SUBMISSION FROM PORTPATRICK HARBOUR

Portpatrick Harbour, built and largely unchanged since the mid 1800’s is located on the South west coast of Scotland on a peninsula approximately twenty miles from the Irish coast. The Harbour and village provide both a relaxing environment and a safe haven in adverse weather for thousands of mariners each year. The Village of Portpatrick is a very idyllic and charming place offering many fine Hotels, pubs, shops and restaurants to the visitor whilst providing vital local employment within the area. The picturesque harbour which lies at the very heart of the village underpins much of this local economy acting as both a gateway to the area for sailors and by providing the stunning focal point around which the village exists.

Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefit Society was formed in July 2015 with the aim of saving and securing Portpatrick Harbour into full community ownership. This became necessary after the community of Portpatrick discovered in a public meeting held in January 2015 that a failed attempt to purchase the harbour by a previous group in 2012 had resulted in an imminent threat of repossession of the harbour by a Jersey based property developer. This crisis meeting uncovered, for the first time, some very uncomfortable and ugly financial facts surrounding the circumstances of that agreement. This led the community of Portpatrick to take direct action at that meeting and subsequently take full control over the situation in order to attempt to save the harbour which lies at the very heart of the village.

Supported by Third sector D&G we were introduced to Community Share Scotland. Borrowing capabilities had already been identified as being very weak due to the financial history created under the previous group which was a company limited by guarantee with charitable status, subsequently access to normal routes of finance prove very limited and unsuccessful. Community Share Scotland offered a new possibility, indeed for our community this looked to possibly be our only chance to avoid losing our harbour. There was much work to be done; this required us breaking new ground in the Scottish third sector. With the aid of Community Share Scotland we would together need to create, for the first time, a totally new type of charitable group in order to achieve our goal. We required to generate business plans, financial forecasts, share offer documents and very importantly, the new rules required to pass the charity test and become the first Community Benefit Society to gain charitable status with the Scottish charity regulator OSCR.

A new “charitable Community Benefit Society” the first in Scotland, would be formed to give our community the platform from which we could raise community shares to finance the rescue of our harbour from what was inherently a very negative financial position. The new “Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefit Society” would provide
Governance and structure, registered under both the FCA and Scottish charity regulator, this would allow our Community the opportunity to start again.

Community Share Scotland are an inspirational group of people who are extremely innovative in their efforts to find solutions when faced by problems. They introduced us to Social investment Scotland who provided much needed bridging finance to us in the form of the “Community share loan”. This new financial product allowed us to avoid repossession of the harbour by the property developer whilst the process of registering the new Community Benefit Society along with raising the share offer was carried out.

Portpatrick Harbour CBS subsequently became the first Community Benefit Society in Scotland to register with both the FCA and gain charitable status with OSCR in August 2015. The new Community Benefit Society planned to raise £75,000.00 through Community Shares. This was the prime target but the business plan along with the financial advice received through Co-operatives UK identified that we could go a little further and raise further share capital should we gain enough interest in our share offer, this would be invested in the harbour to kick start it’s much needed regeneration.

The share offer was planned to run for eight weeks, banners were erected and media were engaged to capture as much interest in the campaign as possible. The share offer opened in a flurry of activity during our local folk festival on 5th September 2015 selling 30% of the Community shares on day one. Thirteen days later we had sold £75,000.00 worth of community shares, achieving our primary target. Only Seven days later on the 26 September we smashed through our upper limit of £100,000.00 eventually seeing an oversubscription of over £14,000.00.

This fantastic opportunity allowed people from all around the world to support this community initiative, indeed we discovered that our community was not as small as we had once thought. Applications poured in not only from local residents in the village but from all over the country and indeed, several different countries around the world. People with family connections to the area, people in the yachting fraternity, people who visited the area on holiday, people with an affiliation to the village and harbour and who all clearly cared enough to support the campaign and who wished to see the village harbour remain secure and unspoiled for the future. Together our community have proven that today’s world is not as large and disjointed as it once was and that the little village of Portpatrick now has a very large and diverse community supporting it in today’s modern world.

Out of what appeared to be an almost hopeless inherited financial situation discovered by our community in January 2015, a new opportunity has been born. This opportunity saw the birth of the “Portpatrick harbour Community Benefit Society” supported by its diverse community this allowed us to take direct action and control over a vital
community asset for the benefit of all. This new charitable Community Benefit Society model now stands ready for other groups and communities around the country to engage and utilise, giving them the ability where once it did not exist to make a real difference.

Today Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefit Society has a membership of over 560 people who are all part of our diverse and engaged community, Village residents, sailors, regular tourists, family and friends living all around the world. Portpatrick Harbour has now engaged its first phase of regeneration following closely our business plan, utilising community empowerment in order to acquire adjacent council wasteland this will help provide space for much needed facilities at the harbour. This will subsequently support growth to the core business of the harbour whilst supporting our community’s infrastructure through our charity’s wider reaching objectives and promoting local business and employment.

Calum Currie (Chairman)

Portpatrick Harbour Community Benefit Society