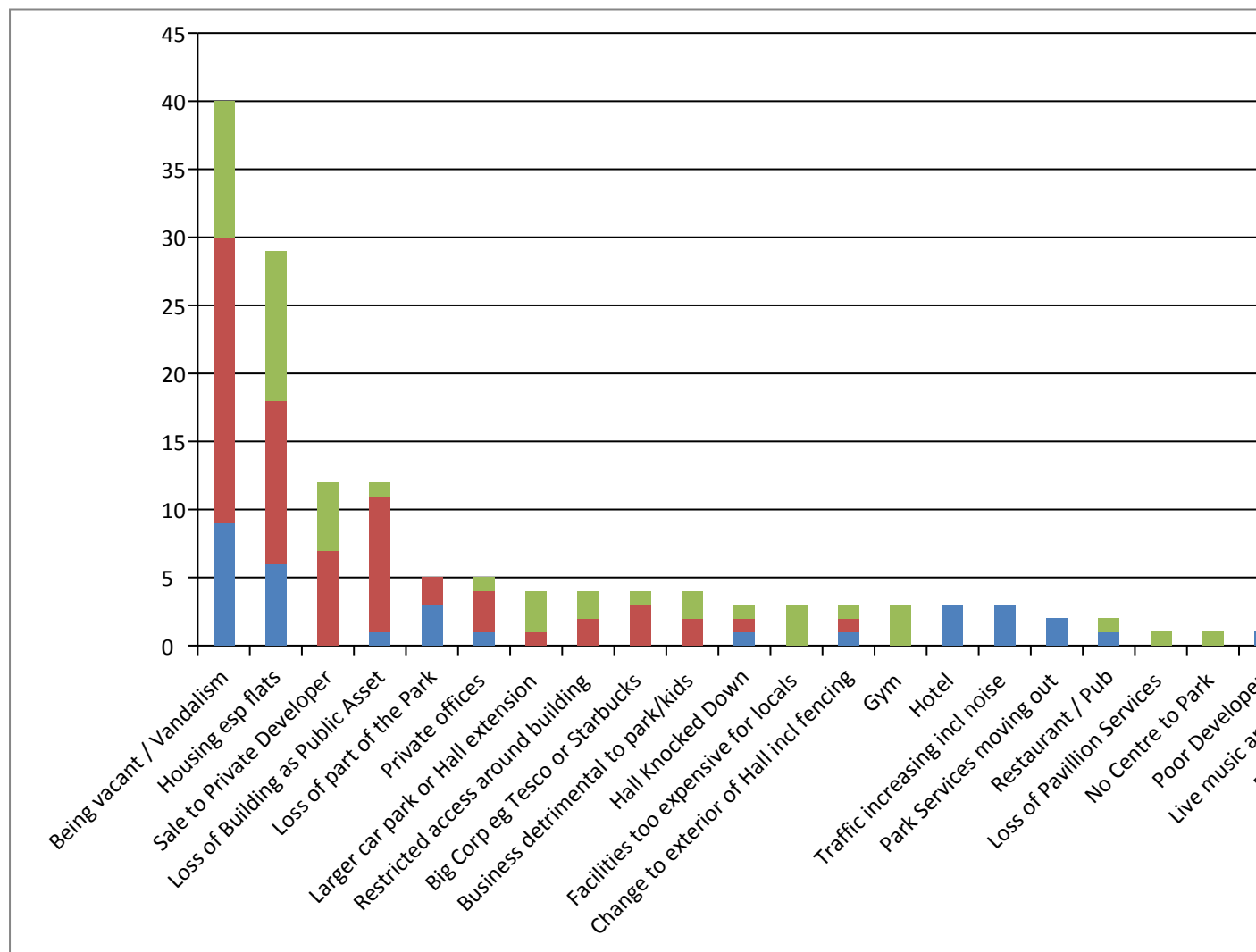
Increase jobs and trade to the area.

“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”

There were also many suggestions about the Hall being used partly for the community and partly private use.

### I would not like to see....



As can be seen 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 the 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.

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.

### **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 (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

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?

“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”