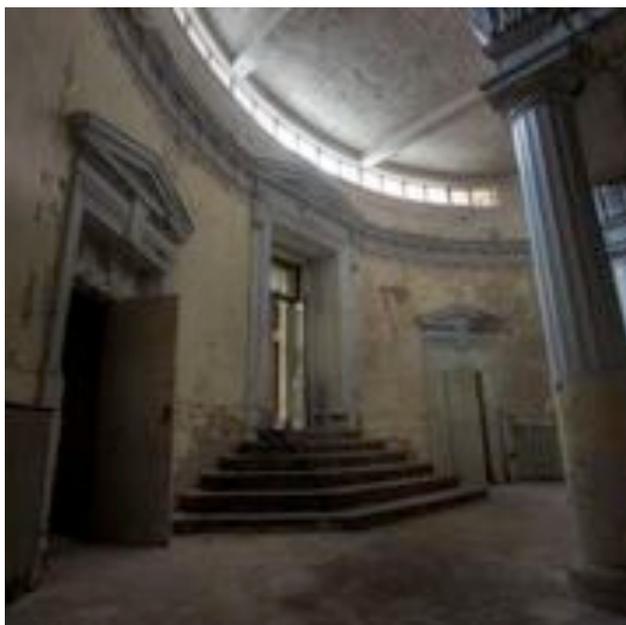




FRIENDS OF THE OLD TOWN HALL

UPDATE ON THE BUILDING

Remember that old one about a ‘terrible sense of déjà vu’? It’s been a bit like that since our last Newsletter. Cast your mind back: we were fretting last August about the lack of progress on the City Council’s announcement that they would get ‘urgent’ weather proofing done on the Old Town Hall roof, about it taking far too long to get meetings with the Council to take forward our bid for them to compulsorily purchase the building for sale on to us - though we’d managed to get them round the table after 6 months of asking - and that the owners having made it known they would apply for planning permission to redevelop it themselves, still hadn’t done so.



Sadly, that’s where things still stand. The roof has still not been weatherproofed, so the OTH is getting its second winter of water damage since the Council said it would fix it. That’s putting up the eventual cost of weatherproofing - rumour has it that the bill is going through the roof (couldn’t resist that one!) - and even more seriously, the cost of full restoration because there is even more damage to repair.

We had another meeting with Cllr Ibqbal and officers in September and agreed to set up a technical group to look at how the work we must do to mount a community

share offer – to raise the purchase money – would mesh with what the Council will have to do to compulsorily purchase the OTH. 4 months on and we’ve done our homework, we’ve had one largely unproductive meeting with the Council and we’re now waiting for a date to discuss their homework, as and when it’s done. Yes we know the officers are few and hard-pressed, but with elected members saying in public that they want the problem fixed, something’s got to give. And we trust it isn’t the deteriorating fabric of the Old Town Hall.

More overleaf

SERIOUS TALKS WITH THE COUNCIL ?

Bear in mind this is all before the Council face up to a decision that they will actually use their compulsory purchase powers. There is inevitably a formal process that will have to be gone through; we understand that. We want to get it started, so we can move beyond the agreed position that we and they are working together on a solution and that may need compulsory purchase. Meanwhile we're stuck. We want to start crowdfunding to raise the money we will need to run a community share issue, but we do need to know what we can say to people we're asking for money about what the outcome of their donations will be. If you detect frustration, that's because we are hugely frustrated; 2018 saw us make very little progress with the project.

And the owners? As before, silence apart from a few bangs heard from inside the building on 10 January, when the back door was open and some work, or preparation for work, was presumably going on inside. Our sources suggest they are simply doing a bit of 'tidying up'. If it just 'a bit' it won't scratch the surface. No sign of their planning application and frankly, we'll believe it when we see it. The only other thing to be seen is the rash of 'hazard' and 'keep out' notices stuck on the outside of the OTH this week. Maybe at last they've realised how dangerous some parts of the inside have become.

We continue to press the Council to sit down with us and talk seriously about their ambitions for the Old Town Hall. Watch out for us putting more public pressure on in the next few months. And meanwhile we are given to understand there is renewed developer interest in Castlegate as a whole. Any information on that would be gratefully received.

TRUE OR FALSE ?

What do you know about the building.

Test yourself with our short Old Town Hall Quiz

Answers on the next page

1. The Old Town Hall is a listed building ?
2. Local government has automatic responsibility for listed buildings ?
3. The fabric of the OTH is stable ?
4. The OTH is part of the Castlegate regeneration plan ?
5. The council is working towards saving the building ?

LOCAL HERITAGE FAIR 19 AND 20 JANUARY

If you came to the Fair organised at relatively short notice in September 2017, you'll know there are many local voluntary groups doing great work for the heritage of their communities, whether historic buildings, cultures, the natural environment. This month's Fair promises to be bigger and better. We'll be there with a stand and the banners, and you'll be able to sign up for our new petition to the Council and the owners of the Old Town Hall to get on with it and stop this great building falling down. We need as many names as we can get and aim to get enough to force the Council to discuss the position. So visit the Millennium Galleries on Saturday from 10-5 and on Sunday from 11-4, and we'll be pleased to see you!

SAVE THE DATE

The Friends' AGM and open meeting is planned for Thursday 28 March. Yes, it's the day before Brexit is due to happen, so come along and take your mind off that. Details of venue and time to come. are planning a community share offer to raise the funds that will be needed to buy the Old Town Hall. If you have experience of running a community share offer and are willing to discuss that with us – whether to talk through the process or take a more active part – please get in touch via fothsheffield@gmail.com

TRUE OR FALSE: THE ANSWERS

1. True. It is a Grade II listed building like the Central Library and the Post Office.
2. False. Buildings in private ownership are the responsibility of the owner, but local government has powers they can use if the building is neglected
3. Could be true or false – we can't be sure. We hope it's stable but the water damage from the leaky roof is getting worse. We are very worried about the effects of more winters on the fabric on top of the owners' many years of neglect.
4. False. There is no council plan currently in place to save or regenerate the building.
5. Both true and false. We have met with them and asked them to use their powers to make the building weatherproof, but progress is so slow it may prove too little too late. We've also asked them to move ahead on compulsory purchase, for sale on to us, but that's going even more slowly.

FOTH: HOW TO CONTACT US

We are on Facebook – <https://www.facebook.com/OTHSheffield> – and have a blog at <https://friendsofthsheffield.wordpress.com/>

We now have our own website: <https://sheffielddoldtownhall.co.uk>

Finally you can always email us at: fothsheffield@gmail.com