



Portaferry Regeneration Limited

Chairperson's Report

28TH Annual General Meeting: Monday 15 February 2021 at 7.30pm

Via Zoom

INTRODUCTION

1. In February 2020, the Directors of Portaferry Regeneration Limited (PRL) revised the company's Vision Statement and some of the previously agreed key priorities to align with the new Objects/Articles agreed at the Annual General Meeting on 28 November 2019.
2. The new Vision Statement is as follows:

Portaferry Regeneration Ltd recognises the outstanding natural beauty of Portaferry's surroundings and seeks to make the town a more desirable place to live, work in and visit whilst maintaining its unique character.
3. The new key priorities are as follows:
 - Access funding to replace the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) and reduce dereliction/build on success of THI;
 - Establish an arts and crafts hub;
 - Identify buildings of important heritage that are suitable for restoration or regeneration;
 - The relief of unemployment through supporting local businesses and services, including the tourism industry;
 - To consolidate and grow networks and key contacts in pursuit of our objects.
4. This report provides an update on progress under each of the key priorities. The COVID-19 pandemic has undoubtedly had a major impact on our ability to progress most of our key priorities and our income. It made effective networking very difficult and this was exacerbated by the furloughing of key people.

KEY PRIORITIES

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

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 has been invested in a Resilient Heritage project.
6. The heritage-led regeneration plan, which will be finalised shortly, 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.
7. The plan will be used as the basis for a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for further funding to implement the projects identified.
8. We continue to work with Ards and North Down Borough Council in pursuit of further opportunities to address dereliction.
9. We have been in discussions with the Architectural Heritage Society regarding funding under the Village Catalyst Programme. The Society is keen to progress a project in Portaferry. Initial funding of up to £7.5k is available to carry out an options appraisal and further funding for £200k for the actual project. Any project has to address poverty and social isolation e.g. providing employment/skills.
10. The proposed agreed Public Realm Scheme has been delayed because statutory consultees did not respond in a timely manner to allow Planning Service to process the application. It is now anticipated, subject to funding, that the scheme will commence towards the end of 2021.

Establish an Arts and Crafts Hub

11. It is expected that there will be a project eligible for funding under the Heritage Regeneration Plan. A pilot residential arts festival was organised for May 2020 but had to be cancelled because of the COVID-19 pandemic. There was significant interest from visiting artists who had booked overnight stays.
12. We continue to meet with Council officers to explore further options and with Portaferry Arts Society.

Identify buildings of important heritage that are suitable for restoration or regeneration

13. Twenty-seven buildings of important heritage were identified as part of the Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme. Whilst ten buildings were renovated and refurbished under that scheme, a substantial number remain derelict.
14. The Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan is expected to contain proposals for the renovation of a further number of buildings.
15. As mentioned previously, PRL has been in discussions with the Architectural Heritage Society regarding funding under the Village Catalyst Programme. The Society is keen to progress a project in Portaferry. Initial funding of up to £7.5k is available to carry out an options appraisal and further funding for £200k for the actual project. Any project has to address poverty and social isolation e.g. providing employment/skills.

The relief of unemployment through supporting local businesses and services, including the tourism industry

16. 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.
17. 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.
18. The scoping study was completed and formed the basis of a successful application to Invest NI for further funding under Phase 2 of the Collaborative Growth Programme. £168k has been awarded to further develop tourism experiences identified and expand the collaborative network. Echlinville Distillery will administer the fund.
19. The Market on the Square was suspended for 2020 due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions. The intention is to resume later in 2021.
20. 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.

21. As a further measure to help support local businesses 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.
22. PRL recognises the contribution made by local businesses during the COVID-19 pandemic. We hope to build on the goodwill that has been created by encouraging the community to continue to 'Keep it Local'.
23. The tender for the development of a Portaferry Heritage Trail has been awarded by the Council. Design work is under way and it is hoped that the trail will be in place during 2021.
24. Work has been completed on the Nugent's Wood woodland walk. However, it is disappointing that a major part of the trail was not upgraded. The walk has proved to be very popular with a substantial increase in use.
25. The Council has upgraded the woodland walk from Exploris carpark to the Walter Meadow. This connects with the Nugent's Wood project.
26. The Company has contributed £500 in sponsorship to the Portaferry Recreation Hub to provide meals to those in need during lockdown.
27. It is expected that the possible extension of the existing Marina will be included in the Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan.

To consolidate and grow networks and key contacts in pursuit of our objects

28. During the year we met regularly with politicians, Departmental and Council officials, and representatives from statutory bodies on a range of issues. However the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions meant that face-to-face meetings could not be held.

EXISTING BUSINESSES

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

Brewery Yard

30. Currently twelve out of thirteen units are occupied. However, a number of businesses were granted a 3-month rent holiday in response to the difficulties arising from the closure of businesses during the Spring 2020 lockdown. The introduction of a service charge has also been deferred for all units.
31. The company has organised for regular maintenance of the trees, shrubs, yard etc. and has organised several clean-ups during the year.

Barholm

32. Maintenance work costing approximately £10k was carried out during the year.
33. In view of the impact on the tourism industry as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, the tenant was also granted a rent holiday and new terms agreed.

The Stables

34. The Council has agreed to relocate the Visitor Information Centre to Exploris. As a result, PRL has received notice from the Council of the termination of the lease for The Stables. Options for the use of building are being considered under the Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan.

The Marina

35. It is expected that the possible extension of the existing Marina will be included in the Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan.

PRL Offices

36. PRL is located at 16 The Square, Portaferry. Due to COVID-19 pandemic restrictions the office is closed and staff are working from home.
37. Cuan Crafts, Physiofront and an artist/architect remain in Shore Road as tenants of PRL.

APPLICATION FOR CHARITABLE STATUS

38. An application for Charitable status was submitted in January 2020. However, due to the legal consequences of a legal judgement against the Charity Commission Northern Ireland, there has been a delay in processing applications and we await a decision.

STAFFING

39. Hannah Dynes continues in her role as Administrative Officer. Her co-operation and understanding during this difficult time is much appreciated.
40. The employment of the Heritage Resilient Project Officer, Peter Dornan, has come to an end. Peter is also thanked for his co-operation and understanding.
41. Finally, my thanks to all my fellow Directors who have worked 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 officials who have also supported us in our endeavours.

John Dumigan
Chairperson

Date: 22 January 2021