

# Stewarton Initiatives



## Stewarton Community Hub Our journey, lessons and tips

Robert Whitford - Chair

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# Who are Stewarton Initiatives?

- ▶ Our charity was formed in 2016, stemming from the first ever Stewarton Community Action Plan.
- ▶ One of the projects suggested by residents and adopted into the Action Plan was a small meeting room and information centre.
- ▶ The facility could be used by smaller community groups and organisations to hold meetings and gatherings, sell tickets for events and encourage new members to join.
- ▶ The idea of a smaller meeting room for one-to-one appointments for services such as health, mental health, finance and more was then explored.
- ▶ Thankfully there was a vacant space right in the centre of the town, known informally to locals as 'the cross'.



# Our Process to Ownership

- ▶ We thought that finding the owner of the vacant land was going to be easy but that proved not to be the case.
- ▶ East Ayrshire Council could not decide if it owned the land, and efforts were made to confirm this through Strathclyde Regional Council and even the old Ayr County Council.
- ▶ Eventually the council said that they owned the land so negotiations started with the view of taking over the site via a Community Asset Transfer.

**LESSON 1: MAKE SURE YOU KNOW WHO OWNS  
THE LAND BEFORE YOU START**

# Appointing Advisers and Site Manager

- ▶ The first appointment was our Legal Adviser who volunteered. He knew a lot about leases and the pitfalls of just agreeing to local authority proposals.
- ▶ We eventually came to an agreement with the council and signed a CAT transfer and lease which gave us ownership of the land at 'the cross'.
- ▶ We then found another volunteer who is a retired architect and can read plans and advise on the building of the hub.
- ▶ We persuaded him to join the team, which was a great move as we would have been lost when it came to the actual build.

**LESSON 2: MAKE SURE YOU HAVE SOMEONE WHO KNOWS ABOUT BUILDINGS AND REGULATIONS**

# How did we Achieve Funding?

- ▶ Our outline planning was in place, but we still needed the funding to help make the Stewarton Community Hub a reality.
- ▶ We had around £20,000 from the East Ayrshire Council leaders fund but that was not nearly enough.
- ▶ We applied to the Place Based Investment Fund for around £60,000 and were successful in being awarded this.
- ▶ The process was fairly simple and we were given an advisor to create a business plan for the hub, to work out how much funding we may need.
- ▶ Unfortunately, with initial estimates for the build coming in, we realised this was not nearly enough, and so also applied to the Renewable Energy Fund.
- ▶ We were successful in this and received around £95,000, giving us a total budget of around £175,000 to work with.

**LESSON 3: WHATEVER FUNDS YOU THINK YOU NEED, FIND ANOTHER 50% AS A CONTINGENCY**



# Our Community Hub Team



# Building Work Begins

- ▶ After some surveys, we found that we could connect into old sewer pipes and a power source that belonged to nearby former public toilets.
- ▶ We appointed a local contractor, Dickson Joinery, to undertake the work and construction began in early 2023.
- ▶ The first phase was progressing, but we soon hit a snag as an old oil container was discovered, which had leaked and contaminated the soil.
- ▶ We were forced to spend £8,000 of our contingency sorting this issue and paying for additional excavation and concrete.

**LESSON 4: EXPECT  
THE UNEXPECTED**





# The Banners Were Up

- ▶ We made sure to get some banners up promoting the project to the local community.
- ▶ Sharon Kilday and Lynn Young from the Renewable Energy Fund and Place Based Investment Fund came down to see work progressing.
- ▶ We received lots of positive comments from the community and everyone was excited.





# Construction Underway

- ▶ Construction work was well underway, with the floor and timber frame quickly erected as the summer progressed.
- ▶ Contractors for Dickson Joinery were all excited to work on the project and were very helpful.
- ▶ Our hub team made regular visits to the site, keeping an eye on progress and any issues.
- ▶ Where small issues arose, our volunteer architect Don and our hub team quickly found a solution alongside the contractors.

**LESSON 5: KEEP AN  
EYE ON PROGRESS**



# Our Final Hurdle

- ▶ Unfortunately during a water test, it was discovered that we had no flow coming into the building.
- ▶ This meant that the toilets and kitchen could not be used, and so the building could not open.
- ▶ Nobody was taking responsibility for the issue and only the intervention of senior management at Scottish Water saw the problem resolved.
- ▶ The company dug up the street and found out that a toby was broken, so an easy fix!



**LESSON 6: PERSEVERE AND  
EVERYTHING WILL WORK OUT**



# Stewarton Community Hub

- ▶ We were handed the keys to the building and a five-year project was finally complete.
- ▶ We had a lot of administration to sort out, acquire furniture from the council and finalise some details.
- ▶ We finally opened to the public at the end of December and have now welcomed several groups into the building to use it.
- ▶ We welcome a small donation for every hour of use to help us with running costs etc.
- ▶ Our volunteers keep the hub running smoothly and any issues are raised straight away.



# What Our Space Provides



- ▶ The building can be used by up to 18 people, with tables and chairs that can be arranged and folded away in any situation.
- ▶ Our small meeting room is perfect for private appointments or cosy chats.
- ▶ The accessible toilet can be utilised by any hub users, and the kitchen is perfect for making tea and coffee.
- ▶ We are hoping it will be well utilised by local groups for many years to come.



# What Have we Learned?

- ▶ What you see is not what you get, be prepared to make changes.
- ▶ There are some objects that take more time and patience to achieve.
- ▶ Get a good legal advisor and site manager.
- ▶ Apply for more funds than you expect to need.
- ▶ Use a builder who is known to the town, they want to do a good job as they expect to get more work.
- ▶ Be patient but firm (it's not easy).
- ▶ Enjoy the process and celebrate the end result!

