

MAUCHLINE CONSERVATION AREA REGENERATION SCHEME (CARS)

REVIEW UPDATE

SMART CONSULTANCY

MAY 2025



East Ayrshire Council
Comhairle Siorrachd Àir an Ear



**HISTORIC
ENVIRONMENT
SCOTLAND**

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1. Background and process

Mauchline Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) is a heritage led regeneration scheme for Mauchline which will run until March 2026. The scheme is funded by Historic Environment Scotland and East Ayrshire Council and will provide property owners within the Mauchline Conservation Area with the opportunity to apply for grant funding for building repairs, re-instatement of architectural detail, and shop front improvements. It also includes a range of supporting educational and training activities, and a series of Public Realm works. A further summary of CARS was included in the initial report. This is replicated in appendix 1 for ease of access.

Smart Consultancy was commissioned by CARS (via East Ayrshire Council) in early 2024 to undertake an evaluation of the project. This will involve work in a series of stages until the anticipated end of the scheme in March 2026. This report represents the mid-point second phase of this work following an initial interim report finalised in July 2024. It primarily updates on progress from early summer 2024 to end March 2025, picking up on some of the key issues identified last year.

Evaluation work will conclude in the spring of 2026 with the preparation of a full final evaluation report. This will include a review of all qualitative and quantitative information collated on the project – assessed against the Theory of Change and Evaluation Framework contained in the initial report. It will tell the full ‘story’ of CARS, and support this with a series of ‘before and after’ pictures of works undertaken. The final report will conclude with suggested recommendations on what the CARS experience may mean for further related developments in the town.

Initial interim report key findings

The initial report reflected a number of recurrent messages on progress to late spring 2024. These included:

- Very significant delays in progression of anticipated capital works – significantly due to Covid, but also for a variety of other reasons;
- Consequential changes in projected CARS spend profile – but within a context the overall budget remained largely committed;

- Understandable community disillusionment from the apparent lack of development progress, and the need to manage community expectations in this context;
- Some more tangible progress on public realm works;
- Significant progress across the non-building' aspects of CARS – education, training, policy development etc;
- Perceptions on a lack of clarity and functions of the CARS community Steering Group.

From these messages, potential immediate actions identified were to:

1. Consider a new programme of community engagement and communications to update the local community on positive progress, and address disillusionment.
2. Identify some visible 'quick wins' which can be delivered to support new community engagement.
3. Review the role of, and need to continue the Steering Group, and if continued draft and agree new terms of reference.
4. Seek further negotiation with HES on grant payback arrangements if these threaten some of the planned future work programme.

2. Project update and spend (April 2024 – March 2025)

The interim report summarised progress across all CARS action areas by spring 2024. This was set against the original CARS project aspirations as contained in the successful funding application to HES. As CARS has evolved, it has broadened into offering a series of linked activities.



The table overleaf summarises subsequent progress, and how things have changed in the past year.

PROJECT ELEMENT	ORIGINAL EXPECTATIONS	CHANGES AND PROGRESS APRIL 2024 – MARCH 2025
Priority Building Repair Capital Projects	At the outset, CARS was intended to support 6 priority projects that would provide grant assistance for the re-use of redundant buildings and the intensification of underused buildings, resulting in viable end uses. The proposed priority buildings were: • Abbot Hunter's Tower (Mauchline Castle) – A listed. • 8 Loudoun Street (Gavin Hamilton's House) – A listed. • 8 Loudoun Street (Old Bakery) (red sandstone building). • 21 Loudoun Street (Poosie Nansie's) – B Listed. • 3 High Street (Home of John Richmond)- B Listed. • 8-12 Earl Grey Street (Mauchline & District Kilmaronock FC Supporters Club).	2 developments potentially progressing 4 projects in total continue to progress. Poosie Nansie's (21 Loudoun Street) – elemental costings received by owner, currently reviewing which direction they would like to proceed with. Due to budget constraints MCARS are also reviewing which aspects of the project would be priority to instruct as “essential”. This direction is in an effort to ensure we have a sufficient contingency in place in the event the works reveal additional repairs as experienced elsewhere in the project. Mauchline Castle Estate (8 Loudoun Street - Gavin Hamilton's House, Old Bakery, Abbot Hunter's Tower) – meeting held with owner to request instruction and payment of fees. 2 potential previous projects will not now progress. Mauchline District Kilmaronock Supporters Club – due to lack of client resource and funding, staffing changes and limited contact. Despite significant efforts by CARS the risk of progressing further became too great. 3 High Street – due to changes in ownership and missing owners no progression was achieved.
Small/Medium Building Grants	The original submission to HES indicated the project would deliver: • A Small Grant Scheme providing funding for building repairs to properties identified as medium/high priority;	Small/Medium Grant Schemes (Non- Priority Buildings) • Practical Completion Awarded 4 Loudoun Street • Works progressing ✓ 1 The Cross- on-going challenges experienced around roof, stone work and gable render/masonry. Additional grant requested and approved(March).

	• A Small Grant Scheme providing funding for shopfront improvements; • A Small Grant Scheme providing funding for the replacement of UPVC windows and rain water goods with wooden sash & case windows, and cast iron rainwater goods in line with guidance on energy efficiency and climate change adaptation for traditional buildings;	✓ 5 Loudoun Street- due to condition, property required full new roof and structural repairs to chimney, additional grant awarded at cabinet January 2025. Roof, render and stone works ongoing. Windows installed. Chimney ongoing. ✓ 3 Earl Grey Street- works proceeding well. Additional works to RHS chimney as structurally unsound, additional grant requested and approved (March) ✓ 17 Earl Grey Street- Works progressing well. Additional works required to roof, additional grant requested and approved (March) ✓ 39 Loudoun Street- Works progressing well. Additional works required to rain water goods. ✓ Burns House Museum (2 projects). Tender returned, EALT agreed to their revised contribution to remain within their affordability. Consequently, 8 projects continue to be advanced. 3 projects anticipated in April 2024 will not now progress: ✓ 15 Earl Grey Street – previously CARS project office, due to budget constraints the office was closed and lease terminated. As a result of this the application for grant was withdrawn by Mauchline CARS. ✓ Kays Curling Stone Factory – proposed improvement works by CARS were limited to external fabric repairs as grant eligible, owners plan to complete a wide range of improvement works internally and externally. Proposals created by Mauchline CARS will be considered by owners when progressing this project independently. ✓ 1 Earl Grey Street – due to conditions of grant, 15 Year Clawback Burden, owner withdrew from process.
Public Realm Works	The CARS application to HES indicated it would undertake a range of Public Realm Improvements and repairs to support wider regeneration and restoration objectives.	Live projects: ✓ Street Signage - phase 2 of the street signage will be installed when scaffolding is removed from the associated buildings. ✓ Cobble, Bollard & Railing Repairs - instructed via EAC Greener Communities, it is hoped these works will be completed prior to the Mauchline Holy Fair.

		✓ Historic Boundary Wall - Listed Building Consent submitted for works, all required documents issued to EAC procurement for review and to enable them to issue a tender for the works. Due to budget constraints this project will be reviewed as matters progress with the currently live projects.
Community engagement and learning projects	CARS was anticipated to deliver a Community Engagement & Education programme of activities which promote community engagement and education.	Mauchline Archaeology Scotland Projects- archaeological dig scheduled for 5th-7th June, this will be held at the historic arched entrance to Netherplace House on Loudoun Street. Mauchline Heritage App- All documents and supporting information with EAC Procurement for review, due to workload this will be progressed in April 2025.
Training projects	CARS was anticipated to deliver a series of training projects to address an identified gap in traditional building skills, These would be central to both direct capital works in the scheme, but also to ongoing maintenance. This work would also provide new training, skills and job opportunities for local people.	Mauchline CARS, with the support of The Scottish Lime Centre Trust (SLCT), produced a training programme for traditional building skills. Courses took place throughout September 2023. Further training projects will be undertaken in 2024. The 2023 Training Programme included: • Traditional Masonry Course- a week-long course at Dumfries House, learning to build solid, freestanding walls using local sandstone, all bedded and pointed up using traditional lime mortars. • Scottish Slate Roofing- a one day course providing an introductory guide to traditional Scottish roofs including function, structure, external roof shapes, typical details and decorative features, the causes of deterioration and the main causes of failure. • Traditional Joinery- this included a short history of the development of windows before looking at the different components that make up a window and the issues to consider when approaching repairs. • Traditional Signwriting - this workshop was inspired by signage and lettering, including ghost signs. Attendees learnt about the history of sign painting and the main brush strokes used in signwriting.
Volunteer projects	CARS was intended to stimulate a series of related volunteer projects.	Volunteer Projects - all documents and supporting information associated with Liza Dunlop's book "The White Monks of Melrose and Their Church at Mauchline" is with EAC Procurement for review. This will be progressed in April.

Policy Guidance and Research	In support of the planned capital works, a series of documents and guides were anticipated to support developments, and ensure these were consistent with the conservation principles of CARS.	Since March 2020 Mauchline CARS has produced a number of useful documents to support the on-going maintenance, conservation, and repair of the Mauchline Conservation Area including: • Conservation Area Management Plan (CAMP) - a complete guide regarding the management of the Conservation Area, including a framework for maintaining its special character and unique built heritage. • Gazetteer- a "snapshot in time" of every historical property within the Conservation Area and its priority grading at the time of preparing the Gazetteer. • Maintenance & Management Plan (MAMP)- a document created to support property owners maintaining their traditional properties. • Colour Palette- a specially curated colour palette representing the range of pigments available historically within Mauchline. • Materials Audit- a comprehensive analysis into the stone and mortar used across Mauchline. This will allow us to complete repairs like repointing and stone indents with the correct composition of materials. Further, policy tools have been introduced to enhance controls within the Conservation Area: ○ Article 4- The removal of some areas of permitted development to further protect the heritage of a Conservation Area. ○ Removal of Deemed Advertisement Consent- again like Article 4 this provides more control over advertisements within their setting.
Additional CARS development work	Out-with the core funding from HES and East Ayrshire Council, CARS was intended to be a mechanism to source other additional funding related to core project objective. This is relevant to both the next two years, and potentially beyond the end of the main CARS project.	Renewable Energy Fund (REF)-planters have been produced by EAC's Greener Communities, anticipated to be delivered prior to the Holy Fair. Bench Designs have been created by Jonny Burn, EAC's Graphic Designer. Designs have been shared with Greener Communities to ensure there is no technical issues in the production of these. All new street furniture now being manufactured. Place Based Improvement Programme (PBIP)- MCARS successfully gained additional funding in 2022 and 2023 to support the replacement and repair of Mauchline's street lighting. Areas to receive works were identified as Loudoun Street, Loudoun Street car park, lanes and churchyard. Following detailed surveys by ARA it was decided that works to Loudoun Street may carry unforeseen costs and exceed the allocated budget. Works to progress with

		replacement of lighting to car park and the repair, repaint and replacement of lanterns to lanes and churchyard. East Ayrshire company appointed following a comprehensive tender process and materials now in productions. Works to commence in June 2025.
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Spend projections

As of March 2025, summary spend projections on CARS are contained in the table below.

ALL EXPENDITURE HEADINGS			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£2,376,098	£1,112,921	£780,242	£474,209
PRIORITY BUILDING PROJECTS (2 PROJECTS COSTED)			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£374,098	£189,816	£93,893	£90,389
SMALL/MEDIUM BUILDING GRANTS (9 PROJECTS COSTED)			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£1,333,785	£664,605	£355,833	£313,374
PUBLIC REALM (5 PROJECTS COSTED)¹			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£138,989*	£20,000	£48,516	n/a
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND LEARNING			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£35,000	£30,000	£5,000	n/a
TRAINING AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£45,000	£40,000	£5,000	n/a
STAFF AND ADMINISTRATION COSTS			
<i>Total costs</i>	<i>HES costs</i>	<i>EAC costs</i>	<i>Owners</i>
£444,500	£168,500	£272,000	n/a

*Inc. PBIP grants £56,246.75 and REF grant £14,226.00

This projected budget is now all committed. A small contingency fund has now been utilised to support exit costs from the now discontinued Kilmarnock District Supporters Club project at 8-12 Earl Grey Street.

The budget in the table above represents a significant change from that suggested in spring 2024. The headline change is that the total guaranteed projected costs are now £2,376,098 representing an increase of c8.4 % on the earlier figure of £2,192,679. This is due to the additional unforeseen repairs required by live property projects.

In addition, a further estimated £513,950 is currently being requested from HES for the proposed priority building works at the Castle Estate. If these additional funds are secured, the total costs will rise, but more information and progress will be required before a final cost figure can be calculated. The reasons for, and implications of, the increases are considered in section 3.

¹ Balance provided by Place Based Investment Funds.

3. Key observations on progress – April 2024 to March 2025

Based on the updated information in previous sections, and various consultations conducted, a number of observations are made on the progress in the period from spring 2024 to March 2025, and what these mean for the final phase of CARS to March 2026. Some issues these reflect the continuation of some trends, whilst others are newer development.

Overall progress

CARS progress since spring 2024 is significant and visible. This was anticipated as much ground-work was in place last year. Progress, however, has remained challenging and time consuming and credit is due in particular to the Project Officer in maintaining momentum. The past year's work does not, however, fully compensate for historic problems detailed in the initial interim review report. The final scale of CARS outputs by spring 2026 will be notably reduced from initial expectations.

Capital and Public Realm projects

4 priority projects are still anticipated to be delivered, with 2 now discontinued for various reasons. 3 of the 'live' projects are part of the Castle Estate, and dependent on an additional grant from HES. Though there are some positive indications this will be forthcoming, some element of risk remains. Moreover, given the limited time left, the timing of confirmation will impact on whether these works can be delivered in the CARS period, which must end in March 2026. Ongoing challenges with the Estate owners are also a potential issue.

8 small/medium size projects are in various stages of development and projected to be complete on time. 3 have been discontinued from 2024 projections, again for a range of reasons connected to the owners.

Public realm improvements continue, and more may be possible dependent on funding - some of which has been accessed out-with mainstream CARS resources. Though smaller in scale, this work has a more immediate visual impact which may assist positive community perceptions of CARS, and 'buy time' as the completion of the major projects come to fruition.

Other CARS activities

Wider and smaller scale CARS activities, which do not involve capital works had progressed to a much greater degree by April 2024. This work is detailed in the initial review report. Further progress on these is less evident in the past year, but this is reflective on the necessary priority given to capital works. Whilst important and with impact, the relative small scale of this work needs to be recognised: it will not primarily influence final community views on CARS impact.

Costs

Projected CARS costs have increased from 2024 projections. This is despite the number of projects to be delivered reducing. In addition, full delivery of the ongoing portfolio of works will require a further HES investment. A spike in inflation (particularly in 2022/23) accounts for some of this, as do some implications of Covid. But the very dominant cause of cost increases is the identification of additional repair work identified by contractors once on site. These required increasing initial contracted costings – often by very significant amounts. The key question here is whether the real costs of work could have been better anticipated in initial survey work, without this to a degree all subsequent CARS costs became uncontrollable.

Governance

Concern on the role of the CARS steering group was noted in the initial review report, and the consequent recommendation that a formal Terms of Reference for the group be prepared was actioned in early 2025. This detailed a largely consultative rather than decision making role for the group, and clarified expectations. Preparation of this earlier in the CARS journey may have been helpful.

Managing expectations and communications

Given the delays and changes, managing community expectations and concerns has been a significant challenge for CARS, and this will remain the case until the project concludes. Frustration at lack of visible projects on the ground was understandable. CARS has tried a number of ways to communicate the reasons for delays and used social media and more traditional vehicles to do this – including quarterly newsletters

and local press activity. These cannot automatically assuage concerns as messages often could only explain rather than resolve problems. But it is difficult to see how CARS could have done more in this respect.

Wider community views on CARS have not yet been comprehensively tested. This requires to be addressed through some form of community survey work in the final evaluation process.

Explaining CARS' problems and challenges

Mauchline CARS is now in its closing phase. The next year must focus fully on maximising delivery; the budgets are committed and there is now little scope for any further development work or change. It is apparent that the legacy will be combination of good and lasting work alongside a sense that the initial aspirations for CARS have not been fully realised.

In terms of learning from the experience for future similar developments a key question must be considered: the degree to which the problems of CARS were primarily caused by misfortune and a significantly changed context that could not have been foreseen, or actions taken that in retrospect could have been anticipated and different.

The table below briefly identifies the main challenges faced by CARS, the degree to which these could or could not have been anticipated, and what could perhaps have been done differently.

Covid 19	Completely unforeseen, entirely unpredictable in its course, and of huge consequence. Credit due that any momentum in delivering CARS was maintained in this context. But also caveat that some CARS progress was already delayed before pandemic.
Ownership issues	A combination of lack of interest/commitment, property sale, and ill health (and ultimately death) of key owners. Largely unpredictable, but perhaps some greater recognition and risk register work that this needs to be flagged early given the critical importance of owners to CARS progress.

Cost increases	Much higher than anticipated inflation at key point and Covid repercussions unforeseeable. But increases due to additional work would have benefitted from more initial interrogative survey work on building conditions before scope of work and associated contracts issued. More due diligence here would assist future projects.
HES funding requirements	Apparently more significant in earlier capital projects than in past year. But HES requirements clear from outset and very unlikely to change so perhaps need to more clearly communicate and explain these in initial discussions
Extending timescales	Covid 19 clearly very significant here – building works and supplies. But also need to proof realism on some initially suggested timelines.
Community perceptions/disillusionment	To a significant degree triggered by other problems detailed. But perhaps a need to articulate more caution at project start, explain potential challenges in capital works of this nature, and the possibilities of delays. Also perhaps an option – in context of wider delays – to prioritise some visible ‘early wins’ from CARS.
Project Officer change	The initial Project officer left unexpectedly. This cannot be foreseen, but speedy replacement is important. Overall, however, this does not seem a major factor. Once in post, the new Project Officer is recognised to have picked up the challenge quickly.

4. Conclusions and next steps

This update report concludes that significant progress on the main capital and Public Realm works is evident in the year to March 2025, and much credit is due to the Project officer in progressing this despite ongoing developmental ‘head-winds’. The impact of CARS in Mauchline is now much more visible, although still very much ‘work in progress’. Subject to additional requested funding, up to 4 priority capital projects, and 8 smaller capital projects are still anticipated, alongside a range of Public Realm improvements. Other ongoing smaller scale supporting work on education, community engagement, training, and policy guidance is apparent, though this has now reduced in scale as priority development activity has correctly turned to capital projects delivery.

The past year has, however, led to a further reduction in the anticipated number of major and smaller capital projects that can now be delivered - primarily due to the unwillingness or inability of property owners to proceed. This has added to the more historic challenges CARS has experienced – most notably the implications of Covid 19. Taken together, it means that the scale of change delivered by CARS will be reduced from initial expectations.

Wider community views on CARS remain largely untested. Anecdotally, some positive change is suggested from the disillusionment leading from the lack of physical progress apparent in spring 2024. This change has been supported by a range of ongoing communication vehicles used by the project. Overall and longer-term community views on progress and impact require to be supported by more evidence, and the final evaluation process will require to more rigorously interrogate how the communities of Mauchline view the CARS experience.

Despite a reduction in capital projects, the costs of CARS have increased significantly, and these will increase further if the requested additional funding from HES is approved. A number of factors are identified as causing cost increases including Covid and a periodic spike in inflation. But the dominant reason is the need for very significant additional repairs identified by contractors when works began on site.

The role of the CARS Steering Group has now been helpfully clarified through drafting and agreeing a formal Terms of Reference. This clearly defines the role of the group as consultative rather than having any formal decision-making powers.

CARS is now entering its final delivery phase, with the project requiring to formally wind up in March 2026. This now demands an urgent focus on delivery in this period to maximise works undertaken in the CARS 'umbrella' period. It also requires consideration of a formal exit strategy from CARS, wind up of the current steering group, and consideration what longer term legacy of community engagement is retained from the CARS experience for further developments.

In terms of learning, for Mauchline and elsewhere, the final evaluation process and report will explore this further, in particular identifying what development challenges were unforeseeable and unfortunate, and what may have been avoidable based on different approaches. This should not be any attempt to apportion 'blame', but to help future projects of this nature.

The final evaluation phase will commence in early 2026, and a final report drafted by April 2026.

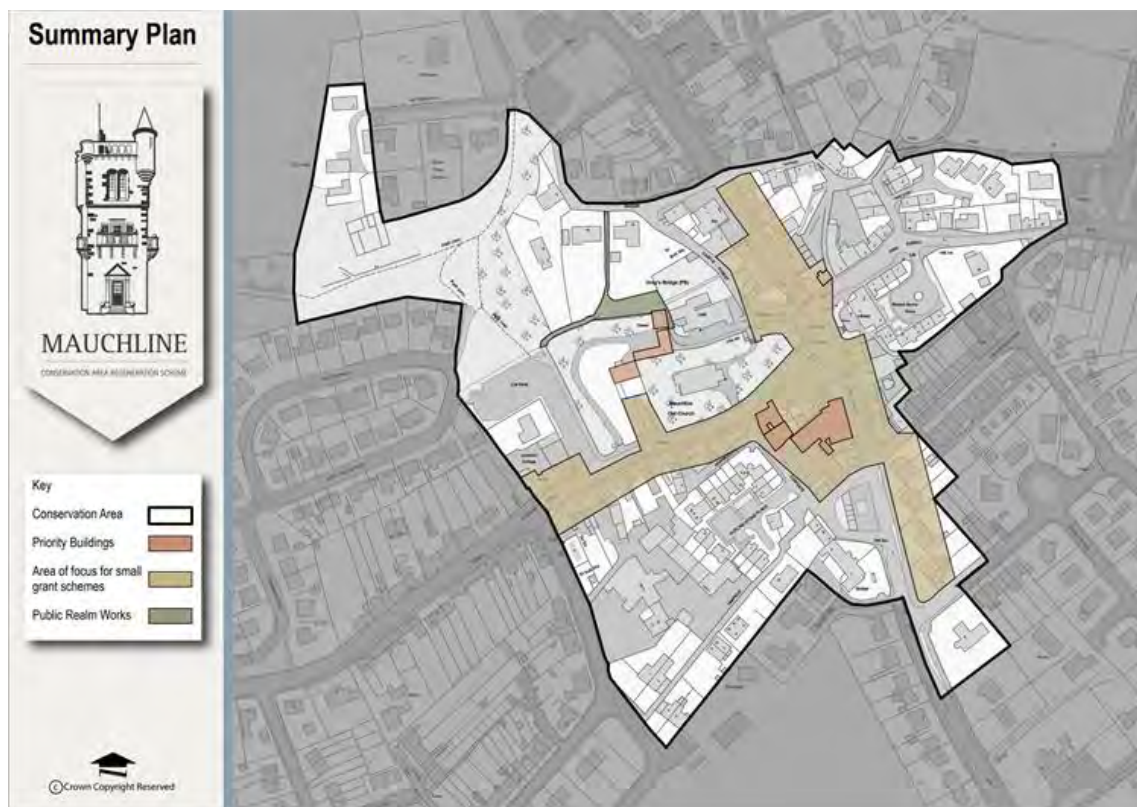
Appendix 1 - Mauchline CARS: background, aims, and principles

Origins and background

A conservation area was established in Mauchline in 1973, and revised in 2003. Based on this history, and the opportunity to establish a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) with Historic Environment Scotland (HES) investment, a Conservation Area Appraisal was conducted in 2017-18. This led to a successful application to HES supported by additional East Ayrshire Council funding to establish CARS. The project was initially intended to operate to 2024, but due to a number of factors (considered later) this has now been extended to March 2026.

CARS eligible areas

The designated areas for CARS investment were identified in the initial appraisal work. They are detailed in the map below.



CARS Aims

The aim of the scheme is to maximise and sustain the economic potential of Mauchline's Culture and Heritage assets through:

- The restoration and repair of six key historic buildings bringing them, where necessary, back into productive and sustainable use;
- A small grants scheme to enable and encourage private owners to carry out urgent repairs on traditional and older properties;
- A small grants scheme for shop front improvements;
- Public realm works;
- An education and training programme for those involved or wishing to be involved in the traditional construction industry;
- a programme of community participation and learning to increase people's understanding and appreciation of heritage.

Principles

The general principles behind the CARS scheme are:

- To adopt proven traditional building techniques based on analysis of the causes of defects and an understanding of the historic development of the building;
- To avoid unnecessary damage and avoid replacement of sound historic fabric;
- Restore architectural detail and heritage features based on appropriate evidence;
- Safeguard the future of the building with regular maintenance.

CARS grants

Grants available were identified at the outset as for:

- Large building repair grants of up to 90% of eligible costs for priority building projects;
- Small building repair and shopfront improvement grants for properties within the main commercial areas of Loudon Street, Earl Grey Street and Kilmarnock Road – grant rate 75% of eligible costs, up to a maximum of £25,000;

- Small grants for the re-instatement of architectural detail – grant rate 75% of eligible costs up to a maximum of £15,000.

Eligible work

Historic building repairs - structural and external repairs to historic buildings including repairs to roofs, masonry, external doors, and windows.

Re-instatement of architectural detail - including ornamental metal work, decorative tiling or timber or stone details where the building is otherwise in good condition or will be repaired as part of the project.

Shopfront improvements - where works restore or contribute positively to the built heritage of the Conservation Area.

CARS Activities

In the successful application to HES, CARS detailed that it would achieve its objectives through a combination of:

- Priority building repair projects that provide grant assistance for the re-use of redundant buildings and the intensification of underused buildings resulting in a viable end use;
- A Small Grant Scheme providing funding for building repairs to properties identified as medium/high priority;
- A Small Grant Scheme providing funding for shopfront improvements;
- A Small Grant Scheme providing funding for the replacement of UPVC windows and rain water goods with wooden sash & case windows, and cast iron rainwater goods in line with guidance on energy efficiency and climate change adaptation for traditional buildings;
- Public Realm Improvements - that repair and upgrade a pedestrian thoroughfare and provide a vantage point for interpretation and accessing the 'A' listed Abbot Hunter's Tower; and

- **Community Engagement & Education** - a programme of activities which promote community engagement and education.

In practice, this has evolved into a programme of work which includes:



CARS governance

CARS is operated by East Ayrshire Council's Planning and Development Service, and a full time Project Officer. In addition, a local community Steering Group supports the project – this is a sub-group of the Mauchline Community Action Group.