

I'm writing as a founder member of Friends of Ashton Court Mansion (FAM) & representative of our active volunteers, to express our support for the Bristol Historic Buildings Trust proposal to take on the lease for the Grade 1 listed Ashton Court Mansion. This includes 700 years of unique and undervalued standing structures, some of which have been hidden away for decades.

FAM have studied the many decades of Council funded surveys, reports, and searches for a leaseholder. We have witnessed the coming & going of council reorganisation and officers with new ideas, various prevarications & direction changes, never with the flourishing of this ancient building at the heart of decision making.

Ashton Court Mansion is on the National Buildings at Risk Register. FAM have researched, surveyed and understand the condition of the building in detail in a way that no one in the Council or among their subcontractors fully grasps. LSH quotes recorded leaks & plans we made, and we know that we never got around the whole building each time we surveyed and that despite the sustained efforts by Council officers to patch the failing 1970s roofs, there are leaks, long-term rots and wet walls which are not visible, some with carved stone actively decaying. This week we have recorded new leaks in the plastic trays FAM placed around the building; some has already seeped through 17th century rotting beams.

FAM are not allowed to raise the issue of this poor condition with the general public in order to raise funds or gather volunteers to legally assist with building fabric. We are unaware of Council have raised funds & grants for repairs & activities since an HLF grant 25 years ago. In the meantime, FAM are seeking another paddling pool to capture more extensive roof leaks. FAM know the condition is not stable and we have no confidence that this flurry of engagement by the council will be sustained.

Put bluntly, this Bristol City owned Long Ashton Manor should be leased to a building centred charitable trust with a vision for sustainable use, able to make a concerted effort at high quality repairs and restoration; with well managed finances and a ring-fenced income from mansion events & activities which can be reinvested directly back into the building. Events

can be popular & profitable and were in the past with over 300 events a year, but BCC never reinvested in the fabric.

FAM feel a local group such as Bristol Historic Buildings Trust, with local experience, contacts & loyalties, should be given the chance to take on the programme of repairs & reuse. I have been impressed by the professionalism and attitude of those I have met recently who would be involved. FAM are comfortable that during the works, many detailed decisions regarding the historic fabric and building uses will be made within the good working relationship developing with North Somerset planning department, Historic England, and with us.

FAM understand the Council's reluctance to release a building they have found difficult to manage within their own red lines and financial constraints, but the building condition is deteriorating, and the Council's diminishing funds must be used for their many pressing Statutory Duties. Handing over to a third-party corporate body often increases cost & lowers value as seems to be happening in the mansion café recently, eventually leading to the conclusion that it is not financially viable.

After a tour around the country visiting similar buildings, the ex-chair of the Bristol Civic Society concluded that critical to good outcomes is where the local authority works cooperatively with a dedicated building's trust. We assume that in venturing into a new partnership between BHBT and BCC, there would be a presumption for positive cooperation backed up with a contract to protect both parties, the best interests of the Mansion and its users.

FAM hope the Council will vote in support of the proposal to entrust Ashton Court Mansion to Bristol Historic Buildings Trust, so everyone can move onto the next stage of legal, financial & on-site preparation.

Tish O'Connor, BSC Econ. Dip Arch Cons.

<https://ashtoncourt.wixsite.com/mansionfriends> FAM has a growing following with over a 1000 on Facebook, over 800 on Instagram & over 600 Friends, most of whom wish to see the dereliction resolved. Volunteers bring a wide range of skills including computing, social media, librarians,

researchers & teachers, scientists, green tech engineers, architects & me
with 40 years of work in archaeology, stone & architectural conservation.