

Dunblane's Braeport Centre demonstrates how it's done

Dunblane Development Trust's bid to take the Town's Braeport Centre into community ownership was boosted recently when the project was chosen to be one of eight Demonstration Projects in Scotland. The Projects are examining different approaches to the transfer of assets from local councils to community groups.

Dunblane's Braeport Centre has fulfilled many functions over the past 100+ years. When it closed in 1964, it was a primary school. Today it is a popular and well used community facility run by volunteer members of the Dunblane Development Trust (DDT) - a charitable company which aims to improve life for the people of Dunblane.

DDT currently leases the Braeport Centre from Stirling Council and has funded a range of minor improvements but inevitably, the building will require substantial investment in repairs, maintenance and services if it is to be fit for purpose into the future. The Centre also offers significant potential for improving the existing facilities, for example by extending it to provide additional space for a small meeting room, a café with a modern kitchen and toilets. However none of these improvements will be possible unless the Centre is transferred into community ownership.

The present lease will expire at the end of 2010 and there is some uncertainty as to the Council's longer term plans for the building after that date. This prompted DDT in 2009 to register a community interest in the Centre under the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003. The Trust's application was successful, which means that, should the Council opt to sell the building, the Trust will now have an opportunity to buy it for the community.

DDT and the Council are now working together to investigate the possibility of transferring ownership of the building to community ownership. This will be undertaken through the Council's established *Less than Best Value Disposal Policy and Procedures*. To secure the transfer, DDT will have to develop a business plan for the Centre and undertake a survey of community facilities and user groups in Dunblane to prove the need for the Braeport Centre. And since a 30 year maintenance plan will be drawn up, a technical survey of the building will also be required.

For help with this undertaking and with the support of Stirling Council, DDT turned to a Scottish Government funded programme called *Promoting Asset Transfer*. The programme aims to increase understanding and awareness of the benefits and risks associated with the transfer of assets from local authorities to community organisations.

As a demonstration project, DDT will receive some funding and the time and expertise of a consultant to assist them with carrying out the surveys, developing a business plan, negotiating with the Council and communicating with the wider Dunblane community.

'This is a great opportunity' said Lawrie Dewar, one of DDT's board members, 'there is a great deal of work involved in a community group taking over such an old property - and we need all the help we can get. Becoming a Demonstration Project will help us to achieve our objective of securing an exciting future for the centre. We want a building that meets the needs of the 21st rather than the 19th Century.'

Ends

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