

Whitchurch Silk Mill Public Meeting

Wednesday, 25 July at Whitchurch Parish Hall

Whitchurch Silk Mill, including its machinery, is owned by Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust and is looked after and run by the Silk Mill Trust. It is a registered charity.

The knowledge that weaving had ceased in December 2011 and was not likely to resume, and that the mill may even close owing to a financial crisis, had caused alarm affecting the village and all those with an interest in the mill as an important working example of its industrial heritage as well as the employment of weavers. We learned about it immediately prior to our meeting at the Silk Mill in June and were later advised that a meeting had been organised in order to determine what the community at large would choose to see happening to the Silk Mill and the importance with which it is held in the community..

HMG was represented by John Silman, Dave Plunkett, Basil Hunt, Carol O'Shaughnessy and Eleanor Yates. Our members Pam Moore and Phil Turner were also there representing the HBPT. They were among the 109 people attending, including some County, Borough, and Town Councillors, members of Hampshire Mills Group, Trustees of Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust (HBPT), Friends of the Silk Mill, community groups and local businesses.

A statement was read from the Chair of the Trustees of the Silk Mill, Keith Watts, who was unable to attend, followed by John Silman (President of Hampshire Mills Group), Bill Fergie (Chairman of Hampshire Buildings Preservation Trust), Eric Dunlop (Borough Councillor), Stephen Bryer (General Manager of the Silk Mill), Angela Hurley (Friends of the Silk Mill), Tom Thacker (County Councillor), Sir David Mitchell (former Trustee and former MP), Barry Thomas (local shop owner), who all introduced themselves briefly and explained why they were present. Stephen Bryer (General Manager of the Silk Mill), read out a statement where he questioned the validity of the appointment of the new Trustees which will be addressed when they meet.

On arrival we had been asked to leave our names and contact details and given post-it notes on which to write responses to these two comments:

1. 'What does the Silk Mill mean to you? and
2. 'What would you like to see the Silk Mill doing in the future?'

Our written responses were then stuck to the walls.

Later, all attendees were invited to add further thoughts to the post-it notes which have since been sorted into groups for analysis which has been published by Clare Isbester & Lynn Parnell. Their analysis, in brief, is:

- 1 The largest single group of responses referred to the Mill being important for our heritage, history and tradition. The second: that the Mill is the heart of Whitchurch and a unique place. The third: the Silk Mill attracts visitors and tourists to the town and 'puts Whitchurch on the map'.

2. The largest group of responses was from people wanting to see the resumption of commercial production of silk and demonstrated the need for production to be commercially viable. The second largest group wanted to see a vibrant and interactive heritage site. Many respondents felt that the commercial weaving of silk was inherent to the success of the heritage site. Thirdly, many indicated dissatisfaction with information provided by current Trustees and Management, and a feeling of disengagement with the local community, especially with many of whom may be able to offer real help.

The continued support by HMG, in association with the Friends of the Silk Mill, to the Trustees is essential if the Silk Mill is to regain its former prominence and attract visitors and produce revenue. Many see the development of Laverstoke Mill's Gin Visitors' Centre just a few miles away as an opportunity to increase visitor numbers to Whitchurch and the Silk Mill.

Notes supplied by Eleanor Yates and the **Feedback from the Meeting** report. Go to the village website <http://whitchurch.org.uk/2012/07/silk-mill> and local media for current updates on the situation.