



Portaferry Regeneration Limited

Chairperson's Report

**29TH Annual General Meeting: Monday 21 March 2022
at 7.30pm - Via Zoom**

INTRODUCTION

1. Portaferry Regeneration Limited (PRL) continues to pursue the delivery of its vision as outlined below:

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.

2. The key priorities for PRL are as follows:
 - Access funding to replace the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) and reduce dereliction and building on the 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.
3. This report provides an update on progress under each of the key priorities. Throughout the year, the COVID-19 pandemic continued to have a major impact on our ability to progress most of our key priorities and reduced our income because of loss of rents. It made effective networking very difficult, which was exacerbated by the furloughing of key people.

KEY PRIORITIES

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

Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan

4. Following extensive community consultation involving local community groups and local people, PRL completed a heritage-led regeneration plan and submitted it to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). The plan will be used by the National Lottery in the assessment of any future funding bids. Informed by the outcome of the community consultation, PRL has prioritised several heritage-led projects to be delivered over the next number of years and hopes to enter discussions with NLHF in the coming months to identify those projects that might attract funding.
5. Most of the projects will require premises and the intention is to select buildings of important heritage that need renovation and are eligible for any available funding.
6. We continue to work with Ards and North Down Borough Council in pursuit of further opportunities to address dereliction and explore possibilities for match funding and partnerships.

Public Realm Scheme

7. In relation to the Public Realm Scheme, a full design has been agreed, planning permission has been obtained and all statutory approvals have been given. An application for funding and a business case was submitted to the Department for Communities. The Minister for Communities halted the scheme because the Executive had not agreed a budget for public realm schemes in small towns. However, new money has been found under the Covid Recovery Small Settlements Regeneration Programme. The funding will be managed by district councils and Ards and North Down Borough Council has been awarded £1.6m. The Council has received a letter of offer. This funding might be topped up by £300k from the Council. It is anticipated that the project will commence in the 2022/23 financial year.

Castle Park

8. PRL has met with Council officials to discuss the future development of Castle Park. A brief for an options appraisal has been prepared and invitations to tender sought. The options appraisal and development of a masterplan will involve extensive consultation with the community.

b) Establish an Arts and Crafts Hub

9. PRL is in discussions with several artists/crafters who are interested in creating an arts and craft hub in Portaferry.
10. The monthly artisan food, arts and crafts market, which is a PRL project, continues to provide an outlet for local artists/crafters.

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

11. PRL has identified a list of buildings that are suitable for restoration or regeneration. Funding options are being considered and partnerships explored.
12. Whilst ten buildings were renovated and refurbished as part of the Townscape Heritage Initiative scheme, a substantial number remain derelict.
13. The Heritage-Led Regeneration Plan contains proposals for the renovation of a further number of buildings. PRL will prioritise projects that will be of benefit to the town. Decisions will be based on the outcome of the community consultation that took place when developing the Plan.
14. Following the move of the Visitor Information Centre to Exploris, PRL has decided to sell the Stables on condition that its future use brings economic benefit to Portaferry. Several attractive offers have been submitted for commercial uses. PRL is currently assessing the bids to determine which one will bring maximum benefit to the town.
15. Barholm is currently vacant and has been placed on the market for sale. As with the Stables, PRL will seek an enterprise that will bring economic benefit to Portaferry. There have been a significant number of interested parties who have recognised the commercial opportunities the building presents and its unique location.

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

Strangford lough Tourism Cluster

16. In early 2018, PRL lobbied for a pilot scheme in Portaferry which would 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 investigating the potential to establish a collaborative network of tourism providers around the wider Strangford Lough area. The purpose was to exploit 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 then formed the basis of a successful application to Invest NI for further funding under Phase 2 of the Collaborative Growth Programme. An award of £168k was obtained to further develop tourism experiences and expand the collaborative network. Consultants have been appointed and the Cluster, which has been incorporated as a Community Interest Company, continues to expand with key tourism providers around Strangford Lough. Immersive experiences are being developed to attract and encourage visitors to stay in the area. These experiences are being marketed through Tourism NI digital platforms.

19. The Cluster is an excellent example of how businesses can collaborate for their own benefit and the benefit of their communities through the creation of employment opportunities.

The Market on the Square

20. The Market on the Square was re-launched in July 2021, and has been greatly appreciated by visitors and local alike. 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 surplus monies after paying the necessary expenses are used to promote the market.

Keep it Local

21. PRL is in the process of re-launching the 'Keep it Local' campaign in conjunction with Ards and North Down Borough Council. It hopes to establish a collaborative business forum which will closely follow the model of the Cluster group. Such campaigns secure and provide employment opportunities and have significant environmental benefits because of less travelling of people and products.

Heritage Trail

22. PRL was represented on the steering group for the development of the Portaferry Heritage Trail. The project has suffered some delays, but it is anticipated that the Trail will be launched in 2022.

Nugent's Wood

23. PRL played a major role in the delivery of the Nugent's Wood woodland walk. The walk has proved to be very popular with a substantial increase in use. From 16 February 2021 to 30 September 2021, 43,778 people visited Nugent's Wood compared to 5,044 people for the whole of 2019. This is an indication of the popularity of off-road walks and PRL intends to lobby the Council for more such walks and trails.
24. The Council has upgraded the woodland walk from Exploris carpark to the Walter Meadow. This connects with the Nugent's Wood project.

Brewery Yard

25. Currently all 13 units in Brewery Yard, which is owned and managed by PRL, are occupied and there is a short waiting list for units. The purpose of Brewery Yard is to provide local start-up businesses with small business units leased at economic rents. There is need for more such units and PRL intends to meet with Council Officers to explore opportunities for their provision.

Ferry Service

26. PRL met with the Minister for Infrastructure on two occasions to lobby for an early and more flexible ferry service. The early ferry and off schedule ferries are now a feature of the service provided. The additional sailings facilitate workers who work or are seeking employment on both sides of the Lough and provides a better service for visitors.

Marina

27. The purpose of the Marina is to facilitate access to the Lough and attract visiting boats to the town. The Marina needs refurbishment and PRL is in discussions with the Council and the operator about the funding needed.

8 Shore Road

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

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

29. During the year we communicated regularly with politicians, Departmental and Council officials, and representatives from statutory bodies on a range of issues. However, the COVID-19 pandemic restricted our progress in many areas.

30. PRL participated in and commented on the review of the Portaferry Village Plan.

31. PRL commented on several significant planning applications relevant to the pursuit of its objects. This included the proposals for the Ropewalk Scheme, proposals for a conference centre at Quintin Castle, and proposed developments in High Street.

32. PRL continues to work in partnership with Portaferry Community Collective, the Ards Peninsula Villages Partnership, Strangford Lough Tourism Cluster and has responded to various consultations undertaken by the Council.

CHARITABLE STATUS

33. PRL was granted charitable status on 18 October 2021 and was subsequently successful in its application to HMRC for tax concessions, in particular corporation tax. Charitable status opens up further funding opportunities. However, the company is restricted to working within its charitable objects.

OTHER MATTERS

34. PRL is actively supporting the provision of a 3G pitch in the Portaferry area.

35. PRL has also been in discussions with the Historic Environment Division (Department for Communities) regarding making the renovation and restoration of Portaferry Castle one of its strategic priorities.

36. PRL welcomes (the list is not exhaustive):

- The expansion and improvement of Exploris including 'Night at the Aquarium'
- The re-opening of Quintin Castle – newly renovated high-end accommodation and conference facilities, due to open in March 2022.
- Restoration of the former boy's primary school (St Patrick's) as high-end chalet accommodation – due to complete mid-2022.
- Renovation and occupation of 16/17 The Square
- Development of new houses at the end of Rockfield Park
- The renovation of 25-27 High Street and the construction of new houses to the rear
- The animation of 7 High Street - depicting the life story of Reverend Orr
- The opening of Roxy Lady – clothes boutique and gift shop
- The opening of Down Delights – coffee shop offering bakes and sandwiches
- The Bull and Claw - restaurant and bar due to open soon.
- Viking Festival – 25 to 27 March 2022 – based primarily in Castle Park

37. The above demonstrates the continued economic development and growth of Portaferry.

CHALLENGES

38. The following challenges have been identified in the context of achieving PRL's objects:

- Encouraging the renovation of derelict/vacant property in Ferry Street, the Square and High Street.
- Encouraging/facilitating new businesses and building on Portaferry's reputation as a market town.
- Non-availability of suitable rentable property for new/growing businesses.
- Meeting the need for additional small units suitable for start-up businesses.
- Meeting the need for additional volunteers to help take projects forward.
- Producing quality/competitive applications for funding of priority projects.
- Engaging with the community through an effective communications strategy.
- Maximising on/attracting staycation visitors.
- Ensuring better promotion of Portaferry and the Strangford Lough area.
- Cost of living/inflationary increases inhibiting new or growing businesses.
- Facilitating the retention and possible return of local people through suitable accommodation, thereby helping sustain local schools, businesses and services.
- Taking advantage of hyper-fast fibre broadband thereby facilitating home working and hot-desking.

39. The arrival of superfast broadband will facilitate the opening of digital businesses and remote working and bring environmental benefits because of reduced travelling.

DIRECTORS, MEMBERS AND VOLUNTEERS

40. In recent times, PRL has used its social media platforms to seek new directors, members and volunteers. The response has been disappointing. I therefore

encourage all members to think about the contribution they could make to the work of PRL and contact us at info@portaferryregeneration.com to make arrangements to discuss the role you could play as a member, a director or as a volunteer for specific projects. I would also ask you to encourage your friends and family to do likewise.

STAFFING

41. Hannah Dynes continues in her role as Administrative Officer. Her co-operation and understanding during this difficult time is much appreciated.
42. 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. It should be noted that every Director is unpaid, and expenses incurred are not claimed.
43. My grateful thanks also to elected representatives, Council officers and departmental officials who have also supported us in our endeavours.

PRL Offices

44. PRL is now located at Unit 10, Brewery Yard, Portaferry. The office is open by appointment only.

John Dumigan
Chairperson

Date: 23 February 2022