

Peebles Community Trust – Annual Report 2017/18

Another busy year for the PCT – consultants working on the viability assessment of our proposals for community use of parts of the March Street Mills site; development of our ideas for a community operated coworking space in Peebles; and further efforts to secure funding for a PCT manager and office. But the outcomes have been mixed.

- ❑ We have a positive viability assessment, which puts us in a strong position for future progress in this initiative, but only if and when we can secure the interest of the owners or a future buyer of the site to discuss a sale. We are some way off this at present.
- ❑ In respect of the coworking space, we have made considerable progress in defining what we want and don't want from such a space, but efforts to secure space to try out this concept (well tested in urban locations, but not in a rural / small town environment) are reliant on external funding, which we have been unsuccessful with so far.
- ❑ And likewise in our efforts to put in place a funded full-time manager for the PCT to drive its programme forward, and to balance out some of the weaknesses of over-reliance on a part-time and intermittent volunteer base drawn from already heavily committed individuals.

But not to despair; as can be quickly seen from listing of the PCT many positive achievements (see Annex 1 to this report) we have much to celebrate and be proud of. For the coming year we need to consolidate our efforts around just a few projects – see details at Annex 2. We also need to become better at making use of those resources we can call on – primarily volunteers from amongst our membership. In the short-term we would like to encourage members (and other supporters) to get behind those projects of particular interest to them – by offering their services and/or joining the relevant project working group. If you are interested, please make contact with us.

Achievements and challenges

Securing funding for a base and a full-time support worker: Despite considerable success in securing grant funding towards a number of PCT priority initiatives and projects, the PCT has been much less successful in its efforts to strengthen the core systems and functions of the organisation through the funding of a paid anchor person and a PCT base. Over the last eighteen months the PCT has been unsuccessful in five funding applications directed to this end. Relying on part-time and intermittent volunteer resources to facilitate and push forward the work programme of the PCT is now proving a major restraint on the work of the PCT, and securing funding to support a full-time position remains a priority, and challenge, for the PCT.

March Street Mill re-development viability assessment: Efforts to build the case for the purchase and repurposing of part of the March Street Mills site have progressed well. However, the Working Group for this initiative comprises three Steering Group members only; additional volunteers to the Working Group are being sought. The report from consultants has been broadly positive, with clear demonstration of demand for an enterprise incubator and training centre, and a strong financial case in support of the proposals. Matters are currently stalled pending adjudication of the application by the site owners for Planning Permission in Principle (mainly for housing) currently before the SBC Planning Committee (due to be discussed in March 2018). But even then, unless the site owners or whoever eventually purchases the site is prepared to sell parts of the site to the community, there are limited options open to the community.

Registration of Community Right to Buy (CRtB): One possibility is to register a community right to buy – either for the Admin Building and surrounds and the area of the current allotments, or for the site as a whole. We have been advised that the process of establishing such registration requires the commitment of significant resources – administrative and footwork (collecting signatures) – and to date the PCT has not been able to assemble the level of volunteer resources to tackle this.

MMM Allotments: As part of the above initiative, for which the PCT has secured support (financial and advisory) from the Scottish Land Fund preparatory to launching an application to the Fund in actually purchasing parts of the site, the PCT is championing the transfer of ownership of the allotments into community ownership. The MMM allotment association has also been robustly establishing and promoting its interests in this regard, and is working alongside the PCT to bring about such a transfer. Its priorities are to retain the allotments in their current location, and to seek the transfer of ownership of the allotments to the community. The association has met with SBC Councillors to make their case, and at the instigation of the site owners has met with the owners and their advisers to hear of the revised proposals for relocation of the site. The Association continues to strongly object to the relocation of the allotments.

Building partnerships for redevelopment of the MMM: The PCT has met with Eildon Housing to discuss possible opportunities for, and interest in, cooperation in respect of development of affordable housing / care facilities on the March Street Mills site. Discussions have been positive, albeit recognising that the (high) costs of buying, demolishing and decontaminating the site represent a significant disincentive to any potential purchaser and developer of the site, which would put the Housing Association off taking the initiative in promoting such a development. Clearly this is a situation not lost on the site owners – who have taken the position that the site cannot be realistically developed unless they and any future site owner is let off paying a developer contribution, including contributions to affordable housing, and to schools and roads infrastructures. The PCT (and many others) are strongly opposed to any relaxing of developer contribution requirements.

Coworking space / enterprise incubator: For the last 2½ years the PCT has been participating in the CAN DO PLACES initiative (<http://www.candoplaces.org/>), funded by the Scottish government as part of its Can Do Innovation Challenge. Through this we have shared experience with over twenty other communities across Scotland through a series of workshops, seminars and visits, and the production of a short video on the work of the PCT. A particular focus of this work has been the creation of an environment in which businesses can thrive and new businesses can develop, with a particular focus on building shared business spaces (offering affordable opportunities to explore and show-case new business formats) and coworking spaces (supported spaces to build and encourage new small businesses through collaborative efforts).

Through this we have formed particular linkage with initiatives in Crieff (Crieff Community Trust) and Falkirk (Falkirk Delivers – Business Improvement District). We continue to work closely together, including organising a meeting with John Swinney in March 2017, the originator of the Can Do Innovation Challenge, and then Deputy First Minister and Minister for Finance and Cabinet Secretary for Finance, Constitution and Economy, to press for increased support for town centre regeneration. In a follow-up we are scheduled to meet with Keith Brown, Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work, in February this year to press the case for continued support.

Through our work to acquire the former administration building on the March Street Mills site we developed the concept of a community owned and operated coworking space at the core of business proposal and viability assessment for the site (examined by consultants funded a Stage 1 grant from the Scottish Land Fund). As part of the development of the business case for this venture we participated in the first training course organised by the Coworking Accelerator Network, another initiative supported by the Scottish Government. This two-day event was organised by Edinburgh-based coworking venture The Melting Pot, and facilitated by local and international facilitators. The course focused on the practicalities of setting up this type of business, drawing in particular on the 13 years of hands-on experience (including its ups and downs) of The Melting Pot.

Given that it will be some time, at best, before a coworking space can be developed on the March Street Mills site, we did try to get a less ambitious proof of concept project established, by hiring locally available space (we had been in discussion with Gary Rennie at the Old School Business Centre (the former Halyrude School) about taking on one of his larger rooms) but were unsuccessful in securing the full funding package to take this forward. We plan to try again in the coming year.

Membership: Membership is up, though we have not yet established a more straightforward means of collecting annual subscriptions (currently door to door collection). This is an area where we are keen to secure additional volunteer input.

Communication systems: We have strengthened our use of electronic communications media, with establishment of a PCT Facebook page, upgrading and remodelling of the website (underway), and improved familiarity with use of MailChimp (email lists and newsletters) and Survey Monkey (questionnaires / feedback). Our communications still fall far short of ambition, but the key constraint is shortage of volunteer manpower. Again, additional volunteer input is sought.

Mobilising the considerable volunteer resources amongst the membership and within the community: The Action Points emerging from preparation of the Town Action Plan provide clear guidance on what needs to be done, and which points are within the sphere of interest of the PCT. Nonetheless, the PCT remains very limited in what it has the capacity to advance using the very limited manpower resources available. Stimulating increased involvement of the PCT membership and securing of commitment of time and expertise to the action programme is now **THE** major constraint to further growth of the PCT.

Food for thought – our ambitions continue to fall way outside our capacity to take any, let alone all, of these forward at this given time.

If you would like to talk through any of the above, please contact our secretary on myriam@PeeblesCommunity.org, or phone 01721 729839.

Annex 1 – Progress since establishment

The Peebles Community Trust (PCT) was setup in Sept 2012, and has moved from strength to strength. Years run from March to February – key milestones are:

2017/18	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• preliminary discussions with Forest Enterprise Scotland for the acquisition by the community of Esheils Wood, a 10 acre wood located between part of the Peebles Cardrona multi-use path and the Tweed River, including securing of £5k funding towards developing the business case for management as a forest and outdoor training facility, and leisure and recreational space• continuation of cooperation with community initiatives in Crieff and Falkirk as part of the CAN DO PLACES project to re-energise town centre economies and create CAN DO coworking spaces• participation in a two-day training workshop organised by The Melting Pot Edinburgh and the Coworking Accelerator Network, a Scottish Government funded initiative, offering support to Scottish based community groups looking to set up coworking spaces• completion of a viability assessment of PCT proposals for acquisition and re-purposing of the former March Street Mills administrative building and surrounds as a community owned business incubator and training centre
2016/17	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• re-drafting and adoption of the PCT Company Articles to bring them into conformity with the Community Empowerment and Land Reform bills, using the some of the DTAS grant and additional financial assistance from the Peebles Common Good Found• responses to various planning consultations to promote community interests and advance the town priorities established in the TAP and the draft Whole Town Action Plan – notably SESplan II, the LDP, the Supplementary Guidance on Housing and significant individual planning applications• continued participation community mentoring initiative, now rebranded as CAN DO PLACES – including preparation of a short video on Peebles and the PCT aspirations to develop a community hub on part of the March Street Mills site• various community engagement initiatives – including a very successful community oriented questionnaire survey – to gauge local interest in the PCT acquiring part of the March Street Mills site to establish a community / enterprise hub, and secure the transfer of the allotments into community ownership• securing £22,000 of Stage 1 funding from the Big Lottery / Scottish Land Fund to contract consultants to develop the business case for acquisition of the part of the March Street Mills site preparatory to raising a Stage 2 application to the Scottish Land Fund for most of the funds towards purchase of the relevant land and buildings• business consultants and the services of an architect have been contracted, and

	<p>work is underway – due for completion early April</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• participation in community mentoring initiative Can Do Towns focusing on promoting town regeneration and developing co-working spaces
2013/14	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• start-up support from an Awards for All grant of £5,000 – public engagement, build membership, equipment, establish Peebles Community website

Annex 2 – Work programme

The key actions points that are on the table for the PCT are:

TAP Action Point	actions taken / not taken	importance	likelihood of progress
establish Peebles “Town Team”	need to secure funding to rent premises, and ideally to fund a lead facilitator	😊😊😊😊	😞😞😞😞
taking forward the Town Action Plan	some action points being progressed, but need for dedicated facilitator to make connections to other organisations / institutions to progress others	😊😊😊	😊😞😞
ensure the March Street Mills site remains an economic asset to the town	the PCT has responded to the application by the site owners for Planning Permission in Principle for re-development of the site with two submissions to Scottish Borders Council planners – on 12th Mar 2017 and 15th Jan 2018, and raised concerns about the over-preponderance of housing in the proposals in submissions to consultations on the SBC Supplementary Guidance on Housing and the Main Issues Report on the next Local Development Plan	😊😊😊	😊😞😞
actively encourage businesses to locate in Peebles	the only available business premises currently available in Peebles are on the High Street – at high rentals; there are no premises available for larger businesses, and there is next to no provision for economic land in forward plans as any available land is sanctioned for yet more housing; the PCT has been making representations to planners and economic development officers – through the TAP and Whole Town Plan and through consultations, but so far to little effect; against this background, promotion of the town as a business location has limited merit until the authorities support a coherent and viable plan for strengthening the Peebles economy, including allocation of space	😊😊😊	😞😞😞
establishing a co-working space / enterprise incubator	this is already one of the proposals for re-development of the former MMM admin building, but since this is some years off, an earlier and less ambitious proof of concept start-up is proposed in town; considerable headway has already been made through participation in the CAN DO PLACES and Coworking Accelerator Network initiatives, but	😊😊😊	😊😊😞

	further progress requires the formation of a group of project champions		
establish a Peebles Network of Businesses	mainly needs application of volunteer effort – to build data-base and to organise networking events	😊😊😊	😊😞😞
completion of the Peebles Whole Town Master Plan	need to secure funding for professional support to achieve completion	😊😊😊	😞😞😞
protect and enhance the landscape setting of the town	consistent responses to planning consultations, plus strategic planning through TAP and Whole Town Master Plan, making positive impact	😊😊😊	😊😊😊

Annex 3 – 2017/18 Steering Group members

The Board of the Peebles Community Trust now stands as follows:

name	skills area	status	register of interests
David Pye (Chair)	Independent Financial Advisor,	business owner / exec	Board of Scottish Border Homes; Treasurer Peebles Rugby Club
Myriam Baete (Secretary)	company administrator, bee keeper,	retired	apiary manager – Newbattle bee-keeping education project
Crick Carleton	resource economist & management consultant,	entrepreneur /semi-retired	principal of international development economics consultancy
Joe Wilton	former medical practitioner,	retired	Board Member of Tweedgreen, Chair of Tweeddale Wood Fuel Group
John Swanson	former marine superintendent, oil & gas,	retired	Community Councillor (co-opted – resilience team)
Steve Dubé	writer and editor	retired	projects officer, Peebles Civic Society
Lawrie Hayworth	community enterprises, community care	retired	chair Community Council; third sector / social enterprise mentor
Mike Boyd	IT and digital design, enterprise development	young entrepreneur	former Edinburgh University resident young entrepreneur
Ross Lowe	printing industry & associated trades	employee	road safety, pedestrian access - especially for the disabled
Ian Mewett	former Community Councillor	retired	chair of MMM Allotments Association
Ruth Noble	environmental education practitioner	freelance worker	outdoor education for young people; Tweedgreen
Anna Lawrence	former Community Councillor	consultant	forestry consultant & honorary professor of forestry, UHI