

Swale Media Arts Centre

It was reported in Sittingbourne News late 2020 that our group had been given the opportunity to occupy 34 High Street, Sittingbourne after giving Swale Borough Council (SBC) Properties their business plan they would work with Swale CVS to form a CIC or Charity. The group was made up of arts and media including Swale Film Society, Action Plus Media Ltd, Touchbase Media and various others who had interests.

After discussing with CVS consultants it was decided that Helen Stock would form a CIC in the name Swale Media Arts Centre and she would manage with Ken Rowles (Cllr) and Steve Kane Touchbase. We then had three months of lockdown. Helen Stock said she was to be part of the group but could not take on full time management due to other commitments. Ken Rowles after discussions with Head of Policy, Communications and Customer Services, David Clifford, formed the CIC with Steve Marians a director of Action Plus Media Ltd who had their trading and registered office at Creek Creative Abbey Street Faversham. Swale Media Arts Centre CIC was formed and Jarmans Solicitors was instructed to look after the lease agreement with SBC's legal department.

In July 2021 Ken Rowles(Cllr) took on local decorators to repair and decorate the exterior of 34 High Street after receiving funding support from the Sittingbourne Area Committee. We were told by SBC Properties the landlord that they had problems with committing to a lease and they would give a License to continue the project. Steve Marians and Ken Rowles signed the licence. On 27th July a Skype meeting was held Chaired by leader Roger Truelove and attended by various officers and councillors to discuss the project and future funding.

The 20's weekend event was held with artists and entertainers hold workshops. The Swale Media Arts Centre was opened by the Mayor and Mayoress with ITV local news broadcasting the event that evening. From September to Christmas four very good arts exhibitions were held in the Addizzone Gallery. The British Entertainment History Project used the for one of their interviews the upstairs members room/studio space to film ex TVS Maidstone producer presenter Peter Williams MBE who is now one of our patrons. His interview can now be seen on their website.

The Centre has many problems in developing business as original plans due to the COVID-19 set back and the condition of the property. Lack of heating system, various electrical and plumbing problems. Since January the property has been difficult to occupy. The art gallery is now open Tuesday to Saturday the members room is hired to two art groups. One has just given notice that the upstairs room it not suitable and we now have another group sighted up for future months. 34 is open for Council members to see the venue and the work we are doing. Photos of the original decor are available and the interior decorating that has been done.

We now have a programme going forward with support for various activities and youth training. The museum is open on Saturdays. We are holding various events throughout the year. First on Saturday 26th a celebration of 100year BBC presenter DJ entertainer Paul Harris. We are screening various films and documentaries made by or featuring local artists and directors each month.

We are forming a management team with a treasurer and chairman. Hope to go on and have the 5-year lease as originally planned.

Cllr Ken Rowles

Swale Media Arts Centre CIC