

THE JOURNEY FROM BIRKDALE LIBRARY TO BIRKDALE COMMUNITY HUB AND LIBRARY. 2012-2020



Andrew Carnegie stated - 'A library outranks any other one thing a community can do to benefit its people. It is a never-failing spring in a desert. There is not such a cradle of democracy upon the earth as the free public library, this republic of letters, where neither rank, office, nor wealth receives the slightest consideration'.

SUMMER/AUTUMN 2012

Our local community was informed that Sefton was undergoing a consultation process to assess the attendance and book borrowing numbers at Birkdale Library in Liverpool Road Birkdale. Sefton Council was looking to make budget cutbacks and closing local libraries was one way of achieving this. The Council envisaged making a saving of £400,000-£480,000 by closing 7 out of 13 libraries in Sefton to help with their budget deficit in the period 2012-2015. Ainsdale and Churchtown libraries were also under threat of closure. Representatives of Sefton Council questioned people as they attended the library as part of their public engagement process. The public consultation was carried out from October 2012 – January 2013. The consultation questionnaire was available in the library for people to fill out as well as on-line although many people would not have had access or known about this. As the consultation closure date was 14th January 2013 local people, once they realised the serious threat to their library, decided to act against this proposal.

Birkdale Library Action Group (BLAG) was founded, at a first public meeting held in Liverpool Road Methodist church on 17th November 2012. It was very well attended by young and old alike with representatives from our local school's PTA Groups. It was chaired by our local Lib Dem Councillors from the local Wards. People volunteered to various sub-groups of BLAG to deal with the aspects of the campaign to prevent closure of the library.



B.L.A.G
BIRKDALE LIBRARY ACTION GROUP
SAVE THE LIBRARY
PUBLIC MEETING
LIVERPOOL ROAD
METHODIST CHURCH
SATURDAY
17th NOVEMBER 2pm
Details
01704 578196
07973 623210



DECEMBER 2012

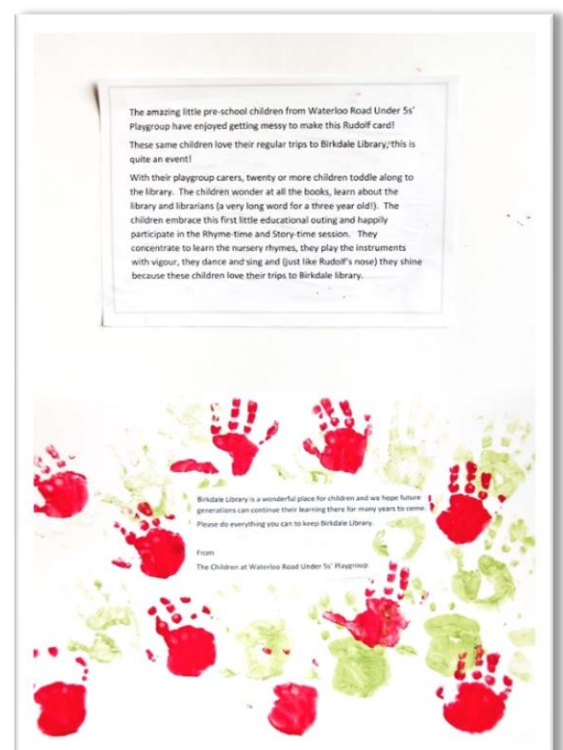
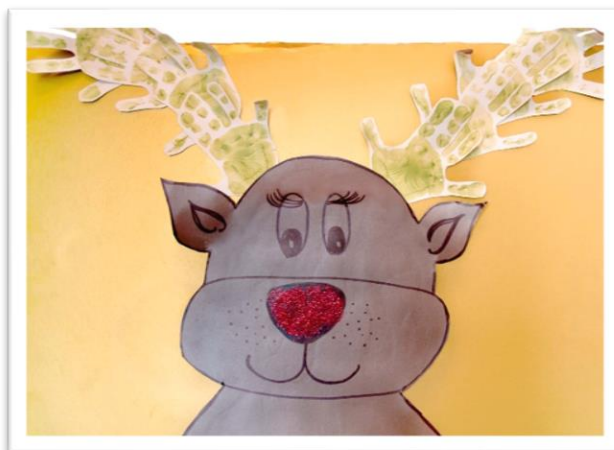
One of the sub-groups liaised with the local schools and it was decided to install a Christmas tree in the library foyer where children from the schools and playgroups could put tags on the tree stating why they wished the library to stay open. Also, Christmas cards were to be made by children with messages of support, which were to be sent to Councillor Ian Moncur who was responsible for libraries, children and schools. This was all achieved.

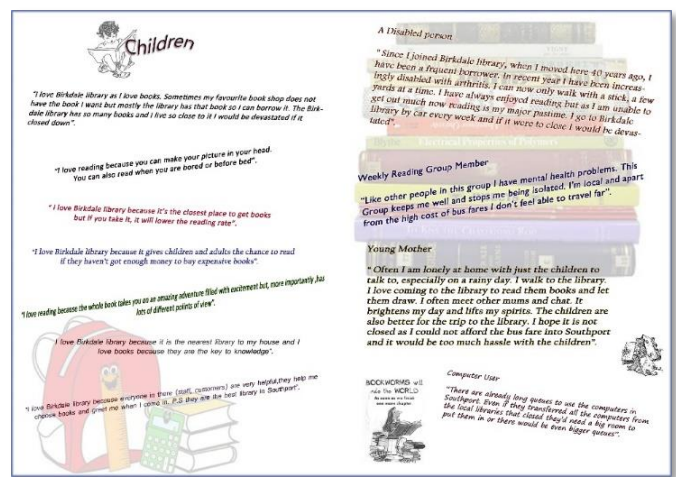
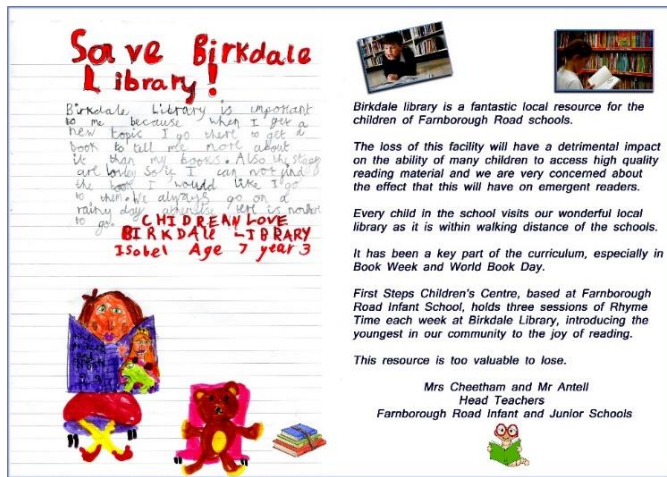
A letter was sent to the then Prime Minister David Cameron. The reply from a government Civil Servant was unsatisfactory.

Birkdale Library Foyer December 2012



Waterloo Road Playgroup





The above pictures and photos are representative of the efforts that were made by our local community and schools to prevent the closure of Birkdale library.

January – December 2013

This was a very busy year with many people involved in the fight to save Birkdale, Ainsdale and Churchtown libraries from closure. BLAQ members were a hardworking and enthusiastic group of people. Around the country many libraries were threatened with closure as councils attempted to balance their budgets. This brought about many campaigns some more successful than others. Some libraries became successful as volunteer run and others in conjunction with their local council. Of course, some attempts were unsuccessful. Several websites were set up to give the library groups a platform for advice, support and to swap experiences – the Public Library Campaign, Public Library News and My Community Rights are some examples.

BLAQ Members arranged for a petition to be signed by local supporters so that we could attend a council meeting at Southport Town Hall to put forward our case for keeping Birkdale library open. We obtained the required number signatures to be able to do this.

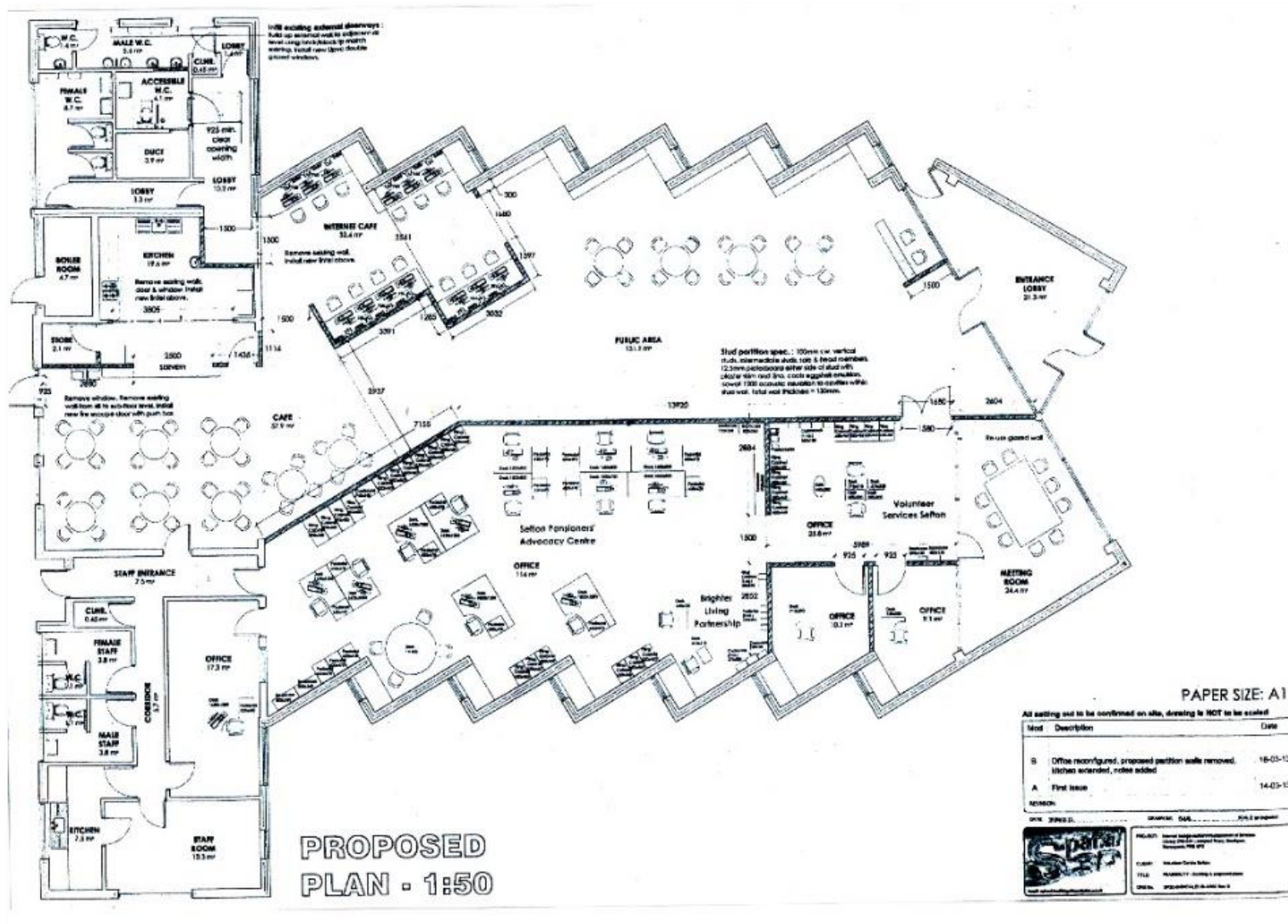


BLAQ Supporters January 2013 on Town Hall steps.

In February Sefton Council voted to close the three libraries, Ainsdale, Birkdale and Churchtown. The decommissioning process was to commence in October 2013. BLAG and ABC Group had drawn up Business Plans summarising how savings could be made.

During March, the Local Sefton Council for Voluntary Services (CVS) put in a bid to use the library, once closed, as the offices as their present headquarters in Shakespeare Street were deemed unsuitable for their purposes. This action caused upset amongst BLAG members as they were fighting hard to retain a library. However, many meetings took place to try and resolve this issue as BLAG needed some space to operate as a library and the Sefton CVS plans were taking up 75% of the library floor space. This fell short of the space required by BLAG. A public meeting was held in **July** to inform the public of their intended plans.

Sefton CVS Proposed Floor Plan



April 2013 BLAG and the ABC Group set up a stall outside the Atkinson Centre in Southport as that was the day it was to re-open after a complete refurbishment so that we could highlight further the closure of our libraries especially as so much had been spent on Southport library.



May 2013 was the deadline for submitting to the Council alternative ways of saving money, BLAG had to work hard to produce viable Business Plans to present to the Council on May 9th. Both the ABC Group and BLAG compiled Business Plans suggesting ways in which the costs could be reduced with a saving of approximately £350,000. We had hoped that at least one of these plans would be considered as an alternative to closure. This was using volunteers to help with the staffing and reducing opening hours. However, this caused problems with the unions as it was seen as job substitution by non-paid staff. This was not the case as we had included the incumbent staff within the Business Plans. Another setback at this time was that the planned meeting to discuss these Business Plans was deferred until 18th July. This meant that the decommissioning process would be underway by then! A very disappointing time.

Another public meeting was held in **July** 2013 at St John's church, St John's Road Birkdale to keep the public up to date about the Sefton CVS Proposals and to recruit volunteers. Later in the year Sefton CVS moved to the premises they now occupy in Norwood Road.

BIRKDALE LIBRARY ACTION GROUP (B.L.A.G.)
PUBLIC MEETING
Birkdale Library
- the Way Forward?
at ST. JOHN'S CHURCH,
ST JOHN'S ROAD, BIRKDALE
THURSDAY 25th JULY, 7.30pm

Birkdale Library is in danger of closing in December 2013. BLAG submitted a proposal to the Council to keep our Library open, cutting costs by supplementing staff with volunteers. However, this was rejected by the Sefton Council Cabinet on 18th July. Instead, the Cabinet gave support, in principle, to a bid from Sefton CVS to use the Birkdale Library Building for its own activities, with a possible Library service, but only 20% of the current size.

Would you be happy with that?
 Is there any alternative?

If you are passionate about keeping Birkdale Library open, Please attend our meeting

Or e-mail:- blibvolunteers@gmail.com

Part of Council Report May 2013 *'The Head of Health and Wellbeing indicated that meetings had taken place with the ABC Group, Aintree Library Action Group, Friends of Carnegie Library and the Sefton Council for Voluntary Service. All the meetings had been productive, and information had been provided in response to the requests from groups and individuals.*

*A deadline of 9 May 2013 had been set for the submission of any proposals which would have staffing implications and three alternative proposals have been received as set out in Paragraph 6.2 of the report. A further report on those proposals would be submitted to the meeting of the Cabinet to be held on **18 July 2013**, following an evaluation by Officers'.*

'Option B was selected as the option to be implemented for the delivery of the Library Service by the Council. The review is now at the implementation stage e.g., deciding when to close libraries and what mitigation to put in place. There remains the opportunity to put forward feasible and sustainable alternative proposals during the implementation processes.

Even though the Council had stated they would look at proposals that were a feasible alternative to closure we felt that we needed to formalise the group to consolidate our position. BLAG changed its name to Friends of Birkdale Library (FOBL) and registered as a Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO) with the Charities Commission in September 2013 with a written constitution. Trustees, including Southport's MP John Pugh, and committee members were appointed.

December- Birkdale library was closed permanently. It was a sad day for our community as the library was well loved and so much effort had been put into attempting to prevent the closure. Ainsdale and Churchtown libraries were also closed permanently.



Birkdale library staff - closing day 13th December 2013.

2014

A pre-feasibility grant was obtained from the SIB – Social Investment Business Consortium to enable FOBL to pay for professional assistance in relation to the viability of acquiring the Birkdale library building and running a lending library. As a consequence of this we were able to employ the assistance of a member of Locality. (Neighbourhood Planning).

During this year as we were waiting for Sefton Council to put the library site up for sale, we developed strategies to help us achieve our goal to purchase the site. FOBL knew this would be difficult but were not deterred. Looking for possible business partners as backers was looked into i.e., Housing Associations, local investors, Public Health, Co-op, property developers.

In line with My Community Rights and the Localism Act 2011 FOBL applied for the site to be listed as an Asset of Community Value in November. This meant, if accepted by the Council, that we had to be informed when it was put up for sale and it would trigger a 6-month moratorium period whereby the site could not be sold to any other bidders within the 6-month period. The Birkdale site was listed by Sefton Council in early 2015 as an Asset of Community Value. During the interim time FOBL had explored other site options locally as a possible library site but with no success.

Locality helped draw up the requirements we would possibly need within the Bid Packs once made available by Sefton Council: -

- Scoping partnership
- Capital Funding Plan
- Income strategy required/financial modelling.
- Operation costs.
- Detailed plan of activities and floor space required.
- It had been decided that FOBL would need to run a community hub too as a library alone would not create sufficient income to make it a viable proposition.

During November, a 'Community Needs Survey' was carried out by FOBL to ascertain whether local people still wished to have a local library and what services would be useful to them. The results of this survey were positive enough for FOBL to know that this facility was still needed by the local community. Membership of the Sefton libraries had reduced by 30,000 since the closure of the three local libraries (FOI).

2015-2016

The Birkdale site was approved for Open Market Tender on 6th February 2015. FOBL submitted a formal Expression of Interest to purchase the library site. This was acknowledged by Sefton Council. The Moratorium period was due to expire on 5th August 2015. However, because of delays in production of the bidding criteria it was possible that the Moratorium period could not start until they were available as so the Moratorium date would be later. A Financial Plan was written, and statistics compiled to support FOBL's cause.

During this period of time a great deal of work was required by members of FOBL to investigate the plans that would have to be made in order to have a chance of purchasing the library site. A survey of the site was conducted to give an idea of the cost of repairs that were required should the site remain in its present condition as well as a valuation survey once the Bid packs were made available. It was thought that the site would probably be stipulated as commercial, small commercial or residential.



FOBL had been busy looking for a business partner and had approached various agencies. Adactus Housing Association had agreed a plan to build social housing on the site as well as a new but smaller library.



FOBL submitted two bids to purchase the library site in May 2015 one as a stand-alone and one with Adactus. Unfortunately, both bids were rejected. Although a disappointing result it was not totally unexpected. The Birkdale site was sold to a private developer and converted into a housing estate and consequently named ***Library Gardens!!***



Not to be deterred the search was then on in earnest to find a different site suitable for the purpose of bringing a library and community hub to the Birkdale area.

The empty Station Masters house attached to Birkdale station was eventually thought to be an option. Merseyrail were contacted and the trustees of FOBL arranged to view the house with Merseyrail representatives to discuss the possibility of converting the house into a library and community hub. A viewing took place in August 2015. The initial consultation was very positive as the house had been unused for at least 20 years. The house is owned by Network Rail and leased to Merseyrail. A structural survey was to be carried out by Network Rail to ensure the building was safe and checks to verify that the building could not be used for a commercial enterprise.



FOBL was asked for a financial breakdown of expected costs in running the library/hub and equipment required. It took some months for the above processes to be completed.

In **July 2016** FOBL received confirmation by letter from the Managing Director of Merseyrail giving permission for the station house to be converted into a library and community hub. This was a good day!



Even though FOBL had been engaged in fundraising activities during the long journey to get this far it now needed to start in earnest. A fund-raising team was formed. FOBL had applied to the Big Lottery and Heritage Lottery Funds but had not been successful. Funds were boosted by a £4,500 donation from the Councillors for Birkdale Ward.

It was during this time that FOBL changed its name to Birkdale Community Hub and Library (BCHL) at the Station Masters House to reflect the aims for the future. The logo was designed and approved by all Trustees.



The colours of the logo reflect the colours used by Lancashire and Yorkshire Railways which originally ran trains to Birkdale Station.

The local press was informed of BCHL's progress.



A local architect firm, Andrew Cunningham Building Design Ltd, approached BCHL offering to draw up plans for the conversion pro bono as they were keen to help get this project off the ground. In the following years, this firm were invaluable to the success of the renovation. A surveyor was employed to carry out a building condition survey.

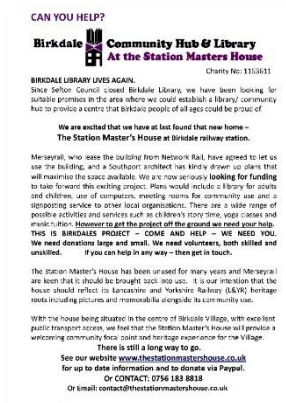
In December BCHL, with the help of volunteers, took part in the Birkdale Christmas Fayre to raise local awareness as well as funds for the renovations required to the station house.

2017

In January, a meeting was held with Merseyrail representatives to discuss the Terms and Conditions for the sub-lease of the property. Originally to be a bi-partite lease. It was suggested that we contact the Railway Heritage Trust for funding and to contact Sefton Planning Department for 'change of use' from a domestic dwelling to a public building.

Draft architect plans were drawn up and after some changes a site meeting was arranged with Merseyrail. BCHL had to wait for approval of the plans by Merseyrail before we could move forward. This took several months.

A flyer was produced to highlight to the public that BCHL had found a suitable building to bring a library back to the local area and to recruit volunteers. BCHL had launched their website www.thestationmastershouse.co.uk.



A volunteers meeting was held in **June 2017** at the Birkdale Conservative Club. Many volunteers agreed to certain tasks to help promote the charity and assist with fundraising efforts. Twenty-four people attended this meeting. Many of these helped with the Open House week in July. People also volunteered to help with the following: Friends of the Stationmaster House; media, marketing, fundraising events, Project Management and contacting local Businesses.

In June, a fundraising dinner was held at Hillside Golf Club. It was a very successful evening and BCHL raised £3,532.



In July BCHL held an Open House event for one week during the Golf Open week being held at Royal Birkdale. A rota for the volunteers was drawn up. It was a very successful week with many people being shown around the station house and told of future plans. Funds were raised by selling books, crafts and Bric-a-brac. Members of Sooty's Garden Centre in Tarleton supplied planters, flowers, gravel, and a bench to improve the look of the front garden. A marvellous transformation! After the event Merseyrail purchased the planters and they are in the station house garden today. BCHL raised £1,220 and the week highlighted just how much our local community wished us to succeed. More people signed up as volunteers.



During this year, a 200+ Lottery Club was commenced at £2 a number. This has been a successful regular contribution to funds. A 'Friends of the Station Masters House' was also created at £12 per annum. The first Newsletter for the 'Friends' was produced in December 2017. However, as an advertising exercise 2,000 copies of the Newsletter were printed and delivered by hand locally.

In October, a lease negotiating meeting was held with Network Rail to discuss Heads of Terms of what would be a Tripartite lease between BCHL, Merseyrail and Network Rail. Once the Heads of Terms were agreed then BCHL could apply to the Sefton Transition Fund for funding towards the renovations.

The then owners of Stanley's Greengrocers set up a second-hand bookstall at the back of the shop. They raised £2,000 in total from book sales.



In November BCHL was successful in their bid from the CO-OP Community Fund receiving £5107.92.



In December BCHL took part in Birkdale Christmas Fayre again and were able to use the station house as a base for this. Again it gave a chance for the public to see the house and hear what BCHL hoped to achieve as well as raising funds. Christmas cards and Bookmark were printed for sale too.



During all these fundraising activities negotiations were ongoing with Merseyrail and Network Rail to agree Heads of Terms for a tripartite lease of at least 15 years. This length of time was required as Funders and Grant Givers would not consider any application with a lease less than 10 years. Also work on the building could not commence until a lease was signed. Builder's quotes were being obtained in readiness to move forward when possible. Network Rail, as future landlord, were to carry out structural repairs to the house. The aim of BCHL was to have the house operational and open to the public sometime during 2018.

BCHL continued with fundraising activities popular ones being Quiz Nights and talks on various subjects as well as a Wine Tasting evening and a Race Night. **BCHL** were in a position to apply to the Sefton Transition Fund to help with the cost of renovations and solicitors' fees. **BCHL** also looked into fundraising websites such as 'Just Giving', My Donate, and Give as You Live'.

A meeting with Merseyrail and Network Rail representatives was held at the station house. A report was to be compiled as to the work that needed to be carried out on the house. The two documents pertaining to the lease that required agreement were Heads of Terms and Statement of Condition.

2018

BCHL was successful with the Asda green token fund in Central Twelve. **BCHL** received the most tokens so were awarded £500.



During the previous months, many books had been donated. **BCHL** enlisted the help of the company Better World Books to dispose of the unwanted books. These would go to developing countries. Volunteers were invaluable in helping to sort and box the books not required. The books to be kept were stored at Hightown station.

One of our volunteers worked with local schools to promote the hub and library and to produce artwork promoting it.

BCHL's most recent architect plans had been agreed by all the Trustees and were presented to Merseyrail and Network Rail.

A Privacy Policy was written in line with the new GDPR Guidelines and posted on the website. All volunteers on the mailing list were contacted to ensure they still wished to receive update emails.

Due to the difficulties of dealing with large organisations proceedings were slower than expected. During the middle of the year there were some concerns as to whether **BCHL's** finances would be sufficient to cover the cost of the renovations which were reckoned to be around £100,000. Keeping this in mind **BCHL** moved forward cautiously. **BCHL** employed William Scott as the builder to carry out the renovations. He was very patient as **BCHL** had many start dates that did not transpire but he managed to work around this with the other projects he had in hand.

2019

A successful Crowdfunding appeal was launched in October to raise funds for the 8 computers that are now in the Station Master's House.

The 15-year tripartite lease between **BCHL**, Merseyrail and Network Rail eventually took place in **November**. This was a long-awaited day. Now, at last, **BCHL** could move forward and start renovations on the house. These began in December.



2020

The renovations to the house continued during lockdown keeping in line with all the Covid-19 Government Guidelines. There were many obstacles to overcome as the house needed to be brought up to present day health and safety standards for a public building. This involved fire safety regulations, insulation, disabled access, rewiring, ethernet installation, sash windows, heating, alarm system, reconnecting the water supply and replacing the concrete boundary wall with brick as well as dealing with damp issues.

All changes were made in keeping with the historic relevance of the house and its Victorian features especially as Birkdale village is a designated conservation area. As one of the upstairs rooms (now the computer room) is over the station ticket office soundproof flooring was laid under the floorboards.

The downstairs hall wall was removed, and an archway was created between the two downstairs rooms to make this into the now library area. The front door was widened to allow for wheelchair access. The chimney breast in the back room was removed to make space for the lift but the chimney was preserved so it did not affect the look of the outside of the house.

The backyard was overgrown with Buddleia. This had all been removed, new paving laid, and the surrounding wall repaired. Two of the original station benches have now been installed in the backyard to make a suitable seating area with a historic connection to the railway and the station house.

Recruitment of volunteers took place during 2020 with great success. Unfortunately, due to the Covid-19 pandemic and lockdowns the Station Masters House was unable to open to the public in 2020 as planned. However, the volunteer librarians were able to catalogue the donated books at home as the Library Management System is online and all books stored on the Cloud.

Sefton Planning Department were involved in checking the standard of the changes and the building was finally signed off as meeting all requirements for a public building in October when all the main renovation work had been completed.

Please see the BCHL website for further information. www.thestationmastershouse.co.uk.

BLAG Members	FOBL Trustees	BCHL Trustees 2020
Terry Durrance-Chair	Val Owen- Chair	Terry Durrance- Chair
Pete Rimmer	John Pugh MP	John Pugh MP
Mary McQueen	Sally Moss-Treasurer	Sally Moss - Treasurer
Victoria Tinsley	Sylvia Thompson - Secretary	Sylvia Thompson- Secretary
Kim Gittins	Terry Durrance	Roger Fieldhouse- Financial Adviser
Sheila Boardman	Len Davies- Facilities Manager	Phil Margham-Project Manager
Jan Hill	Roger Fieldhouse-Financial Adviser	Andy Webb- IT Consultant.
Len Davies		
Sally Moss		
Sylvia Thompson		
Colin Wayte		
Lib Dem Councillors from Ainsdale		
Churchtown & Birkdale		

BCHL Team

200+ Lottery Club Managers – Tony and Chrissy Gadd

Friends of the Station Masters House Co-ordinators – Seonaid McNab and Shirley Hale

School Liaison – Sarah Moriarty.

Newsletter – Linda Lord and Sylvia Thompson

Facebook and Twitter co-ordinator – Cath Riseborough

Fundraising Team, Cath Riseborough, Linda Lord, Sylvia Thompson, Sally Moss.

Media – Carolyn Campbell and Terry Durrance.

A big THANKYOU to all the people, who are too numerous to mention, who have supported the charity over the years. Without them and their enthusiasm the journey would have been much more difficult. There were times when encouragement from our volunteers and supporters helped keep the faith.



Welcome to our new volunteers and Managers!



Support from The Railway Heritage Trust, Network Rail, Merseyrail, PH Holt Foundation and other donors made completion of the renovation process possible.

Photographs of renovations before and after changes.



Front and back rooms 2016



Downstairs rooms prior to work commencing in December 2019.

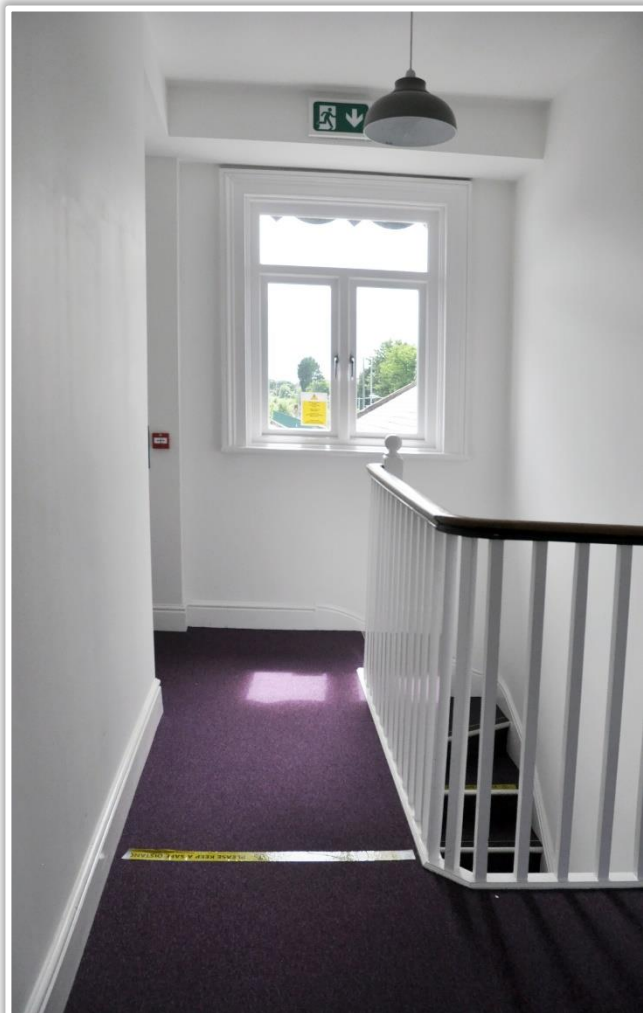
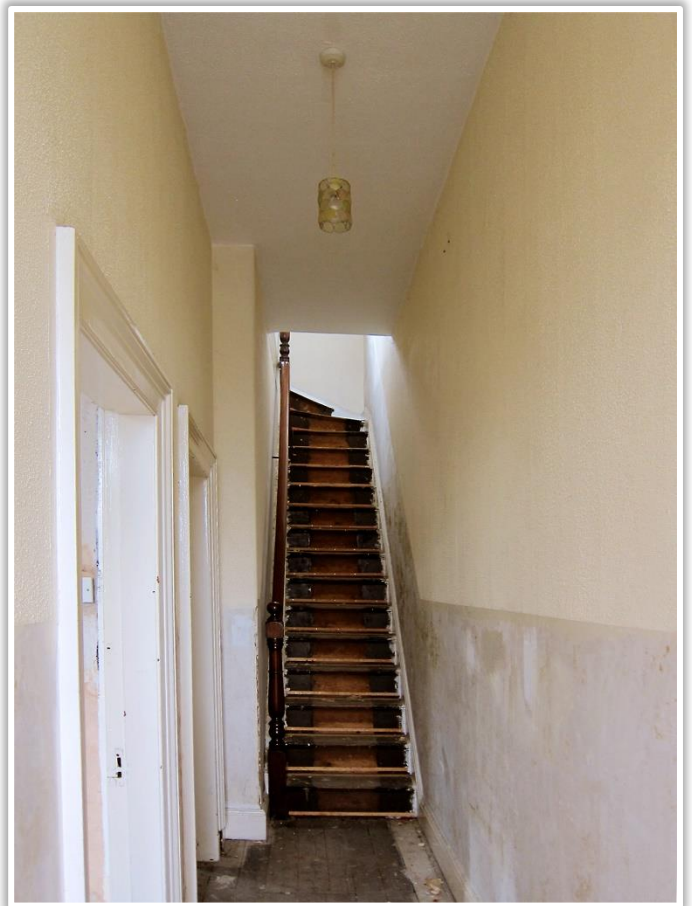




Adult and children's library downstairs after renovation 2020



Entrance Hallway and landing 2016



Entrance hallway and landing after renovation 2020





Kitchen area prior to renovation 2016



Kitchen area 2020





Computer room 2016



Computer room 2020



Large meeting room 2016



Large meeting room 2020



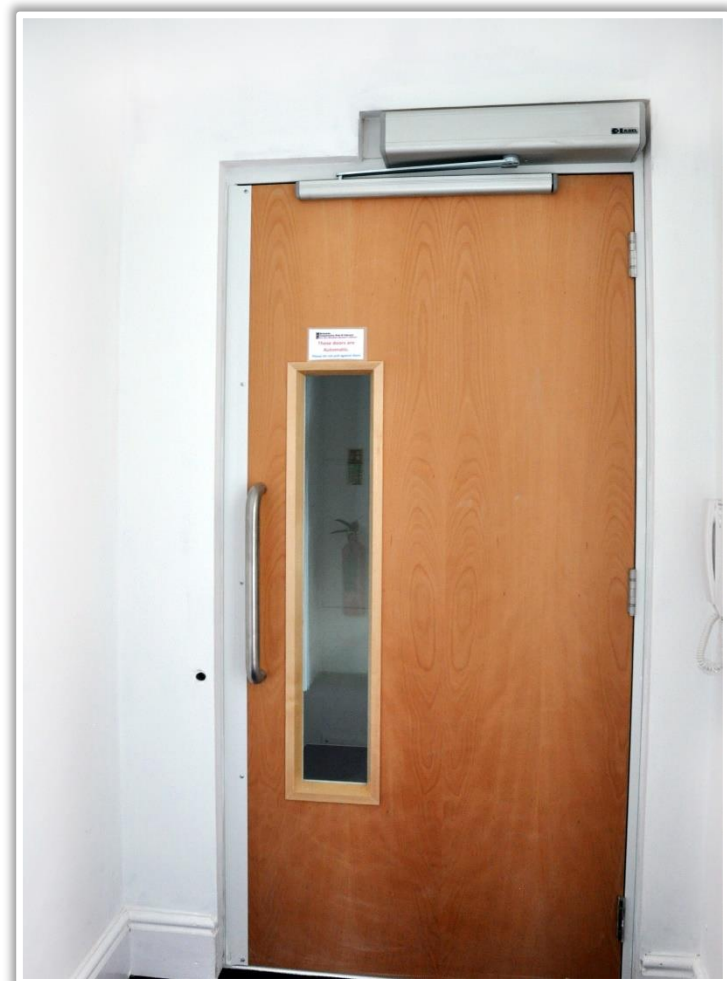
Small bedroom 2016



Small meeting room 2020



Upstairs bathroom 2016



Now lift area after renovation 2020



Back Garden after renovation. Benches original from Yorkshire and Lancashire Railway.