



Tullibody Civic Centre

A phased approach to community ownership
Tullibody, Clackmannanshire

Background

First, they came for the park. Armed with plans for a new school campus, Clackmannanshire Council wanted to build on the only greenspace in Tullibody. When community opposition proved too much, the Council re-thought its plans and agreed to re-build on the existing school grounds.

Then, they came for the Civic Centre - again, the only community facility in a town of 10,000 residents. This time, the Council wanted to knock down the building and sell the land. "That's when it all started," says Janette McGowan, Chair of Tullibody Community Development Trust. "Initially, we tried to go for a lease but the conditions were just too onerous. The Council said that if anything broke down we would have to replace it with new.

"But since the hall had really deteriorated, lots of maintenance and repair work was needed, so we just couldn't sign it. As we couldn't get past that

impasse, buying the building was the only solution – if it needed thousands of pounds spent on it, we had to be the owners."

Funding and support

The Trust started with an occupancy licence, then connected with Development Trust Association Scotland and the Community Ownership Support Service for the journey ahead. A valuation came in at £500,000, but by outlining the community benefit they achieved a 50% discount and bought the property for just under £250,000.

"We had a number of funders but the main one was the Scottish Land Fund," says Janette. "In March 2018 we applied for stage one funding to carry out a feasibility study and to engage an architect and business professional. We got another £5,000 from the Community Lottery to complete the business plan, and

then stage two funding from the Scottish Land Fund to purchase the building, fund our community facilities worker for a year and pay for essential repairs such as a new fire alarm system.



“And because we’re an ex-mining village, we got a bit of support from Coalfield Regeneration, who provided training in first aid and food hygiene and money for a catering assistant.”

Alongside COSS and DTAS, who Janette says “have been a great support all the way through”, the Trust also found Clackmannanshire Third Sector Interface (TSI) helpful. With six trusts across the shire all taking on occupancy licences, a joint worker was appointed by the TSI to work across the groups.

“All the trusts do things slightly differently,” says Janette. “But we’ve been able to bounce off each other, find out what works, share resources and keep each other right with the legislation. The other trusts have all taken over the running of their centres, but we’re the first ones in Clackmannanshire to become owners.”

Involving the community

Support from the local community has also been crucial to the project’s success, both practically and in terms of morale.



“Whenever we said we’re really stressed out, we’re getting nowhere with the Council, they always said keep going we’ll do what we can,” says Janette. “The support has been amazing, with volunteers coming in or helping if we need a plumber or joiner, the community has been behind us all the way.

“I think that’s partly because we carried out a consultation about future plans, which really helped with engagement because they could see the vision and they were involved in shaping what the centre would look like and what we could do here.”



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Overcoming challenges

Which is just as well, as liaising with Clackmannanshire Council proved far from easy. Having never undergone an asset transfer before, the Council was understandably finding its feet – but the Trust found them reluctant to use DTAS’s route map or learn from other Councils nearby who had successfully navigated the process.

“It was all very frustrating,” says Janette, “especially dealing with the Council’s legal department, who seemed to block us at every opportunity because they wanted full market value, despite it being ring-fenced as a community asset. The Council had tried to run the Civic Centre and failed, they lost money, didn’t maintain it and didn’t market it.

“And I think there was a sense from them that if they couldn’t make it work, how could a bunch of volunteers? Not understanding that most of us, somewhere in our background, have a lot of experience in running facilities and businesses.”

Taking ownership

The proof has been in the pudding, however, as within its first year of ownership the Trust turned a profit. The Centre is now filled with classes and activities, from football, netball, table tennis, yoga and Pilates to toddler groups and pensioner meet-ups – all of which generates income from room hire – as well as housing an interactive heritage centre and café.

Another frustration, once they took over the building, was a lack of maintenance records. “The council didn’t provide them so we had to start from scratch with our own consultants, heating engineers and electricians,” explains Janette. “We had inherited this old building but we couldn’t backtrack to see all the wiring records and it’s like a warren in here! But we’ve been marking where each socket is connected to the main fuse box, so that if something does go wrong we’ll know where to go.”

Prior to selling the building, the Council had closed the sports hall due to a leaking roof, but wouldn’t allow the Trust to fix it until they owned the property. Now, with a refurbished roof and floor, and a lick of paint, the hall is once again proving hugely popular with locals. “It’s a major attraction, everybody was desperate for it to re-open,” says Janette. “Not just for sporting activities but also for community events.”

Three years and much hard work later, the Trust has been victorious in saving the Civic Centre for public use. What would they say to other organisations hoping to have a similar impact in their own community?

“Do your research and visit as many centres as you can who have been through the same process,” says Janette. “And hear about the pitfalls, don’t just look for the good news. We visited a number of groups who had done amazing things and got great advice – that really helped us.”



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Janette McGowan

Tullibody Community Development Trust

www.tullibodycdt.org.uk

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