

Submission by St Luke's Trust (SLT), at the request of the Administrators, for the attention of the Trustees of Alder Bridge Association for Steiner/Waldorf Education (ABA)

The Trustees of SLT have not been able to meet with the Trustees of ABA and have therefore not been able to clarify many issues that may or may not be in the mind of the Trustees of ABA. We have also not been privileged to what the Fellowship are arguing for and why and have therefore had to do a lot of guessing as to what points to meet. On the other hand the Fellowship have been given access to what SLT are suggesting.

As Association Members of Alder Bridge Association for Steiner Waldorf Education, we strongly object that the Membership has still not been properly informed that Administration is (was) being considered. An email went out informing the membership that the school would be closing its doors but there was no mention of possible Administration and no mention of the possible loss of Bridge House. It is still the case that the membership (160+ people, many long-standing members) have not been properly informed that ABA has gone into Administration and why, or that Bridge House is at risk. Further, no possibility has been given for Members to communicate and raise funds to save Bridge House. Meanwhile, Administration costs are no doubt mounting.

Reasons not to sell Bridge House (and the Woodland)

1. There is a required use of Bridge House (BH) going forward. New EYs provision, woodwork and crafts and importantly the surrounding grounds for new EYs provision in the future – as set in the ABA Strategy document during May 2022.
2. Preserving well established access to the site. Introduces risk and uncertainty for sustainable access in the future if lost
3. Losing BH causes harm to the aims of SLT — see below.
4. A new vision for wider use by the community. For example, local scout groups and other local organisations in the future.
5. St. Luke's Trust (SLT) transfer the school building and surrounding land which is currently leased to ABA to the same new charity which has objects that are also compatible with the objects of SLT. This gift ONLY takes place if BH is secured by SLT. No other proposal leverages a gift in this way.
6. A new operating model can emerge that supports Steiner-Waldorf education in this locality, for the benefit of the local community in new innovative ways. There are two initiatives established to do this – RGEYC and AT. These initiatives are active today and wish to develop and grow in the future.
7. SLT has the track record of creating a land trust and innovative educational early years provision in Reading – SWSF do not.
8. SLT disposed of its care activities in 2019 so that it could focus on its EY's activities. Moreover, land was set aside specifically to enable the future development of the site e.g. access to the Woodland from the school. SLT was taking the long-term development view.

Why disposal of the ABA land and buildings to a third party will cause significant harm to the aims of SLT and the local community

1. The school building was built in the back garden of Bridge House and they are designed to be used together, as one. Both parts are needed to run a balanced school – offices and Early Years rooms are essential and these are part of Bridge House.
2. Bridge House is a listed building and is in a conservation area. Any potential works on buildings elsewhere on the overall site e.g. the school building – will be constrained as to its impact on Bridge House. Consequently, it is optimal from a development perspective to manage the whole site as a single entity.
3. Access to the school building is through Bridge House and this is required for planning permission and security reasons. In the absence of these access arrangements the school building would have to be accessed further down Mill Lane, which is a private street. The long term implications of this are uncertain. Well established access arrangements would be disrupted with unforeseen consequences in years to come. New developments that involved increase in numbers using Mill Lane would probably be restricted or impossible.
4. One or more new initiatives can start from the bottom up with little change to the buildings. Early years provision is running successfully in Reading with 50 families. Some of these parents want to send their children to Steiner inspired education in this area. Other out buildings can also continue to be used for other craft work teaching e.g. woodwork.
5. Long term tenants at Bridge House will lose their home.
6. SLT is proposing to gift the school building to the new proposed land charity. This would only happen if the proposed land trust were formed. No other proposal can leverage this particular social benefit.
7. Members of the Association (parents and others) want to see EY work continue in the EY rooms in and behind Bridge House and these initiatives would be harmed.
8. In essence, it is our opinion that the disposal of Bridge House to third parties would severely harm the charitable aims of SLT and the reasons that Bridge House was donated by the owners to this work in the first instance – for the provision of Steiner Waldorf education in the Reading area. We believe the Charity Commission would take a dim view of the splitting of the site; if the splitting of the site looks likely, SLT will raise this with them and argue the case.
9. Many, if not all, Association members want to see Bridge House to continue to be a centre for Steiner Waldorf education in our community. There are gifted individuals who could well step forward if approached.
10. Very long-standing tenants at Bridge House will lose their home. SLT is experienced at running Houses in Multiple Occupation being a license holder at its premises in Reading. Marcus is also an experienced portfolio landlord, including running HMOs.
11. Letting of rooms has produced significant financial resources for ABA since 1997 (when Bridge House was acquired); this continuing support would be lost to S-W education indefinitely into the future if Bridge House were sold.

Why SLT rather than the Fellowship should benefit from any surplus funds

1. Bridge House was gifted into Bridge House Home School Trust (later renamed St Luke's Trust) for the purposes of S-W education *in the Reading area*.

2. Bridge House was sold to Alder Bridge Association for Steiner/Waldorf Education (ABA) by St Luke's Trust at a fraction of full market price for the purposes of S-W education *in the Reading area*.
3. The 'Fellowship' has a different purpose from ABA, despite what they claim. ABA is not a subsidiary of the 'Fellowship' but a fully independent Charity.
4. The purposes (from the Charity Commission website)
 - i. of the Fellowship are: a) "To advance education in accordance with the principles of Rudolf Steiner" and b) "To promote Steiner Waldorf education in Great Britain and Ireland and to help and advise the schools."
 - ii. of ABA are a) "Alder Bridge Association for Steiner-Waldorf Education provides schooling, kindergartens and Parent & Child groups based upon Rudolf Steiner's teaching to educate the whole child." b) "To promote and provide for the advancement of education upon the principles indicated by the late Dr Rudolf Steiner and to conduct in the United Kingdom any boarding or day school or schools for the education of children."
 - iii. It follows from the above that ABA *provides* premises at which the education is promoted and/or carried out whereas the Fellowship is *an advisory body and does not itself carry out the education*.
 - iv. SLT can both provide premises and run, if it wishes, a school or other S-W educational establishment (as it has done in the past when it was Bridge House Home School Trust).
5. The 'Fellowship' appears to be arguing that the Memorandum and Articles of Association of ABA say that the purposes of ABA is national because it states 'in the UK'. The reason this is in the M&A is to make it clear that, for tax and charity law purposes, the charity can only benefit people in the UK (ie not abroad, eg Kenya). It does not mean that the target beneficiaries are nation-wide. The statement in the M&A that the purpose of ABA is S-W education is local to the Reading area and not national is in the names – initially Reading Steiner School Project (see this at the top of the Memorandum and Articles of Association), then Alder Bridge Association for Steiner Waldorf Education – both specific to the location in the Thames Valley. On the other hand, it is clear that the Fellowship has a different, national, support task. St Luke's will argue this in court if necessary.
6. The original benefactor for the creation of what became SLT (Mrs Mullock) was also a significant benefactor in the creation of Reading Steiner School Project. Her intentions to support local S-W initiatives was very clear and demonstratable.
7. The 'Fellowship' offered 3 options for the Trustees but all involved selling Bridge House and using the surplus in different ways. None of these options involved keeping Bridge House – which reveals their intentional bias. Their intention does not align with and support (their supposed aim) the purposes for which the Reading Steiner School Project/ ABASWE was founded but for their own ambitions elsewhere.
8. The 'Fellowship' avoided showing the Trustees how, after staff were dismissed and paid off, the rental income could be used to pay off the debts and Bridge House then be available for S-W education and/or community initiatives. There was no impartial advice given to the ABA trustees to openly discuss viable options with SLT, owner of half the total school site.
9. The 'Fellowship' has avoided any engagement with and the issue of damage to the interests of St Luke's Trust – which is also there to support S-W education. Their proposal damages the facilities of the site and creates planning permission problems in the Conservation area, crippling the use of the school building; with the restricted access it is likely no new buildings would be allowed without limiting numbers using Mill Lane.

10. It is self-evident that the Fellowship want to close down S-W educational initiatives in the area from the fact that they are not supporting St Luke's proposal to help these new initiatives to come into being. Trustees of ABASWE should be aware of this.
11. When the decision was being taken to go into administration, the Fellowship did not recommend that this was first discussed with Association members and thereby give them the opportunity to do something about it. Association members have still not been informed that ABA is in Administration! Why have they been excluded? The interests of the members of the Association have so far been sidelined – but this should now be changed before any further important decisions are taken. Members should be fully informed (even at this late stage), consulted, have the opportunity to contribute, raise funds and a vote should be taken on what should be done.
12. It is the view of SLT that the SWSF are blatantly asset stripping. Such action will be robustly challenged; legally if necessary – but hopefully this will not be necessary.
13. The 'Fellowship' appear to be arguing that the closing of the school is the same thing as closing the charity and selling the building. Yes, the school needed to close and needs a restart growing from the bottom up, as before, but no, the purposes of ABA are not redundant and Bridge House is needed to enable this. ABA as a charity can close but the purposes and needs remain and can be carried forward by others. The needs of future beneficiaries are paramount and self-evident. SLT's proposal addresses this imaginatively and creatively. The Trustees have a duty to consider the needs of other local parents who will follow them. Please refer to the ABA 'Code of Conduct' for the Trustees.
14. The SWSF appear openly hostile to alternative routes to promoting the Steiner-Waldorf educational approach i.e. Alder Tree Home Education CIC. Whilst the SWSF are owners of the 'Steiner' and 'Waldorf' trade mark this should not inhibit or discourage educational innovation by new initiatives working out of the impulse of Steiner's child development insights. SLT does not support the idea that such new initiatives are a reputational threat.
15. The Trustees of ABA have a *legal obligation* to support the aims of the Charity they are Trustees of and should not be tempted to support the aims of other charities, no matter how they might sympathise with them personally. St Luke's Trust will challenge, legally if necessary, any decision that goes against the interests of the locally based Charity.
16. St Luke's is aware that the 'Fellowship' appear to have been carefully orchestrating pushing ABA in the direction of administration for some time and not working to solve the structural problems in the school. This is predatory with the aim of asset stripping ABA; though care has been taken not to put anything in writing (e.g. advising ABA in writing to go into administration?), the intent is clear from what has been said and what has not been said. St Luke's Trust have lodged a substantial formal complaint to the 'Fellowship' which has not yet been resolved.
17. The Trustees of SLT again request a face-to-face meeting with the Trustees of ABA as soon as possible.

In summary, the Trustees of SLT see many variations on how the work of ABA can be taken forward in a positive way, whether ABA as a body continues to exist or not, and would like to work with the Trustees of ABA to make the necessary transition possible.

Mr Marcus Webb & Dr Stuart Brown
Trustees, St Luke's Trust (Berkshire)

8th February 2023