



Portaferry Regeneration Ltd

Chairperson's Report

Annual General Meeting: Monday 18 December 2017 at 7.30 pm in Portaferry Market House

INTRODUCTION

1. During the year the Directors of Portaferry Regeneration Limited (PRL) continued to pursue the vision of making Portaferry a great place to live, work and visit.
2. We are focused on delivering 5 key objectives:
 - Addressing dereliction
 - Promoting/developing tourism
 - Lobbying for a Public Realm/village enhancement scheme
 - Growing commerce
 - Improving communication.

KEY OBJECTIVES

Addressing dereliction

3. In the past year we helped address dereliction through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). When finished, seven buildings will have been renovated and modernised and grant aid of approximately £1.5 dispensed. The most recent completions are the Market House, a self catering apartment in the Old Bank buildings in The Square and offices/shop/physiotherapist at No. 8 Shore Road. Still to be completed are two houses at the bottom of Ferry Street, and the Sailing Club.
4. The THI was due to finish in August 2016, but because of delays in progressing some projects we successfully obtained an extension of the scheme to the end of December 2017. Unforeseen work in the Sailing Club has resulted in that project running beyond December 2017, and to accommodate the delay we have asked for a further extension to the end of March 2018.

5. There still remain a number of buildings in High Street, The Square and Ferry Street that are vacant and detract from the appearance of the town. We are pleased that two buildings in High Street have recently been purchased and look forward to their development. We are working with the owners of buildings in Ferry Street to see if there are sources of funding that would facilitate their development.
6. PRL has investigated the economics of purchasing derelict buildings and carrying out the renovations itself. After renovation of a building we intended to sell it and buy another, renovate and sell it and move on etc. Unfortunately, when the cost of purchase was added to the cost of renovation the sale value of the finished building was less than investment and none of the schemes were financially viable.
7. Our strategy, therefore, is to encourage building owners to renovate their own properties and for PRL to seek or help them obtain funding from whatever sources are available. When the current THI finishes we will apply for further funding although Heritage Lottery Fund has indicated that future schemes will be different to the current one. We also believe a Public Realm Scheme will encourage owners to invest in their properties as they see property values and rents rise.
8. We are also pleased to see the completion of the houses beside the Bus Station, in Burn Brae and beside the clinic. All this adds to improving the appearance of the town.

Developing tourism

9. PRL is delighted at the success of Exploris and its award by Tourism NI as a star attraction. Over 150,000 visitors in the first year is an amazing achievement and it creates knock-on opportunities for local businesses. We will work with Exploris and others to ensure Exploris visitors stay longer and have greater opportunities to spend money in the town. We are working with the Council, Tourism NI and local tourist providers to create holiday packages that attract longer staying visitors.
10. We have also been lobbying the Council to develop the Castle Park as a family adventure area that will compliment and enhance the Exploris offering. This will include developing the walk and wood that run by the Walter Meadow to the Shore. It will also include the renovation of the Gate Lodge. Currently the Council is appointing consultants to draw up options. The walk by the Walter Meadow will connect with the development of Nugents Wood. Up to £250,000 has been allocated by Peace IV funding to develop walkways in the wood; the plans for this are expected to be completed early next year.
11. The Rural Development Fund has allocated up to £30,000 for the development of a Heritage Trail and plans for that are also expected to be developed in the near future.
12. Further funding has also been earmarked for carrying out an audit of access to Strangford Lough. PRL is of the view that the Lough is one of

our most important assets but safe access to and from the water is limited. In the future, we hope to be able to extend the Marina and to build a breakwater so that boats can moor and use the Marina throughout the year.

13. We see activity holidays as an important contributor to the growing tourism and we will continue to work with the Council on the development of walking/cycling/golfing/fishing etc holidays.
14. PRL is also actively working with Ards Peninsula Villages Partnership on the development of the Peninsula as a tourist destination and with the Heart of Down Committee on making the Strangford Lough area a tourist destination.
15. During the year we met regularly with officers from the Council and with Tourism NI on developing tourism. We also participated in Council workshops on the development of its integrated strategy on Tourism, Regeneration, Arts and Culture. We have lobbied for an officer dedicated to developing tourism in the Peninsula and for hands-on assistance in developing and delivering events and festivals.
16. PRL has contributed £4,000 in sponsorship for local events such as the Gala, Sails and Sounds, the Triathlon etc; events are an important part of tourism in this area.
17. We are also lobbying for a better media presence and a website promoting Portaferry and the Peninsula.

Lobbying for a Public Realm/village enhancement scheme

18. If we are to attract more visitors we want a village that is attractive to visit. In pursuit of that we have had a meeting with the Department for Communities and the Council. The Department for Communities funds Public Realm Schemes and after departmental officials had a walk-about tour of the village they agreed that Portaferry is worthy of an investment in its public realm. When Stormont budgets are released they would sympathetically consider a bid from the Council for funding. The Council would have to match fund such a scheme. It was suggested that the scheme would include The Square and streets leading to and from it. The scheme would mean new road and pavement surfacing, new street lights, new street furniture, new signage, a facelift scheme and possibly funding for new shop fronts. In January 2018, the Council will decide if it will support and fund such a scheme.
19. PRL also continues to lobby for infrastructure and car parking that will support any increase in visitor numbers.

Growing commerce

20. PRL is anxious that the range of retail shops is increased, particularly in The Square and along the Seafront. We are pressing the Council to make Portaferry an arts and crafts hub where artists can be seen at work,

visitors can try their hand, there could be a retail outlet and perhaps arts tourism courses packaged with local accommodation providers. PRL is also actively seeking to establish a market based in the Market House and The Square. This could be a monthly or weekly market depending on customer support. We will consult with local businesses if the market is feasible. We will also try to organise a 'buy local' scheme.

Improving communication

21. As previously mentioned we intend to ensure there is a better electronic and paper promotional material that makes Portaferry and the Peninsula better known. We will improve and modernise our own website, create a better social media presence and hold regular face to face meetings with local Councillors, MLAs, civil servants and council officials.

EXISTING BUSINESSES

22. The company continues to manage its own properties and carry out its duties as a limited company and an employer.

Brewery Yard

23. All units are fully occupied. A rent review is underway as rents have not been increased since 2008. The company has organised for regular maintenance of the trees, shrubs, yard etc and has organised a number of clean-ups during the year. We are indebted to Elle Dempster for maintaining the flowerbeds at the entrance. Some maintenance to the fascia boards is needed next year.

Barholm

24. The current tenant has agreed to replace beds and furniture and to make a substantial improvement to the internal décor. All of this is conditional on a new five-year lease being granted. The Directors have agreed to the new lease. The rent had been reduced due to the closure of Exploris and the recession but it has now been reinstated to its original level.

The Stables

25. The Council is carrying out a review of its Visitor Information Centres across the Borough. It is possible that should they retain Portaferry's Visitor Information Centre, they may wish to move it to a more visible location. If that were to happen we need to have plans for a different use for the building.

The Marina

26. Last year has been reported as a good year for "visiting" boats with the furthest one coming from Russia. The operator had significant maintenance costs due to having to replace the chains. We have also had

notice from the Crown Estate that they wish to increase the cost of the lease by 9%.

PRL Offices

27. We moved our offices last March from The Square to No. 8 Shore Road. The building was renovated using THI funding and is rent free until the end of next year. The move gave us the opportunity to facilitate two start-up businesses; an arts and crafts shop and a physiotherapist. Both seem to be doing well.

STAFFING

28. Last year saw the departure of the two staff who had been working on the administration of the THI. This created quite a difficulty as we lost all the historical knowledge and experience they had acquired while working on the scheme. However, we were lucky to be able to find two excellent replacements in Concepta McKissick and Phillipa Martin. We are indebted to both of them for all their hard work in picking up the pieces and taking the scheme forward.

29. We have also been lucky to have had Marie Austin seconded to us for 3 days a week from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. Ards and North Down Council facilitated the secondment and we are indebted to them for their support. Marie is a previous Director of PRL and will be working on establishing the Market and pushing for the Public Realm Scheme.

30. Finally, my thanks to all my fellow Directors who have worked so hard during the year and who have invested considerable time and effort in their endeavours to regenerate Portaferry. My grateful thanks also to Councillor Joe Boyle who is a stalwart supporter of all we are trying to achieve.

John Dumigan
Chairperson