

## THE ENGLISH BRIDGE WORKSHOP: Becoming a Trustee: February 2017

The English Bridge Workshop is actively seeking to develop the board of Directors and Trustees, as it enters into a long term (125 year) lease agreement with Shropshire County Council to manage the property at Abbey Foregate. The English Bridge Workshop provides invaluable services to the local community by promoting education in the arts and providing two halls and eight studio spaces at affordable rates for leisure and the arts. Over the past thirty years the English Bridge Workshop, which has been largely volunteer managed and staffed, has supported a great number of people, including local artists and community groups to grow, continue and thrive. This is an important time for the organisation, which is currently in the final stages of the process for a Community Asset Transfer, with Shropshire Council, which has been approved. The Trustees will have an executive role in the development of the organisation, including implementing fundraising.

**WHO WE ARE** The English Bridge Workshop (EBW) began in 1985 and has been located at the former Abbey School Building since that time. The EBW became a Company Limited by Guarantee in 1994 (no. 03002566) and a Registered Charity (no. 1048288) in 1995, established to "promote, maintain, improve and advance education and appreciation and understanding of the arts in the County of Shropshire." The vision of the EBW is to "provide a flexible and accessible space in the heart of Shropshire, which is available to the wider community and local artists to enable them to develop, create and educate in the arts for generations to come."



*Exhibition at EBW*

Shropshire has a thriving arts and cultural scene, which is essential for the county and its residents. Arts development directly contributes to a sense of well-being and supports positive community engagement. This is reflected through the activities that take place at the EBW. The EBW meets the needs of local artists and community groups, which require a flexible, adaptable and centrally located space. There is a dearth of suitable available spaces elsewhere in the county. Many community groups use the EBW as the building offers a large space, with suitable lighting and acoustics, a central location and an affordable rate. Activities include, but are not limited to, printing, enamelling, drawing and painting. Two halls are available to community groups for short study courses, meetings, lectures and other activities. At present 12 groups use the building on a regular basis. The EBW also provides eight studios for artists, which are in great demand. They are currently occupied by eleven local artists and crafts people. Over the year, approximately 170 people attend regular courses, with a further 1,000 attendees at day events and exhibitions. Overall, approximately 7,000 visits are made to the Workshop annually.

***"Space to create a hearty exhibition, rather than usual clinical art galleries, making a peaceful welcoming environment and atmosphere."*** Community Group User.

Beyond the space itself the EBW provides a supportive role in the development of many artists. This is something we hope not only to maintain, but to continue to develop. The longevity of the EBW as a charitable organisation and the constant use of the former Abbey School building is testament to the demand for the space and the support of the EBW to those who visit the charity. It is anticipated that this demand will continue to grow, particularly due to the development of the building that is planned under the Community Asset Transfer Scheme, making the role of Manager essential.

***"As a young artist the EBW has been invaluable to me. I have benefited immensely from the space it provides and, even more importantly, the community that has gathered around it. The flexibility and affordability that the EBW offers, as well as its amazingly supportive atmosphere, has helped to nurture my professional practice. I know of no other space like it in Shropshire and feel very lucky to be here."*** Martin, Artist.



*Resident Artist*

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The EBW works in partnership with a number of other organisations including The Belle Vue Community Arts Festival, Shropshire Arts Society and Shropshire Open Studios, who are among those who use the halls for exhibitions. The resident artists at the EBW also engage in teaching through adult courses, apprenticeships, lecturing at universities and colleges, personal tuition and online courses. There have been some very promising meetings with the newly formed University Centre Shrewsbury, who see scope for an innovative partnership with their proposed Culture and Heritage programme.

The EBW is delighted to have the opportunity to be granted the Former Abbey School by Shropshire Council through the Community Asset Transfer Scheme. Community assets are land and buildings owned or managed by community organisations who have a long history of using assets to bring long term social, economic, and environmental improvements to their local area. Asset transfer refers to the shift in management and/or ownership of buildings from public bodies (in this case Shropshire Council) to local community and voluntary groups or charities. The Former Abbey School building is in process of being transferred to EBW, as part of the local Council process of Asset transfer. The EBW has completed the Initial and Formal Expression of Interest, and has now had formal confirmation that the panel have unanimously decided that the EBW meets all the requirements to be granted control of the building. This will help to ensure the longevity of the organisation and the building.



*Community Group*

**THE NEED** The EBW has identified the need to extend the board of Directors and Trustees at this crucial time, to ensure all aims and objectives of the charity's business plan are met. This business plan has been approved by the County Council, as the basis for the lease.

The key responsibilities of Directors and Trustees are to:

- To ensure the smooth running and administration of the EBW, practically and financially.
- To ensure the smooth process of the Asset transfer and ensure the legal and financial frameworks are sound.
- To initiate and supervise the Fabric renovation and building re-structuring programme.
- To ensure compliance with health and safety and other government legislation.
- To facilitate all aspects of the EBWs artistic and educational outreach.
- To develop and implement strategies of funding.
- To have responsibility for Human Resources, including the Friends and volunteers scheme .
- To develop publicity strategy and build up a team to manage it – local, web and national.

### Overview

This is an opportunity to join our organisation at an exciting time, as a Trustee of the English Bridge Workshop studios, enabling us to plan for growth. Trustees have a real opportunity to shape this important facility for Shropshire Arts, a historic building in a prime position in Shrewsbury town, for generations to come.