

ROTHESAY TOWNSCAPE HERITAGE SCHEME – DECEMBER 2023 UPDATE

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress of Rothesay Townscape Heritage (TH) as the programme nears completion on 31st December 2023.
- 1.2. The 5 year programme which started in September 2017 was due to complete in September 2022. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impact on the construction industry, completion was extended until 31st December 2023 to allow for regeneration projects to complete as planned.
- 1.3. The programme has made a transformational difference to the town centre of Rothesay including:
 - **4 priority buildings** restored with a **5th** due to complete by end of December 2023. This includes the new Argyll and Bute Council Customer Service hub at 37 Victoria Street.
 - **4 shopfronts** restored with a **5th** due to complete by end of December 2023.
 - **9 traditional window projects** completed.
 - **14** training and community engagement events held involving School Pupils and Homeowners.
 - **1** Community pop-up shop and innovation space created.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That members of the Bute and Cowal Area Committee note and consider the content of the report.

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3. INTRODUCTION

- 3.1. The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress of Rothesay Townscape Heritage (TH) as the programme nears completion on 31st December 2023.
- 3.2. The 5 year programme which started in September 2017 was due to complete in September 2022. As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent impact on the construction industry, completion was extended until 31st December 2023 to allow for regeneration projects to complete as planned.
- 3.3. The Rothesay Townscape Heritage (TH2) Project is a £2.8m jointly funded grant programme focusing on the regeneration of historic buildings as well as traditional skills training and community engagement.
- 3.4. Rothesay TH is part funded by the Scottish Government, The European Community Argyll and the Islands LEADER Programme 2014-2020, Historic Environment Scotland, Heritage Lottery Fund, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Smarter Choices Smarter Places, and Argyll and Bute Council.
- 3.5. The programme has made a transformational difference to the town centre of Rothesay including:
 - **4 priority buildings** restored with a **5th** due to complete by end of December 2023. This includes the new Argyll and Bute Council Customer Service hub at 37 Victoria Street
 - **4 shopfronts** restored with a **5th** due to complete by end of December 2023.
 - **9 traditional window projects** completed.
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4. DETAIL

4.1. Rothesay Townscape Heritage Programme is primarily a heritage and regeneration focused grants administration scheme that involves substantial amounts of dialogue and commitment with property owners to see the regeneration realised. A large component of the programme is also dedicated to raising awareness of the historic built environment and celebrating the heritage and culture of the Isle of Bute.

4.2. The programme has been transformational for the town centre and has delivered visual improvements benefitting those who live, work and visit this historic town.

4.3. Priority Building Repairs

Full scale repairs have now been carried out to the following properties:

- Isle of Bute Discovery Centre (The Winter Gardens)
- 73-77 Victoria Street
- 39-43 Victoria Street
- 1 Tower Street & 37 Victoria Street (New Customer Service Hub)
- 69-72 Victoria Street (due to complete by end of December 2023)

The regeneration works that have taken place at 1 Tower Street/37 Victoria Street include the new customer service hub. Argyll and Bute Council had purchased 37 Victoria Street (former Royal Bank of Scotland Branch) and this allowed for registration staff to be relocated from Eaglesham House to this ideal town centre location. The public response to announcements on social media has been very positive and a welcome move.

4.4. Shopfront Restoration

The following shops have benefitted from full-scale restoration:

- The Electric Bakery
- Glens Clothing, Victoria Street
- Bussey's, Victoria Street (currently occupied by "For Bute")
- DC Murray, Argyle Street

4.5. Training and Community Engagement

The following projects have been delivered with a view to raising awareness of the historic built environment, to celebrate the heritage and culture of Bute, and to help strengthen resilience within the island's creative, innovative and tourism industries:

- **Built Heritage Information Sessions** – 244 school pupils learnt about common building problems and the importance of maintenance through a range of educational tools and workshops. A range of practical workshops were also held for homeowners, including the repair and maintenance of timber windows, and working with lime render.
- **Environmental Arts Project** – An audio tour of Rothesay, entitled, *“If these stones could talk”* encouraged an audience of 22 to discover the hidden delights of Rothesay and what makes it a great place to live, work and visit.
- **Audience Development** – The work sought to engage with the local community to understand how best to market Bute to visitors. Targeted segments including: heritage, wildlife and active tourism were recommended as a result of the exercise, and which form the basis of a toolkit that is available to businesses island-wide, and which has been shared with Visit Bute as a resource that can be further developed by the organisation.
- **Digital Strategy** – Further analysis explored the digital journey that visitors make from first considerations to actually stepping foot on the island, and which resulted in recommendations around the need for a Bute brand, specific digital platforms, and a central organised marketing effort.
- **Artist’s Workshop Analysis** – A project was undertaken to analyse demand for town centre artists’ workshop and studio space using the WASPS model, which houses workshops in restored historic derelict buildings. The study recognised Bute’s vibrant artistic community, and suggested there is interest for a shared workshop/studio space, though also illustrated the difficulties in achieving this due to the variety of art practices, all of which require quite different and specific needs.
- **Wayfinding** – Areas of the town centre were reviewed with sustainable transport in mind. As part of the TH boundary, options for the Harbour and Promenade area were developed to detailed design stage and which include potential for enhanced walking and cycling routes. This is now being made available to colleagues in Sustainable Transport.
- **The BANK Enterprise Space** – Rothesay TH grant funded the full operational costs relating to a popup and co-working space pilot, from which substantial learning was derived. This pilot has now provided a well-used community space that delivers events, engagement opportunities and temporary office space.

- **Rothesay Castle “Town and Sea” Projection** – A two day event that projected on to the castle wall, mural projects, based on the maritime past of Bute and the colours, textures and materials that make up the townscape.

5. CONCLUSION

- 5.1. Programme staff are now working closely with owners and their respective architects to ensure the successful completion of the remaining building projects.
- 5.2. The 5 year programme has delivered a transformational benefit to the town centre of Rothesay. This has complemented previous investment by the “Rothesay Townscape Heritage Initiative 2008-2013” programme that focused on the eastern side of the town.
- 5.3. With works now well underway with the restoration of Rothesay Pavilion. There may be potential for a future regeneration programme that would focus on the western side of Rothesay not covered by current or previous programme. This would then see a full restoration of the sea front in Rothesay enhancing the town for future generations to live, work and visit.
- 5.4. Following completion of the programme at the end of December 2023 the evaluation report will be finalised providing key outputs. A further report will be submitted to the next area committee meeting to provide a final update.

6. IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. **Policy** - The Outcome Improvement Plan, Local Development Plan, Economic Strategy and Economic Recovery Plan support town centre regeneration and a diverse and thriving economy.
- 6.2. **Financial** - Argyll and Bute Council funding of £200,000 is committed. In addition, Rothesay TH is also made up of the following:

National Lottery Heritage Fund	£1,888,500
Historic Environment Scotland	£500,000
Highlands and Islands Enterprise	£70,249
LEADER	£65,800
Smarter Choices Smarter Places	£21,500

- 6.3. **Legal** - Grant contracts were provided to third parties.

- 6.4. **HR** - A dedicated project officer has been recruited for the duration of the project. Staff salaries are included within the project budget.
- 6.5. **Fairer Scotland Duty:**
- 6.5.1. *Fairer Scotland Duty* – None
 - 6.5.2. *Equalities* - None
 - 6.5.3. *Socio-economic Duty* – None
 - 6.5.4. *Islands* – This project benefits the town of Rothesay
- 6.6. **Climate Change** - No direct implications. The importance of this subject is communicated to contractors to ensure that where possible climate adaption and mitigation is considered to help create a thriving, sustainable local economy and a healthier, happier place fostering lower carbon lifestyles.
- 6.7. **Risk** - That grant schemes are undersubscribed or that projects run over time or budget. These risks will be carefully monitored and mitigation measures introduced on a case by case basis. The coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic also presents a risk to meeting project timelines and as such related Government guidance will continually be reviewed.
- 6.8. **Customer Service** - The council is responsible for administering Rothesay Townscape Heritage grants on behalf of National Lottery Heritage Fund and Historic Environment Scotland and for ensuring due diligence in the performance of its duties.

Kirsty Flanagan, Executive Director with responsibility for Development and Economic Growth

Fergus Murray, Head of Development and Economic Growth

Councillor Liz McCabe, Policy Lead for Islands and Business Development

18th October 2023

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