**Appendix 1 Friends of Bracken Hall submission to Change Group Meeting 2nd October 2024**

This paper sets out thoughts and concerns of the Friends of Bracken Hall in regards to the proposed discussions by Full Council regarding the future of Bracken Hall and is in response to an invitation and request to do so in a note from the Town Clerk.

**What Options for the Future Exist ?**

BHCC is an environmental education centre and is what it is because of where it is, therefore the suggestion to close the current site and move it into the centre of Baildon completely destroys and negates its purpose and should be dismissed as a serious option. However this is not to say that new and alternative operational models should not be considered to improve the efficiency and outcomes of the Centre. The following suggestions are very simplistic in their description, without detailed advantages and disadvantages, and would require significant thought, discussion and input of additional resources in all forms to create the finished plan.

- Stay as was with exactly the same arrangement which existed prior to the resignation of the last Manager.

- Stay as now with a temporary short time Manager.

- Stay as was but with a full time Manager.

- Stay as was but with a part time Manager and stronger more independent Operational Group (pseudo

Trustee).

**Contingent issues need consideration eg the Council hopes to move the library at some point in the future so could the function of BHCC be moved ?**

This would depend on what the function of BHCC is perceived to be.

The whole initial purpose in trying to save Bracken Hall was, it is what it is because of where it is. It is ideally placed on the Glen to encourage individuals and groups (including schools) to engage with landscape, biodiversity, history, archaeology and much more. It is surrounded by woods, moors, the Green, crags, the Glen, a beck, reservoir, historical and archaeological features . As well as connections to Baildon, it is easily accessible from Eldwick and Saltaire. It is accessible from Bradford and Keighley by public transport via train to Saltaire and from Bradford, Shipley and Baildon Towngate by bus to the Glen It is connected to the main part of the World Heritage site by the Shipley Glen tramway and on walking routes including the Millennium Way.

It is a base for exploring and enjoying all this with exhibits and information to bring it to life. BH away from its setting would lose all this.

Saltaire World Heritage Site (SWHS) which is one of only 32 such sites in the UK attracts approx. 350,000 visitors/annum, Shipley Glen Tramway transports around 30,000 people/year onto the Glen. The project funded by the RPA grant provided not only improved facilities at BH but also an improved walking route linking the three sites with the purpose of creating a single, larger and more diverse visitor attraction benefiting all three sites individually and the area as a whole. Two of the three sites and a significant proportion of the World Heritage Site (Roberts Park) lie wholly within the Baildon boundary.

The SWHS is not only the streets and buildings of Saltaire but includes a far wider ranging Buffer Zone identified to offer protection to the defined inner World Heritage Site. A significant portion of this Buffer zone is Shipley Glen and the surrounding moorland areas and its integrity is managed by the SWHS Management Plan 2014. Baildon Town Council is an identified Delivery Partner within this Plan helping to provide better understanding, interpretation and learning of the WHS, its history and environment. BH located on Shipley Glen provides an obvious focal point and centre through which this responsibility can be achieved.

If there is a display at the library with limited and uncertain opening days it offers nothing to would be BHCC visitors or people just calling in on a Glen visit at Weekends

**The Lease Break Clauses - next one is December 2025 and the end of the lease November 2034.**

The important point is that the lease terminates at the end of November 2034 with no option to renew which is unusual for a commercial lease but not uncommon. Whilst December 2025 may be the next Break Clause date there are subsequent dates at three year intervals until the termination date.

Whilst not being aware of any conditions attached to activation of the break clause date, as its implementation is by the tenant, there may be further conditions whereby the landlord could claim recompense of any costs they incur through this action despite the fact that there is no rental income from the arrangement.

It would seem more beneficial to look at the December 2025 break clause date only to concentrate the focus on success or failure before jumping to early conclusions of closure.

**The Rural Payments Agency contract ends Jan 2027**

We understand that the RPA grant was to be paid in two instalments at predetermined points and dates in the project programme with the contractual agreement running for 5 years from the date of the last payment.

As we do not know when the last payment was made we are not aware of when the agreement ends although it would have been early 2022.

Whilst we are not familiar with the details of the signed agreement it would seem unlikely that an agreement to a financial arrangement with a Government body did not contain restrictive conditions to safeguard the funder. Consequently implementation of a closure of the BH site at a lease break point, whilst the agreement is still active, ie before early 2027, could carry risks of financial penalties and potential damage to the Councils reputation.

**Setting performance targets eg visitor figures**

The purpose of the RPA programme of grant funding was to improve the rural economy and our application was under the sub heading of tourism. The application had to identify and was presumably judged on its predicted outcomes within a range of categories. Visitor footfall was a required output and therefore, we believe, actual outcomes are reported against predicted.

Visitor numbers are a useful methodology of assessing the success of a venture but this assumes that visitor numbers are important. Consequently the decision has to be made as to what the Centre is required to achieve and what is its purpose. Once that is firmly established then all support and an operational structure have to be installed to enable achievement of the declared goals. This may require financial, technological, management, volunteer, publicity resources along with drive, enthusiasm and direction..

**What Sustainable functions and Services could the Centre Perform and develop going forwards**.

As we have already said the RPA programme of grant funding within which the BTC bid was successful was aimed at improving the rural economy through an increase in tourist visits. In order to achieve such increases to BH our application identified potential activities, additional to just weekend opening, which could help achieve this such as;

- Half day/Full day/two day/residential vocational courses, eg painting, walking, archaeology, birdwatching,

Residential courses would be in collaboration with the BH bed and Breakfast with whom the idea was

discussed and not dismissed.

- Hold summer fair type events on glen. Annual events, orienteering, cross country running, cycling,

boundary walk etc

There are many history and wildlife groups- highlight opportunity to have an activity based at BHCC

Expand School visit programmes particularly from the inner city

Focal point for information about the National Nature Reserve.

Stronger working relationship with other local attractions.

There is an existing and increasing demand for school holiday time childrens activity programmes. Expansion of the current Wild Wednesday idea could be expanded and developed into longer and wider ranging full school holiday programmes for which a fee is charged.

This question has been aired for years and the Centre will continue as now unless BTC has a sustainable Plan with the resources in Personnel to implement it.

Attached is a copy of the current years weekend activities plan from the FoBHCC which operates on a rolling 12 months basis with changes and amendments to suit changing situations.

Reducing programmes and activities and closing for periods should be considered with caution as it will convey the wrong message and image to the public. They believe what they last hear and could take some convincing that we are still there and ready to come back when we return to normality. It would be an uphill struggle requiring more effort to convince them ‘we are back’ than it may have been to stay open.

**Partnerships with other local attractions**

It is often heard from Council members how Baildon doesn’t seem to receive its share of tourist visitors and doesn’t appear highly on tourist itineraries. Baildon Town Council is starting to take measures to address this with, for example, initiatives like the Visit Baildon Website. However it needs to develop, promote and take advantage of what Baildon has to offer through its location, surrounding environment, landscapes and history,

Therefore with regard to local attraction partnerships will BTC provide a Manager with the remit to carry this forward with at least an idea of which ‘local attractions’ BHCC can have a ‘Partnership’ with and will they reciprocate.

This was the focus on which the grant bid was based.

Bradford will have an National Nature Reserve. BHCC is well placed to be a focus for information about it whatever the form it takes.

Bracken Hall is on a digital geocaching app.

Saltaire tour guides, extended tours up the tramway and onto Shipley Glen

Activities/workshops with Band B

Joint booked events with SGT – ride on tramway/walk on glen/refreshments at Sallys/interest session at BH/etc

**Attractiveness of the Manager post for recruitment.**

BH needs to operate in a more professional and business like manner if expansion and development is to be achieved but this does not mean it has to become a commercial profit making venture.

The role within the Manager post has the opportunity to move Bracken Hall forward and create a Centre which people, young and old, want to visit, and is a valued asset which the people of Baildon are proud to be associated with. To achieve this the post would need significant support from all levels and preferably an increase to full time status. An ideas Manager is fine, but He or She, must be an Organiser and not just to delegate to Volunteers and not be hands on. The formation of a formalised group to undertake delegated operational activities would provide necessary additional support to the Manager who must use social media continually to promote BHCC.