Love Mill Road and Mill Road Winter Fair

**How we might turn this year’s challenges into opportunities?**

Love Mill Road now (almost) has a charity number and, due to the timing of the Covid-19 crisis, an exceptionally good opportunity to demonstrate what it is for and what it can do. This paper introduces some ideas for how the relationship between Love Mill Road and MRWF might work and how it a summer launch of Love Mill Road could help to enable an inspiring community project and secure the financial sustainability of the Fair long-term.

**MRWF 2020**

The latest news (and updates from Susie, who receives regular UK government versions) suggest that it’s unlikely that the Mill Road Winter Fair (MRWF) will go ahead this year as we predict that such large, uncontrollable gatherings will not be permitted in 2020. The MRWF Committee is keen to have some form of online alternative to the Fair; most likely involving virtual performances and an online market for stallholders. However, with the support of Love Mill Road, there could be an associated community project which celebrates the identity and culture of Mill Road, supports the shopkeepers and makes a link between the street, its community and the Fair. We could plan so that this happens anyway, with or without the physical Fair, and the work involved could help us to engage with a wider range of volunteers.

*Working idea for MRWF 2020 Community Project:* -

1. Mill Road shopkeepers and/or personalities are interviewed by volunteers and their stories written up as a series of short articles. Emphasis on highlighting the ethnic diversity and independence of the community. Initial promotion via Mill Road Traders’ Association
2. Local photographers, artists (professional and amateur) and/or perhaps ARU art students also meet with the featured shopkeepers and use the material from their stories as inspiration for art works
3. During November/December, the Mill Road Stories are collated and presented – both online as a kind of gallery on the MRWF website and as posters/artworks which are displayed in shop windows along Mill Road.

This would bring together and use expertise from MR Traders’ Association, MR History Society, MR Bridges, local artists, possibly ARU students, volunteers. Can be done with social distancing and would promote local businesses. It is flexible and would be very media-friendly. All for discussion: there must be many options and alternatives. It’s possible that we may be able to persuade the City Council to let us use their £2K grant to help deliver this type of community project.

**Communications – launching Love Mill Road and clarifying its relationship to MRWF**

We will need to communicate the fact that the Fair is not happening in its usual form and, given the inevitable interest in anything related to the Fair, we could use this opportunity to launch Love Mill Road as a charity which will support and expand the community-related benefits of the Fair.

However, there is a risk that people will be confused about the relationship between Love Mill Road and the MRWF and that potential individual donors and sponsors will not give money to an organisation which channels their money onto other ‘good causes’, which they know nothing about.

To avoid such confusion, we will need to be very clear about why we have established a new charity (Love Mill Road). Key reasons are to enable the Fair to:

* receive gift aid on donations/tax relief on corporate sponsorship
* receive more corporate sponsorship (from companies that can only give to charities)
* be eligible to apply for grants

Additional benefits of having a ‘charitable arm’ for the Fair are that we can:

* Justifiably emphasise the community aims and benefits of the Fair (over the commercial side of it) in all publicity
* Extend the community activities of the Fair throughout the year – deliver the ‘ripple effect’ we’ve talked about by funding and promoting a MRWF Fringe and other charitable activities - ie the Fair is no longer the only project each year
* Encourage a wider range volunteers to get involved, by generating links with other community organisations/activities and channelling focused investment in time, energy and funding within the Mill Road area
* Use the combination of the two organisations to promote Mill Road as a special and vibrant destination - for shopping and community activities (which will have indirect benefits for the local economy and the Traders’ Association).

We already have the local press enquiring about plans for this year’s MRWF. This summer we could prepare a press release, leaflet drop and social media notification to launch Love Mill Road, set out the new charity’s relationship to the MRWF, explain how it will support community projects and describe what will happen in December 2020. This publicity could include a call for donations/sponsorship and volunteers. We could also give examples of other projects Love Mill Road would support next year (eg. Repair Café, MRWF Fringe events and a MR Traders’ Association translation service) to give an indication of the range of events alongside and in addition to the MRWF. Later in the year, there would be another opportunity for publicity to encourage people to engage with the MRWF 2020 Community Project.

*Governance (again) – should MRWF become a CIC?*

Despite all the rationale for establishing the charity, the Love Mill Road Trustees are still concerned about the potential for confusion and feel it would be simpler and better for the relationship between Love Mill Road and the MRWF to be clarified and secured by changing the governance structure of the MRWF Association to become a Community Interest Company (CIC) with shares that are held by Love Mill Road. Any donations/grants/sponsorship for the MRWF would be via Love Mill Road. In addition to the obvious (significant) financial benefits of this arrangement, some key advantages are:

* certainty that the MRWF cannot be ‘taken over’ by another organisation or indeed a group of individuals, who may for instance have commercial objectives
* a clear governance structure that will provide accountability and will give confidence to potential donors and sponsors that their donations will be used for charitable/community-related purposes
* a more attractive organisation for volunteers (and particularly for the chair, treasurer and secretary of the MRWF), who are less likely to be concerned about carrying personal liability.

There are also disadvantages (of course) and I attach a user-friendly list of the pros and cons which we’ve found online.

The idea of changing the MRWF Association to a CIC was discussed in 2019 but not agreed as there was some concern about maintaining the openness of the organisation. The change to a CIC would require those who have a say/vote in decision-making to become members of the MRWF. This membership could be quite wide eg. It could include everyone on the current volunteers’ database, but it would no longer be open to anyone.

There is some urgency now to this discussion because Love Mill Road is about to commission a new branding package – website/logo etc and the brief for this will be influenced by the structural relationship between the two organisations. So we need to make an ‘in principle’ decision quickly.