



Portaferry Regeneration Limited

Chairperson's Report

**Annual General Meeting: Monday 25 February 2019 at 7.30 pm in the
Portaferry Market House**

INTRODUCTION

1. At the beginning of 2018, the Directors of Portaferry Regeneration Limited (PRL) reviewed their Vision Statement and set out priorities for the next five years.

Agreed Vision Statement

Portaferry Regeneration Ltd recognises the outstanding natural beauty of Portaferry's surroundings and seeks to make the town a more desirable place to live in and visit by facilitating:

- the creation and development of self-sustaining local businesses
 - the restoration of its built heritage and the elimination of dereliction
 - the development of its amenities, tourist attractions and infrastructure whilst maintaining its unique character.
2. The change from the previous Vision Statement is to recognise that developments should not detract from the unique character of the town.
 3. We agreed to focus on 5 key priorities:
 - Access funding to replace the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) and reduce dereliction/build on success of THI
 - Establish an arts and crafts hub
 - Buy 15 The Square and improve connectivity between Exploris and the Square
 - Grow tourism
 - Increase lobbying/explore methods/seek assistance.

KEY PRIORITIES

Access funding to replace THI scheme and reduce dereliction/build on success of THI

4. We have helped address dereliction through the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI). The scheme has now closed and over £2m has been invested in the town. The following buildings have been renovated and refurbished:
 - The Market House
 - 28, Ferry Street – residential accommodation
 - 30 Ferry Street – residential accommodation
 - 15-16 The Strand, Westgate – residential accommodation (3 residences)
 - 6-8 Church Street – self-catering holiday accommodation
 - 36A The Square – self-catering holiday accommodation
 - 38 Shore Road, Portaferry Sailing Club
 - 40 Shore Road, Portaferry Community Services Ltd - The Recreation Hub
 - 8 Shore Road – storage units and 2 businesses.
5. An event to mark the end of the scheme was held in the Market House on Friday 9 March 2018. Guests included representatives from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Government officials, political representatives, owners of the restored properties and residents.
6. A key element of the THI scheme was to highlight how heritage buildings contribute to a 'sense of place'. With that in mind, the event saw the launch of 'Portaferry: Windows to the Past' - a booklet featuring some of the historic buildings of Portaferry which were restored through the THI programme. The booklet was written by renowned local author Allison Murphy and gives a captivating insight to the Portaferry of days gone by through its historic buildings and the stories of former occupants. A copy of the booklet was delivered free of charge to households in the Portaferry area.
7. The Directors recognise the important contribution that the Lottery makes to the availability of funding under the Heritage Lottery Fund. PRL organised a public event in the Market House to mark this contribution. The event, which took place in December 2017, included free guided tours of the town.
8. There remain a number of derelict and vacant properties which detract from the appearance of the town. In September 2018, PRL appointed a consultant to prepare an application for funding under the Resilient Heritage Fund which is designed for organisations who want to build their capacity or achieve significant strategic change. This is to be achieved through acquiring new skills and knowledge or new models of governance, leadership, business and income, and is intended to improve management of heritage in the long term including the identification of buildings that might be eligible for further funding which could be in excess of £1m.
9. The application under the Resilient Heritage Fund is for £60k and is supported by Ards and North Down Borough Council, the Department for Communities and the Ulster Architectural Historical Society.

10. We continue to work with Ards and North Down Borough Council in pursuit of further opportunities to address dereliction. In addition, we provide advice to potential developers and existing building owners on funding opportunities.
11. Through extensive lobbying of Ards and North Down Borough Council and the Department for Communities, £1.4m has been earmarked for a Public Realm Scheme for Portaferry. The Scheme, which is due to start in September 2019, will focus on The Square and the immediate sections of the streets leading to and from it. A steering group has been established and PRL has two representatives on the group. A Public Realm Scheme consists of upgrading pavements, installing new street lighting, the provision of street furniture and the redesign of the Square. There will also be funding for the upgrading of shop fronts and a marketing programme for Portaferry. Public Realm schemes encourage private businesses and building owners to refurbish their properties in keeping with the improved appearance of the public areas.

Establish an Arts and Crafts Hub

12. PRL is of a mind that, as Greyabbey is recognised as a hub for antiques, Portaferry could become a hub for arts and crafts. There is an abundance of highly talented artists and crafters living in and around Portaferry but no collective outlet for the sale of their products. We have been in discussions with Council officials about the potential of providing a hub of low-cost studio accommodation for artists and crafters and an integral retail outlet for their products. This would give people the opportunity to visit the studios, meet the makers and buy their products. Part of the hub could also facilitate the provision of arts and crafts classes and extend to arts and crafts holidays in conjunction with local accommodation providers.
13. We continue to meet with Council officers to progress this initiative and to seek suitable accommodation.

Buy 15 The Square and improve connectivity between Exploris and The Square

14. The purchase of 15 The Square, Portaferry was seen by Directors as the best option for enhancing access from Exploris to The Square. PRL's concern is that there is no strong directional signage from Exploris to The Square and visitors often leave without visiting/spending money in other parts of the town.
15. Like all old properties in Portaferry the difficulty faced by Directors was that the cost of purchasing the building and renovating it exceeded the final value of the property resulting in immediate negative equity. We were in the process of seeking funding to balance the heritage deficit, but the building was sold in the meantime.
16. Currently we are considering other properties in the Square and including these in the next funding bid to the Heritage lottery Fund.

Grow tourism

17. Portaferry has been identified in the Ards and North Down Borough Council's Integrated Strategy for Tourism, Regeneration and Economic Development as a tourism hub. In early 2018, PRL lobbied for a pilot scheme in Portaferry to establish a tourism cluster in the area with the aim of encouraging tourism businesses to work together to create tourism experiences.

18. The Council and Tourism NI facilitated the establishment of a cluster group. The cluster group has over 20 members including representatives of the main tourist attractions in the area, for example, Echlinville Distillery, Exploris, Fiddlers Green, the National Trust, the Portaferry Hotel, Portico and the Sailing Club. PRL is also a member.
19. PRL applied to Invest NI for funding under Phase 1 of its Collaborative Growth Programme to pay for a facilitator to carry out a twelve-month scoping study to investigate the potential to establish a collaborative network of tourism providers around the wider Strangford Lough area for the purpose of exploiting economic opportunities arising from joint working on new products and experiences in the area. The application was successful and £25k was awarded.
20. The scoping study has now commenced. If it is found at the end of the study that there are economic opportunities to be exploited through collaborative working, PRL will be in a strong position to apply for Phase 2 funding of up to £160k. Phase 2 funding would support the development of the commercial opportunities identified in the scoping study over a three-year period.
21. In the meantime, the Cluster is developing tourism experiences that will attract and keep visitors in the area. The statutory authorities have undertaken to promote the area through advertising the experiences and marketing the area.
22. A further tourist initiative that has been established is The Market on the Square, which was launched in July 2018 with the help of funding from The Big Lottery and PRL. Funding from the Lottery amounted to just over £7.5k; PRL has committed £3k annually. The market has been a huge success. It is an artisan food, art and crafts outlet and a hub for community interaction. It is held in the Market House and in the Market Square on the first Saturday of the month from April to December. Around 25 traders attend each month, many of whom are first time traders and from the immediate local area.
23. The main aim of the market is to help regenerate the town; give local food and craft producers an opportunity to sell their produce directly to the customer; and attract more tourists.
24. The market is managed by a small committee of volunteers who take care of meeting all the legal requirements and steer/promote the market. The committee is assisted by other volunteers who help with the practical arrangements on the day. It is a social enterprise and is operated on a not-for-profit basis. Any monies which are left over after paying the necessary expenses are used to promote the market.
25. Local charities/advice groups are given free use of the upper floor of the Market House on market day to serve refreshments as a fundraising activity. This allows them to raise money to sustain their organisations so they can carry on their valuable work.
26. The market also provides free children's art/crafts activities and live music performed by local musicians.
27. As a further measure to help sustain and grow the local economy PRL, in conjunction with Ards and North Down Borough Council, will launch shortly a

'Keep it Local' campaign which is designed to encourage people to purchase locally. PRL was successful in acquiring £2k from the Council to help fund the campaign.

28. Plans for the development of a Heritage Trail have now been completed and the project is expected to commence later this year.
29. PRL has been engaged in lobbying strongly for improvements to be carried out to the walkways in Nugent's Wood. Peace IV funding of £170k has been allocated to the scheme and work is expected to commence early this summer.
30. The Company has contributed £4,000 in sponsorship for local events such as the Gala, Sails and Sounds, the Triathlon, the Carol Ship etc; events are an important part of tourism in this area.
31. An audit of access to Strangford Lough has been completed and PRL is currently working with the Council and Portaferry Sailing Club to carry out an options appraisal of how the existing Marina might be extended, additional visiting boats might be attracted, and better access could be provided for water-based activities.
32. 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.

Increase lobbying/explore methods/seek assistance

33. During the year we met regularly with MLAs, MPs, Councillors, Council officials, Departmental officials and representatives from statutory bodies on a range of issues including:
 - A Public Realm Scheme;
 - The promotion of Portaferry by the statutory bodies;
 - The designation of Portaferry as a Tourist Town;
 - The Strangford Ferry Service;
 - Developing Portaferry as an arts and crafts hub;
 - The development of a local market;
 - The development of a 'Keep it Local' campaign
 - The extension of the Marina;
 - The Resilient Heritage Fund; and
 - Significant Council strategies.

EXISTING BUSINESSES

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

Brewery Yard

35. Ten out of thirteen units are currently occupied. We intend to advertise the remaining three in the immediate future. A rent review has been carried out and negotiations are currently underway with the newly formed Brewery Yard Tenants Association.

The company has organised for regular maintenance of the trees, shrubs, yard etc. and has organised several clean-ups during the year.

Barholm

36. A new five-year lease was granted to the current tenant. Having been granted the lease the tenant is in the process of replacing beds and furniture and making substantial improvements to the internal décor. The tenant has reported a subsequent increase in occupancy levels.

The Stables

37. PRL agrees with the Council that the Visitor Information Centre should be in a more prominent location and is working with officials to identify an alternative. If the Centre was to relocate, we need to have plans for a different use for the Stables building.

The Marina

38. A meeting has been held with the operator who has agreed to replace worn mooring rings on the underside of the pontoons. A paper will be drawn up by the operators making the case for an extension to the Marina. Consideration will also be given to the possibility of running a pilot water-taxi service.

PRL Offices

39. We moved our offices in October 2018 from 8 Shore Road to 16 The Square, Portaferry. Cuan Crafts and Physiofront remain in Shore Road as tenants of PRL.

STAFFING

40. Marie Austin is now seconded to us for 5 days a week from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. Ards and North Down Council continue to facilitate the secondment and we remain indebted to them for their support. Marie has been a tremendous asset to the Company and through her hard work, experience and expertise she has delivered on many of the things that are contained in this report. My hope is that she will remain with us in the years to come.

41. 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 elected local representatives who have supported us in our endeavours.

John Dumigan
Chairperson