

Report to Friargate LM from the Friargate Business Group February 2017

The Friargate Business Group was formed when Local Meeting agreed that a group would be helpful to oversee Stage II of the Friargate Project. The Friargate Project itself, of course, arose when it became clear in 2011 that serious work was needed to improve compliance with the DDA (Disability Discrimination Act) by installing a lift, to address problems of damp in the basement and to correct unstable foundations.

As this would cause considerable disruption, the chance was taken to remodel the building for 21st century Quaker needs, and, at the same time, increase our Quaker presence by adding additional meeting spaces. This would involve significant additional short-term expense but would bring community groups, not-for-profit groups, charities and other groups into Friargate, and over time generate significant additional income for Quaker work.

Phase 1 of the Friargate Project was a collective Friargate endeavour. Co-ordination was by a very committed trio. David Peryer undertook much of the strategic and financial planning. Judith Ward co-ordinated discussion and many of the design decisions, inside and out. Chris Edwards was at the sharp end day-to-day. The Meeting raised the funds for Phase 1; it was completed successfully in 2013. It was when Phase II was imminent, and the trio moved on to pastures new, that Local Meeting set up the Friargate Business Group to fill the gap.

What do we do? Responsibilities start with the strategic management of the building; that includes ensuring we can actually pay for Friargate II; that extends to overseeing cash flows and budget forecasting; that in turn involves the lettings 'business'; and that in turn includes promoting Friargate as a venue.

Who are we? The Business Group has six standing members, to reflect the role of the Group: the Friargate treasurer, currently Margaret Bryan; the Resources convener, currently vacant; the Friargate Manager, currently of course Tasha; the Area Meeting treasurer, Stephen Pittam from New Earswick, on the Group because of the significant financial commitment; and the two trustees from Friargate: John Gilham, who has undertaken the client liaison role for Phase II; and John Harris, convening the Group.

The finances are as follows. Phase II expects to come in on budget. With additional work outside the main contract, the total is £442,000. That's been met in two ways. Nearly half has come from: donations and fundraising – an excellent and very important £65,000; grants – a welcome £39,000; and sale of investments - £74,000. We were able to realise the investments at a very favourable time.

The rest has come through loans: £93,000 from individual members of this Meeting and other Local Meetings; £86,000 from the Elisabeth Holmgaard bequest; £85,000 from Britain Yearly Meeting, Area Meeting and other Local Meetings. That's around a quarter of a million in loans, to be repaid with the increased income from the extra rooms for community use.

A lot of our work this year has been looking robustly at the finances going forward, to ensure these repayments can be met. It's been greatly helped by the unexpected bonus of £47,000 from selling the freehold of the last of the Castlegate properties to the lease-holder. Most of this is earmarked for repaying part of the Holmgaard bequest, which is interest-

bearing (the only loan in that category) and so presents itself as an obvious candidate for early settlement.

Cash flow remains tight, particularly in 2018-2020 when big repayments fall due, but we believe we can weather that difficult period. The key is lettings income, so we've looked carefully at lettings income, lettings charges, room usage and income forecasts. The general trend is upwards: in other words, the new rooms are being taken up appreciatively by community groups, who value the enlarged foyer, the lighter feel downstairs, and the smaller rooms on the new top floor.

To ensure that lettings remain buoyant we've also been looking at principles to underpin promoting Friargate. Friargate has many strengths: city centre, ecologically minded, reasonable rates, peaceful atmosphere, and much more, and we've identified a page-full of ways in which Friargate can bear witness to Quaker values.

But we need to keep it simple. We feel that two key elements are our Quaker values, and the real warmth of the welcome offered by the desk team. So we're working towards a two-line phrase – 'a warm Quaker welcome', and then unpacking the values behind this through five familiar words – Simplicity, Truth, Equality, Peace, Sustainability. Put in that order, the initial letters helpfully spell STEPS, so we'll be looking next at how that can help present Friargate positively to potential community groups.

Once the loans are repaid, the work of the Business Group is done, and it will then be laid down. Meanwhile I, and the Business Group as a whole, are very grateful for the very strong support from Friargate for the project: practical support, moral support, financial support. It's been a shared endeavour. It's greatly improved our Meeting House, is benefiting the wider community, and will allow us in the future to increase our Quaker work.

John Harris
On behalf of the Friargate Business Group