



The Larick Centre

Building a new hub for the community

Tayport, Fife

Background

If the best things come to those who wait, then the people of Tayport were more than deserving of their shiny new community centre. Plans were first mooted back in 1995, when the lack of sports facilities in the immediate area caused discontent.

“You could either go across the river to Dundee or to the sports centre in Newport,” says Tony Gowland of Tayport Community Trust. “But back then there was no bus between Tayport and Newport – and there’s only an intermittent service now – so you can only go if you have a car.”

The lack of provision in this Fife town also extended to a community centre, so plans were hatched to develop a multiple-use space, incorporating tourist accommodation and a café. Eleven years of fundraising, public meetings, consultations and feasibility studies later, a suitable site was finally purchased in 2016.

“The site, which is over 3 acres, used to be a steel fabrication plant,” explains Tony. “There was a steel framed building over 80 metres long and over 40 metres wide. It had been sitting unused for about ten years since it came into the ownership of Fife Council, after the company who owned it went bankrupt.”

Restoring the site

But although the location was ideal – close to the beautiful Tentsmuir Forest, Nature Reserve and beach, which attract locals and tourists alike – the ground itself was less than hospitable.

“Because of all the shot blasting that had taken place, there was heavy metal contamination,” says Tony. “But it was Fife Council’s responsibility to remediate the site, so any costs would not burden the Trust.”



Early on in the project, Fife Council offered the site for £9,000 but the Trust was unable to take up the offer at that time. When the Trust felt they could acquire the site, however, the previous offer was no longer on the table – now the Council was asking the full market value of £400,000.

Through an impressive process of negotiation, the Trust managed to agree a selling price of £40,000 – with the Council also agreeing to take on the clean-up. Driving down the price was vital to help secure funding from the Scottish Land Fund which covered the sale, with the Community Ownership Support Service helping with fees. However, the Trust’s challenges were not yet over.

“We acquired the site subject to it being restored,” recalls Tony. “But unfortunately, when the building was being demolished, more contamination was discovered on the site. Fife Council was reluctant to take on responsibility for this work themselves but supported the Trust to obtain funding from the Vacant and Derelict Land Fund to complete the work.”



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Tony Gowland

Funding the project

Previous fundraising by Tayport Community and Sports Centre Action Group, out of which the Trust grew, had raised a significant £55,178 through a variety of community events – and this was put towards the cost of the new multi-purpose community building.



Several funding cycles followed, each building on the previous one, culminating in 2015 with a successful application the Big Lottery Fund’s Growing Community Assets Fund.

“We received phase one development funding from the Big Lottery of £119,000,” says Tony. “And after the designs were finalised for the new building, we received phase two Lottery funding of £1.2million for the capital costs of the building – which still meant we had £2million left to raise.”

Remarkably, the Trust achieved this in less than a year, with successful applications to the Robertson Trust, Fife Council, Regeneration Capital Grant Fund, Fife Environment Trust and various other funders, both small and large. Despite the speed of this final part of the endeavour, for local residents who had first shown their support in 1995, the project started to feel very drawn out.

Community engagement

“One of the things we found is it’s very hard to keep people excited by feasibility studies or options appraisals,” says Tony. “And understandably, people were keen to know what had happened to all the money they’d raised prior to the incorporation of the Trust. So we had to let them know it was safe and would be spent in due course.



“So my advice to anyone else taking on an asset transfer, is keep everyone informed.”

Tony Gowland

“When the old building was finally demolished, that was a really powerful symbol of progress, and everyone could see that something was actually happening. So my advice to anyone else taking on an asset transfer, is keep everyone informed.”

Throughout the process, Tony says Tayport Community Trust was “relatively self-sufficient”, but found Fife Council, Development Trust Association Scotland, and Fife Voluntary Action all valuable sources of help and support. In particular, Douglas Westwater and Community Enterprise were outstanding in putting together the feasibility study and initial business plan.

Reducing social isolation

Customers described it as a ‘life-saver’ during lockdown, a safe place where friends and families could meet at a time of social isolation. In addition, the Centre also acted as a vaccination venue, its layout lending itself well to social distancing. Over the summer of 2021, the new building has come alive with exercise classes, yoga, advice drop-ins, a youth hub, a Community Fridge, families’ groups and more – with spaces of various shapes and sizes available to hire.



The Larick Centre is just one of a suite of projects run by Tayport Community Trust and its trading subsidiary Tayport Community Enterprises, with The Harbour Café, The Larick Campsite, The Larick Café and PLANT (‘People Learning About Nature in Tayport’) all part of the family.

With 60 covers inside, plus outdoor seating, the Larick Café is popular with nearby residents, people staying at the adjacent 30-pitch campsite and day-visitors.

“We’re close to Tentsmuir Forest, so a lot of people go there and then stop for a coffee,” says Tony. “And for the people of Tayport, it’s a facility they’ve said they’ve needed for many years. We also hope that for people in Newport, and other areas within the Tay Bridgehead Ward and North East Fife, we’ll be able to provide things that they want to do or visit. We’re also the closest campsite to the City of Dundee, with its new V & A. The new Centre is in an absolutely superb location, as a base to explore the beauty of this section of the Fife coast, as well as the forest.”

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www.tayportct.org.uk/communityhub

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