



Portaferry Regeneration Limited

Chairperson's Report

**27TH Annual General Meeting: Thursday 28 November 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.

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. 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.
 3. This report provides an update on progress under each of the key priorities.

KEY PRIORITIES

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

4. The Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) Scheme has now closed and all funding has been expended. In total over £2m was invested in the town.
5. 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 and develop a heritage-led regeneration plan. The application was successful. PRL was awarded £55,500, and with match-funding from PRL of £5000, £60,500 will be invested in a Resilient Heritage project.
6. A heritage-led regeneration plan identifies and makes use of heritage assets and reinforces the qualities that make them significant so they can help stimulate environmental, economic and community regeneration. This includes buildings, landscape features, views, and public realm.
7. A project officer was appointed at the beginning of October 2019 and is required to develop the heritage-led regeneration plan by the end of June 2020. The plan will be used as the basis of a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for further funding to implement it.
8. We continue to work with Ards and North Down Borough Council in pursuit of further opportunities to address dereliction.
9. 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. A steering group has been established and PRL has two representatives on the group. The steering group meets monthly.
10. A public consultation on the scheme was carried out in September 2019. The steering group considered the responses to the consultation and adjustments were made to the scheme to take account of some of the comments made. The amended scheme was considered by Ards and North Down Borough Council at its October 2019 meeting and it was agreed to seek planning approval for the scheme. The anticipated commencement date is now September 2020. The Public Realm Scheme will upgrade pavements, install new street lighting, provide for street furniture and redesign the Square. A well-designed Public Realm scheme will improve the attractiveness of the town and make Portaferry a better place to live in and visit. It will also encourage private businesses and building owners to refurbish their properties in keeping with the improved appearance of the public areas.
11. After the scheme has been completed there will be funding of approximately £170,000 for activities such as upgrading shop fronts and delivering a marketing programme for Portaferry.

Establish an Arts and Crafts Hub

12. PRL met with The Portaferry Arts Society to discuss the possible establishment of an arts and crafts hub. The Society members advised that they already have existing studio accommodation but there is a need for gallery space and their preference would be the provision of such space to exhibit their artwork and crafts.
13. Local artists and crafters attend The Market on the Square. This gives them the opportunity to exhibit and sell their work.
14. We continue to meet with Council officers to explore further options.
15. We have identified a number of arts and crafts hubs throughout the island of Ireland and will investigate these further and possibly carry out site visits.

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

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. PRL has been having ongoing discussions with the Council about the development of Castle Park and The Ropewalk. The Council has agreed to provide around 80 additional car parking spaces at The Ropewalk and 3 spaces for coaches and a lighting scheme to discourage anti-social behaviour. Development of the carpark will improve access from Exploris to the Square via Church Street and Castle Street. The anticipated cost of the work is estimated at £300k and the intention is to commence work in the current financial year.
19. We are still considering other options to further improve connectivity between Exploris and The Square.

Grow tourism

20. 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.
21. Following on from the pilot scheme 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 £25,000 was awarded.

As PRL is not an Invest NI Client, we are indebted to Echlinville for administering the fund.

22. Tourism NI and the Council have advised that, as well as good accommodation, tourists expect to be able to avail of experiences and to have 2/3 day itineraries developed for them. Tourism NI and the Council both require such experiences before they can promote the Strangford Lough area.
23. The scoping study is well underway and must be completed by 31 March 2020. A Strangford Lough Cluster Group has been established and comprises tourism providers from around the Lough. They have been meeting on a regular basis and considerable progress has been made in identifying commercial opportunities. Many itineraries have now been developed on a collaborative basis as saleable packages. The group has agreed a 'proposition' for the Lough area which identifies what we have to offer and our target markets. This will be refined and finalised in the coming months.
24. The proposition focuses on health and well-being and all that entails in an holistic sense. It looks at areas such as Christian Heritage, slowing down and relaxation, local food and drink, coastal wildlife, landscape and activity, and storytelling and genealogy. The target audiences include high value luxury coach tours, high value over 35+ groups, weekday international visitors, 'active maximisers' and open-minded explorers, the Italian, ROI, GB, USA family markets and Game of Thrones high value small groups.
25. 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 £160,000. Phase 2 funding would support the development of the commercial opportunities identified in the scoping study over a three-year period.
26. The Market on the Square is another PRL tourism initiative that has gone from strength to strength. Since its launch in July 2018, it is now an established event in the tourism calendar and attracts many visitors to the town.
27. 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. It 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.
28. Portaferry GAC has been contracted to erect and dismantle the gazebos used at the market. PRL pays the club £1,000 per year for this service. We have found the Club members to be extremely reliable, efficient, flexible and helpful.
29. Local 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. On an annual basis this raises in excess of £3,500 for those groups.
30. The market also provides free children's art/crafts activities and live music performed by local musicians.

31. As a further measure to help sustain and grow the local economy PRL, in conjunction with Ards and North Down Borough Council, launched a 'Keep it Local' campaign which is designed to encourage people to purchase locally. PRL was successful in acquiring £2,000 from the Council to help fund the campaign. To make our town sustainable it is important for local people to support local businesses and local services.
32. Tenders for a Portaferry Heritage Trail project will be sought in November 2019 with an anticipated completion date of September 2020 and an estimated cost of £80,000. The trail will focus on the historic, social and economic life of residents in Portaferry from the perspective of a Ferry man, man in his 30s, woman in her 70s and a female child.
33. A contractor has now been appointed for the work of improving Nugent's Wood woodland walk. Due to legislation protecting badgers, the work can only be carried out during the months from April to November.
34. The Council is also planning to upgrade the woodland walk from Exploris carpark to the Walter Meadow. This will connect with the Nugent's Wood project. Peace IV funding of £170,000 has been allocated to the scheme.
35. The Company has contributed around £2,000 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.
36. Costs for carrying out an options appraisal of how the existing Marina might be extended and meet the requirements of PRL, the Council and the Sailing Club have been obtained. The Council has indicated that a budget for their contribution is currently not available but we continue to lobby for funding.

Increase lobbying/explore methods/seek assistance

37. During the year we lobbied and met regularly with politicians, Departmental and Council officials, and representatives from statutory bodies on a range of issues including:
 - A Public Realm Scheme;
 - A Heritage Audit of Portaferry;
 - The promotion of Portaferry by the statutory bodies;
 - The Strangford Ferry Service;
 - Developing Portaferry as an arts and crafts hub;
 - The development of a 'Keep it Local' scheme
 - The extension of the Marina;
 - The Resilient Heritage Fund; and
 - Significant Council strategies.
38. PRL sought assistance from the Department of Agriculture, Environment and Rural Affairs to help with the cost of office furniture and new computers. Funding of £1,500 was awarded under its Rural Micro Capital Grants Scheme.

39. PRL is a member of NICVA and sought assistance from the organisation regarding its proposed application for charity registration.
40. We continue to build and extend our networks and contacts in pursuit of our key strategic priorities. We work with and are represented on the Portaferry Community Collective, Ards Peninsula Villages Committee, Portaferry Village Plan Committee, the Public Realm Steering Group and the Events Strategy Steering Group.

EXISTING BUSINESSES

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

Brewery Yard

42. Currently ten out of thirteen units are occupied. It has been confirmed that a further unit will be occupied in the near future. We continue to advertise the remaining vacant units.
43. Negotiations with the Brewery Yard Tenants Association on new leases are expected to conclude shortly.
44. The company has organised for regular maintenance of the trees, shrubs, yard etc. and has organised several clean-ups during the year.

Barholm

45. Replacement handrails and balustrades were installed during the year at a cost of £1,000. Further maintenance work is required at an estimated cost of £5,000 and a builder has been contracted to carry out this work.

The Stables

46. Discussions have taken place with the Council regarding its review of Visitor Information Centres and the desire to locate the Portaferry Centre in the Square. Notwithstanding that, the lease expires in 2021 and is unlikely to be renewed. PRL will consider a different use for the Stables building.

The Marina

47. Discussions have been held with the Council and the Sailing Club about a possible extension to the Marina that would meet the needs of the three parties. PRL has obtained a price for an options appraisal but at the moment the Council does not have a budget to cover its agreed contribution. Discussions on the matter continue.

PRL Offices

48. PRL is located at 16 The Square, Portaferry. The office is open by appointment.

49. Cuan Crafts, Physiofront and an artist/architect remain in Shore Road as tenants of PRL.

STAFFING

50. Marie Austin remains seconded from the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission. Ards and North Down Council facilitate the secondment and we remain indebted to them for their support. Marie continues to drive forward important projects for the Company, for example: the Market; the Strangford Lough Cluster Group; PRL's proposed application for charity registration and Strategic Planning. Marie has also developed new office procedures that have assisted greatly in the effective running of PRL.
51. During the year PRL appointed a new office administrator, Hannah Dynes. Hannah has settled well into her role and is proving to be a valuable asset to the company.
52. As previously mentioned, PRL employed a project officer to prepare a heritage-led regeneration plan under its Resilient Heritage Project. Peter Dornan took up the post at the beginning of October 2019. It is hoped that Peter will deliver a plan that will be successful in acquiring further Lottery funding that will enable implementation of the plan.
53. 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 representatives, Council officers and Departmental officers who have supported us in our endeavours.

John Dumigan
Chairperson