

BLUE COAT SCHOOL HERITAGE CENTRE

TRUSTEES' REPORT

FOR THE YEAR ENDED 31st DECEMBER 2023

The trustees present their annual report and financial statements for the year ended 31st December 2023.

The financial statements have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies and comply with the charity's governing document, the Companies Act 2006 and SORP applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the FRS 102.

Objectives and activities

Objectives

The company became a charity on the 21st September 2020.

The Charity's objectives are specifically restricted to the following:-

To tell the story of First Derry Presbyterian Church and the contribution the Presbyterian community has made to the city and region since First Presbyterian Meeting House was established on the present site in 1690.

To explain:-

The arrival of Presbyterians in North West Ulster in the 17th century

The challenges they faced over successive centuries until the present day

The role they are continuing to play in the life of the community in Londonderry and the North West

To tell the story of the closure of the Church in 2002, the major refurbishment works and the re-opening ceremony in 2011

To work in conjunction with Tourism N.I., Derry City and Strabane District Council and other statutory bodies to maximise the potential benefits of cultural heritage for the whole community of the North West.

To demonstrate through this work how the story of Presbyterianism can contribute to promoting peaceful relationships and building reconciliation in a divided society.

Activities

Blue Coat School Heritage Centre became a registered charity on 21st September, 2020. The operation and management of the Heritage Centre is supported by a team of 12 volunteers who provide personal guided tours to local and international visitors every Wednesday, Thursday and Friday between May to September. Volunteers also open the premises on request outside these times. During 2023 we welcomed over 6,300 visitors.

Public benefit

The charity meets the public benefit requirement through contributing to improving community relationships and building reconciliation in a divided society.

Our purposes have the potential to make a significant contribution to improving community relationships and building reconciliation in a divided society. The direct contact between Blue Coat School Volunteers and visitors facilitates one to one dialogue and discussion which together with the contents and exhibits on view throughout the Heritage Centre buildings provide information, education, illustration and increased understanding for visitors about the legacy left by the Planters in shaping today's society. The explanation of our culture and heritage, as part of a guided tour process, provides informal and relaxed opportunities for social interaction with all communities, opens up dialogue, helps build a path to greater understanding, promotes good will and contributes to the lowering of barriers. We also re-inforce the commitment of the Presbyterian community to peace building by promoting the Church not only as a place of worship but as a shared space accessible to all. A written notice in the Church vestibule emphasises our commitment to a shared society. One of our specific objects at paragraph 4(3) of the Company's Memorandum and Articles of Association is to tell about the reopening of the Church after 9 years' closure due to an infestation of dry rot. The rededication service included a large attendance of Church, Community and Political representatives from all communities. Volunteers use photographs and written reports of this inter denominational service to illustrate to local and international visitors our enduring efforts of engagement to lower community tensions and underpin peace building. 3. There is direct positive feedback from verbal and written comments left by visitors, not only in the Heritage Centre Visitor book but also on social media and other online platforms. Our work contributes to Central and Local Government policy objectives which encourage unlocking of the potential of cultural heritage tourism as a means of addressing difficult or contested histories... Museums, heritage sites and their collections are perceived as offering vital tools for these purposes. Blue Coat School Heritage Centre is a member of City Council's Heritage Venues Group which, prior to Covid, met monthly as a team to devise programmes which can contribute constructively to these objectives. 4. No known harm has arisen from direct implementation of our purposes. As the general public has access to our buildings we take account of health and safety considerations for all users. A risk assessment which identifies physical hazards and potential risks has been carried out and circulated to all volunteers who maintain constant vigilance and encourage visitors to mind steps and use handrails. The Charity's buildings and displays are open to everyone so the beneficiaries are the local community, the regional, national and international communities who will receive information, education and have the opportunity to engage in dialogue with the Blue Coat School volunteers about the history and heritage of Presbyterian community in the context of the 17th.Century Plantation of Londonderry. 5. Wider public benefits flow from our activities which entail purchasing leaflets, documents, display materials, audio-visual facilities and creating a website .This generates income for suppliers of goods and services. To the extent that we contribute to increased visitor numbers in the City we are also generating income for accommodation providers and retail outlets. 6. Throughout 2023 we continued to build upon this framework in an effort to maximise our contributions to the public benefit. Our interrelationships with Derry City and Strabane District Council and the enlarged Heritage Venues Group which followed the Council's August initiative have widened considerably our cross-community relationships within the Council area and will make a significant contribution to building increasing trust and reconciliation in a divided

Financial review

The trustees consider the charity's financial performance to be satisfactory.

Trustees

The trustees who served during the year are:-

Rev. C. Jones

Mr S McLorn

Mrs G Mellon.

The Trustee's report was approved by the Board of Trustees

Mr S McLorn

Trustee

23rd September 2024