



Inverclyde Shed

Securing a new space for the community
Greenock, Inverclyde

Background

Moving to a bigger property usually comes with an increase in outgoings. But when the team at Inverclyde Shed move into their new accommodation – four times the size of their old one – their rent will drop from £1,000 a month to £1 a year.

What sounds like a magic trick we'd all like to emulate, is the result of three years of hard work and frustration. It's also a well-deserved outcome for an organisation that helps improve the mental and physical well-being of all who work through their door.

Based in Greenock, Inverclyde Shed is part of the nationwide 'Men's Shed' network offering recreational facilities, camaraderie, skill-sharing and a sense of purpose for its members. Deliberately leaving the word 'Men' out of their title, they're open to all-comers aged 18 and over.



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Soon after forming in 2018, Inverclyde Shed secured five-year funding from the National Lottery to cover the rent on two small units. But with the Shed's activities involving numerous machines, tools and benches for carpentry, metal and wood working, neither space was especially suitable.

“We identified quite early on that to have longer sustainability we would have to get something that could accommodate us size-wise in the right location,” says Inverclyde Shed’s Chair, Bruce Newlands. “We also wanted to eliminate that £1,000 monthly overhead, so we didn’t have to rely on grants any more. We generate a little bit of income because we make things, but we didn’t want to have to raise £12,000 a year to pay rent for workshops that don’t particular suit us.”



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Preparing for transfer

With an eye on the future, the Shed ensured its Constitution was suitable for community asset transfer, writing in relevant clauses such as the need for at least 20 members. Then in early 2019, their search for properties began by looking at Inverclyde Council’s available asset register.

A dilapidated, but spacious, light industrial building was found – perfectly situated next to Screw Fix and Home Depot, where the group gets its supplies.

“We decided to go for a 25-year lease, rather than buy the property,” says Bruce. “The thinking behind that was 70% of the building required renewal, we were basically only keeping the steel frame, and we didn’t want that liability on our balance sheet when we were looking for funding. It’s a repair lease, which means we have to keep it maintained – but that will be from the point when the building has been renovated onwards.”

With such an extensive refurbishment on their hands, serious funds had to be secured. As only Local Authorities and regeneration groups can apply to the Scottish Government for a Regional Capital Grant Fund, the Shed partnered with Inverclyde Council on a successful application for £500,000.



Seeking support

Bruce cites early discussions with Development Trusts Association Scotland as helpful for guidance on how the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015 could lead to them securing a low cost lease from the Council. Letters of support from the National Association of Men’s Sheds and Age Scotland helped convince both the Council and funders of the Shed’s merits, with Age Scotland also sharing research about the benefits of taking part in the kind of activity the Shed offers.

“The building is adjacent to the most deprived area in Scotland, according to the statistics,” says Bruce, “and we certainly impressed that upon our MP and MSP, suggesting that Inverclyde was due something after having struggled a wee bit.”

“And although we’re a new charity, we had already built up a good reputation because we have skills to offer out and we do a lot for other community groups. After securing the Community Asset Transfer, we actually won Shed of the Year in Scotland, which didn’t necessarily impact on the process but tells you something about the work we did to get us to that point. So I think we made quite a good case.”



Challenges along the way

Despite all the Shed had to offer the local community, Bruce found the Council still dragged its heels.

“Inverclyde Council just had no experience of this, they had never transferred anything before,” he says. “And there were a number of under-resourced departments acting above and beyond their knowledge. They didn’t seem to know about anything to do with community, they viewed it purely as a commercial decision. And the legal department had no idea about time spans and the pressure it puts on other organisations when they take ages. So I would say to anyone doing this, learn virtue and patience because it can be a frustrating process.”

As an architect by trade, Bruce brought a number of invaluable skills to the table – and suggests other groups do likewise.



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“If you’re looking to take on a building, bring people onto your board who can help,” he says. “Any of the building professions – Quantity Surveyor, Structural Engineer, a Clerk of Works or Project Management are all useful. Some boards bring in experience because they want stuff done for free – but that’s not what a trustee is for, you’re there to guide the process and feed in your experience and contacts.”

Looking to the future

With the lease and capital funding in place, Bruce and the rest of the Inverclyde Shed team can look forward to a more resilient future. An increase in space from 800 sq. ft. to 4,000 sq. ft. will allow many more people to access the building, and move members from working purely on smaller items to large furniture and boats. It also means that for the next 25 years, regardless of who occupies it, Inverclyde will have a superb non-commercial workshop space.

“We feel like we’re putting a bit of community infrastructure into Inverclyde,” says Bruce. “We’ve been very upfront about it, if the Shed disbands or goes under in ten years’ time, that building will still be a community workshop – another group could take it on. So we’re building something quite tangible.”

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www.inverclydeshed.co.uk

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