

Rousay, Egilsay & Wyre – Community Engagement Sessions – The Pier Project

Report compiled by Alan Jones Associates for Rousay, Egilsay & Wyre Development Trust

Introduction & Overview

Alan Jones Associates were appointed by Rousay, Egilsay and Wyre Development Trust to undertake a community consultation around the future use(s) of the Pier Building. The building was purchased by the Trust, and following the end of an existing tenancy, the Trust sought to understand the community's views and priorities in order that the space can be effectively used, whilst ensuring it remains financially and operationally viable.

This report presents the findings of both the community survey (undertaken towards the end of 2020) and the Community Meetings held in December 2021, concluding key findings and recommendations for the Trust.

As a result of the Covid-19 restrictions brought into place across this contract, there was a longer than planned wait between the online (and hard copy) survey, and the Community meetings. Whilst this was unavoidable, the following impacts are noted as part of this report and its recommendations:

- In noting that there was considerable contention around the relationship between the Trust and the previous tenant, it is possible that with two years having passed, the feedback was less influenced by the emotions behind this, and more focused towards possible future uses of the building, however, this may also have been partially as a result of the introduction to the meetings, at which point attendees were advised that the objectives were to look forward and consider uses.
- In the time between the survey and the meetings, there were significant undertakings around heritage provision in the area, most notably the heritage centre at the pier. As such, the survey feedback around quality of heritage, and any survey comments around improving or providing heritage are no longer relevant.
- The impact of Covid 19 and associated measures, in particular around banned indoor mixing, amplified issues felt around lack of social meeting spaces, and the possibility of loneliness and mental health problems.
- Anecdotal evidence through the Community Meetings suggests that a number of new residents moved to the area during or between the two lock down periods.
- The economic impact of Covid 19 has highlighted the risk to businesses of changing tourist numbers. This will considerably impact any consideration of risk as part of further feasibility for the Trust when looking at options for the building.

Summary & Recommendations

In considering the Online survey results, and more recently, the 3 community discussions, the following key points are noted:

- There is a strong desire to see the building reinstated to service the Community – in particular to allow people to meet and socialise, to combat loneliness, and to support the sense of Community that is felt lacking on the Island.
- There is a consensus amongst the Community that they would like to see something done soon, and that the provision of something quickly would be priority over the development of a larger scale project that would inherently take a number of years. It was however noted that on a pragmatic point of view, this may require the Trust to deliver both a short-term option, and a larger long-term vision.
- The most popular option discussed would be a café, although views on the scale and scope of this were varied. Suggestions around a self-service or partially / volunteer staffed operations were cited with mixed views. This may support the suggested provision of short / medium term temporary operations.
- The need for financial sustainability was widely recognised, however a number of attendees' views were optimistic in the current economic environment. Notwithstanding this, options for additional revenue generating use of space were welcomed by the majority of attendees – these may include personal services, ad-hoc shops, etc.
- The provision for visitors is a key priority for the community, however, should be complementary to the needs of the community.
- The Community is concerned by the length of time that has passed so far with this project, even with the consideration of Covid. Some have noted that this relates more to insufficient communication.
- There is a sense of consultation fatigue, and as such the Trust should be cautious in any consideration around approaching the community for further feedback on this project.

As a result, the following recommendations are made for the Trust's consideration:

- **Recommendation 1:** It is recommended that the Trust undertake all appropriate building and structural surveys required to understand any issues and works that would be required for future public use.
- **Recommendation 2:** It is recommended that the Trust undertake a full feasibility study to investigate the options below, building on the above Technical Survey work and this consultation exercise, with an assessment of financial and operational feasibility around one or a combination of the following key options:
 - The development of a Café to serve the community and visitors to the area
 - Listing the building as a commercial opportunity for the private operation of a café or restaurant.
 - The incorporation of revenue generating space for pop up / ad-hoc businesses and services to support the community.
 - All structural work required to allow public use of the building, or, if determined, the feasibility of developing a new build on site in order to deliver the appropriate combination of functions above.
- **Recommendation 3:** It is recommended that the Trust seeks the appropriate advice to determine its constitutional capability to operate the facilities required by the community, and where appropriate, make any constitutional changes to support this.
- **Recommendation 4:** Noting the Community's expressed concern over timescales, it is recommended that the Trust look at options for short- and medium-term operation on the site – using either part of the building if possible, and/or temporary accommodation or outdoor space. This should provide a community meeting space whilst also benefiting visitors to the island during the tourist season. For a short-term option – considerations around “self-

service” or volunteer-based activities could be considered. This may also include signage or site hoarding to improve the aesthetics, in particular noting the concerns around visitors’ “first impressions”.

- **Recommendation 5:** Noting the Community’s perception that communication from the Trust could be improved, the Trust should assess its current communication channels and identify how best to keep the Island residents apprised of developments on an on-going basis.

Community Meetings December 2021

Overview

Four community meetings were scheduled for the weekend of 11th and 12th December 2021. These were hosted by and promoted by the Trust, with a requirement to book spaces at each event. It is noted that should anyone turn up without a booking, they would have been allowed to take part as long as the capacity and Covid secure processes could still be met.

Three of the meetings attracted a high level of interest, whilst the Saturday evening meeting had no attendees and as such was cancelled. There was a request for a follow-up meeting to consult a resident of Eglisay, this was offered by Alan Jones Associates as a Zoom session, but subsequently declined.

Structure

Each meeting followed the same structure in order to best encourage open discussion and feedback. These were structured as follows:

- Introductions (5 mins)
- Short presentation to outline the purpose of the session and present the findings over the initial survey. (10 mins)
- Open discussion chaired by consultant with the key prompts below on screen:
 - What would you like to see the building used for and why?
 - How often would you use it?
 - Has Covid and the associated restrictions changed your view on the possible building usage?
 - What are your main concerns in moving forward with the project?
 - Do you have any further comments to add?

Meeting Notes

Meeting 1: Saturday 11th December 2021 2pm

Number of attendees: 10

- It was confirmed by the Trust that the findings of the initial survey (presented) were available on their website, and that when this is updated to include the findings from these sessions, they will also be shared.
- A positive discussion was had around the need for a café on the island. It was noted that the RSPB centre on North Ronaldsay was a good model for considering, noting that the third party (RSPB) was the primary focus of the centre, but allowed for a café to run alongside – this was beneficial to the community as well as visitors.
- The café would be a focal point for those coming off the ferry.

- It was agreed that the café was previously the heart of the community and proved really important for incomers to the island, allowing them to meet new people and find out about the community before and after moving.
- Discussion was had around how Covid made things even harder for current and new residents, increasing the issues with loneliness – in particular, when people could meet in public cafés etc but not in private houses.
- Frustration was expressed at the length of time taken to move anything forward with the project, and a concern that the level of importance to the community was not recognised.
- It was noted that one incoming family has already left the island, with a thought that this was in part due to the lack of things to do, and places to meet.
- Discussion was held around the need for things to move forward quickly, and the community feeling had changed through the lack of a central meeting point. The community needed something decisive and definite to look forward to.
- It was suggested that the priority would be to create a relaxing and welcoming environment.
- In terms of inclusion within the space, it was suggested that a craft space, space for clubs etc would be good, and that providing space for various regular services (such as vet clinics) would benefit the community and potentially generate operational revenue.
- In terms of newcomers to the islands and visitors, it was noted that the previous café was key for people to meet new people, and to learn about the island, the community and other businesses, services, heritage etc.
- A discussion was held around the option of having a simplified offering – either permanently or as a stop gap solution whilst a longer-term vision is investigated. This may include an honesty box and self-service set up alongside a social public space that can be used like a café. One attendee highlighted a similar set up on Eglisay that they felt really added to the provision on that island.
- An attendee noted the likelihood of further requirements around ventilation as an ongoing result of Covid-19 and changes to the regulation.
- It was agreed that, in addition to the comments earlier around services etc, the provision of pop-up shops would be a possible inclusion in the facility.
- It was suggested that the provision of laundry and shower facilities are considered – both to provide for visitors on boats, but also for the community to support those who may be awaiting urgent repairs etc.
- A discussion was had around the impact on mental health as a result of having no clear social focal point on the island, and that the former facility, regardless of the conflicting views around its operation, provided this service.
- It was noted that the restarting of clubs and groups has been slow, and that restrictions around the school use have only just lifted. It was also agreed that for some groups, the school was suitable but not ideal.
- It was noted that the previous set up (as a pub) demonstrated precedent for a facility to be successful, but it was acknowledged that changes to legislation, licensing, minimum wages etc may impact the costs of running a business comparatively.
- An attendee requested that the Trust look at secure bike parking – it was noted the Trust was in the process of working with the local authority to fund and provide new shelters. It was agreed that the design of a community space should welcome and consider cyclists.
- The suitability of the existing building was discussed, and it was noted that the Trust had plans to carry out the relevant surveys. These would help determine the feasibility for possible use, or whether a new build would be more suitable. This would also investigate the oil spill that has damaged the boreholes.
- Following from the above, it was clear from the whole room that urgency would be a priority and that the community would like to see something in place, even if temporary, whilst the

project is developed. It was suggested that temporary accommodation such as good quality portacabin structures might allow a quicker solution in the meantime.

- The improvements to the heritage centre were noted – indicating that some of the survey results in relation to heritage provision are now outdated. It was also noted that the Trust should avoid duplication of provision in that regard.
- There was a consensus in the room that the community would like to feel that they are kept better up to date than currently.
- It was noted that there are capacity issues on the ferry, but there is little that can be done by the Trust.
- Following the above, it was cautioned that the infrastructure needs to support the island and residents before visitors, although visitors and visitor numbers are still very important.

Meeting 2: Saturday 11th December 2021 4pm

Number of attendees: 8

- It was noted that an initial thought would be whether the Trust offices would relocate to the facility. An attendee asked if this was still being considered. It was noted that this was an option on the table but only if it made sense in relation to available space, and community need. It was agreed that the functions of space required for the community should take priority. It was also noted that there would be financial considerations around moving the offices that may or may not benefit the Trust, and therefore allow greater investment in the community, but this would need to be further investigated.
- An attendee noted that the site is the asset, and their view was that the building should go / be replaced. They felt that there needs to be a café where people can go to during the day.
- A number of attendees agreed that a café / meeting space was the priority, and that all spaces available should be used to maximise the feasibility of the building. It was discussed that having nowhere to meet was impacting the health and wellbeing of island residents, in particular following the Covid restrictions.
- It was highlighted that the children's space within the previous café, and in other locations is extremely useful, and should be replicated / considered in the building.
- It was agreed that the pier lacked a public facility or community space and this impacted the sense of pride in the island, in particular towards those coming off the ferry by car, on foot or by bike.
- It was pointed out that the previous café would provide meals for residents that didn't cook, and so a lighter / self-service offering may not meet that need.
- It was noted that the provision of a more functioning café would allow employment and support the residents on the island.
- There was a concern that facilities on the island are already underused and this should be considered in relation to the financial feasibility of a new community space.
- It was stated that "Anything would be better than what's there now" and that there needs to be work on the aesthetic around the building, even if it's not open.
- The group was informed that the school roll had risen significantly and was set to continue doing so. This suggested a greater need for community space that suited children's clubs and activities.
- Following from the above, it was suggested that teenagers need a place to go to or a youth club. Whilst there was general agreement, it was cautioned that many teenagers stay in Kirkwall through the week.
- It was suggested that the space could encourage archaeology groups and tours, noting the significant heritage on the island.
- An attendee highlighted that the craft shop was handy for last minute gifts, cards etc and that options on the island are limited.

- It was highlighted that there are talented people on the island who have lost a space to showcase this and to generate money.
- It was suggested that any facility uses the wall space for local art, drawings, photos etc.
- It was agreed that some ad-hoc services may be welcome to help support the community and to generate revenue in the facility.
- The need to undertake the appropriate building surveys was raised and it was noted that these are planned by the Trust in 2022.
- There were concerns raised around providing a limited or “lite” option, noting that people might be disappointed and there may be little difference in staying at home or visiting people’s homes.

Meeting 3: Sunday 12th December 12pm

Number of attendees: 10

- The North Isles Landscape Partnership Scheme (NILPS) signage initiative was noted as underway and appropriate.
- Questions were asked around the suitability of the building, with the Trust advising the surveys will be undertaken in 2022. One attendee suggested the best way forward was to demolish it and start again.
- Discussion was had around elements of the building that may not be up to building standards, and issues around the current drainage and blocked bore holes.
- It was suggested that temporary accommodation may be a solution to provide a facility or service whilst a new building is developed. It was noted that a new build would take a number of years from feasibility, through funding, to construction and handover. It was also asked whether the survey could look at the option to use part of the building in the meantime.
- An attendee highlighted that we have lost a year already in relation to visitors and tourism and so any partial or temporary solution would be welcome ahead of the summer.
- It was highlighted that a temporary or partial provision would help to determine what worked and what didn’t, and further evidence a larger scale project.
- The importance of tourism was discussed and agreed, although it was accepted that the ambition for growing numbers would need to be cautioned with the capacity of ferries etc.
- Tourism would potentially allow a business such as a café to remain viable over 12 months, with the tourist season subsidising the quieter months.
- It was commented that the building currently gives a bad impression for those coming off the ferry / arriving on the island. Having a community café or other public space / business would allow people to get recommendations, local information, directions etc.
- In considering other supporting services and ad-hoc usage, there would need to be supporting transport for those island residents that cannot drive / do not drive.
- It was noted that the potential for tourist charter over and above the regular ferries would create a further market for any café or service.
- An attendee highlighted the needs of private yachts who arrive at the island and have little / no services. There was a suggestion to include laundry / showers etc. It was noted that a public shower exists at the harbour currently.
- It was noted that the lack of provisions and services could seriously damage tourism on the island with sites and services such as TripAdvisor being key to people’s decision-making and plans.
- There was an agreement that a multi-use space for various services to be scheduled would be useful and could help to generate revenue, but would have to be considered in the context of how much space there was, and how the rest of the building was being operated. The need for a café / meeting space would be a priority.

- It was highlighted that the school numbers had significantly increased, and that a number of families had moved to the island over the last two years. This would suggest there might be a need to consider childcare, in particular noting that the nursery is over capacity.
- A discussion was had around the option for self-service – an option that had been suggested in a previous meeting. There were divided opinions on whether the self-service model would be appreciated or used.
- Discussions were had around the extent to which the Trust could trade as a café / shop or restaurant. The definition of “not-for-profit” was clarified but it was noted that the Trust would ultimately need to take legal or constitutional advice as part of further feasibility work, should it look to operate a café. It was highlighted that precedence exists in other charities throughout Scotland.
- One attendee felt the Trust should sell the building as there was too much bad feeling in the community, a number of others highlighted that doing so would just further lengthen any outcome or use of the building.
- It was noted that the previous restaurant was successful and a heart of the community, and only closed as the owners retired.
- It was suggested that the building be offered to lease on the open market, testing the viability of any commercial partner. This would allow the Trust to take an income from rental, and lower the risk of operating the business.
- In considering the above, it was cautioned that the hotel is for sale, with minimal interest.
- It was suggested that if the above is considered, some space is still kept for community use and this could be written into part of the agreement.
- It was suggested that a commercial operation would require accommodation to attract any interest.
- Concerns were raised as to whether a commercial venture would be viable or attractive, but it was realised that offering it to the open market would determine this through level of interest (or not).
- A number of attendees were against it being used for office space.
- There was a suggestion that a library of heritage resources could be included but noted that this is similar to the heritage space. A physical archive was also suggested similar to those found in Kirkwall, but limitations on space were also noted.
- A positive discussion was held around the potential for hot desking space, should additional rooms or space be available.

REWDT Response to the Consultant's Report

Our Board is committed to the following next steps:

- We are facilitating a new volunteer Task Force specifically to help us with Recommendation 2 in the consultant's report (feasibility study and review of long-term options). We will be announcing more details about this shortly.
- We are investigating short-term measures for facilitating community events and activities which make use of existing community venues not managed by the Trust, or, if necessary and possible, areas of The Pier site and building. This may include, for example, the 'Old Shop' area of The Pier building, or a short-term structure on The Pier site, but we will need to bear in mind the financial cost, and the impact on any future development of the site, as well as the ongoing surveys related to the oil leak, which may prohibit certain areas from being used at times.
- We will be launching our new Community Kickstart Grant shortly, please look out for further announcements in due course.
- We are making progress on rectifying the oil leak with the insurer and contractor.
- We are investigating a connection to the mains water supply at the site.
- We are committed to keeping the community up to date with progress on this project, as well as providing further opportunities for members of the community to share their ideas and views.

We look forward to continuing to work with the community on the long-term plans for the project. In the meantime, we have identified some short-term solutions which can be implemented and adapted relatively quickly. This does not mean that other ideas cannot be considered and put in place as part of the short-term measures; new suggestions will always be welcome. We also recognise that short-term solutions cannot solve all of the problems identified during the consultation exercise, but we will do our best with our limited resources and the short timescale.