



MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

13th January 2020

PRESENT:

Ann Grimes (Chair); Chris Locke (Vice-Chair), Mark Craig (Secretary & also New Ferry Residents Association); Margie Evans; Bob Baxter; Gerry Evans; Sue Pinnick; Christopher Power, Pauline Power; Ann Marie Riley.

APOLOGIES:

Jan Richardson (Treasurer); Marion Grundy Ridewood; Margi Kegg; Bala Croman; Daneel Star

OVERVIEW OF WHERE WE ARE UP TO:

The New Ferry Community Land Trust was set up in September 2018 by a group of local residents and business people who wanted to do something more pro-active within the community BEFORE any likely reconstruction work was likely to be progressed by the Council following the 2017 explosion. Our aim was to do something positive for the community that both helps to support local traders through these difficult times, and also for the wellbeing of the community so dispirited after the explosion.

Soon after we set up, the Council announced that they would be putting the CLT forward as the vehicle for undertaking a programme of refurbishments to existing vacant buildings in the shopping centre that are not part of the current Council's redevelopment plan, as part of a bid to the Regional Combined Authority's "Town Centre Fund". However, they placed an embargo on the CLT board from divulging details of the detail not only to the general public, but also to the registered members of the group as the deal would involve a lengthy period of negotiations and also would deal with sensitive issues around commercial properties and property values. Even when the Liverpool Echo jumped the gun and announced that New Ferry 'had won' £500,000 of funding (although they did not mention us or how the money would be spent), we were still instructed not to discuss any of the details in public.

This is why, throughout 2019, we have been unable to report on this deal until now. The final version of a detailed Action Plan on how the £500,000 is to be administered and spent was agreed by the Combined Authority on 12th December 2019. The CLT board will be meeting with the Council next week to go through the Legal Agreement that we will need to sign before the monies can be released. The bulk of the money will not be released directly to the CLT, but will be spent on its behalf.

For financial confidentiality reasons, we cannot discuss the exact amounts that will be spent on each element of the proposals. However, we can tell you that there will be a sum spent on acquiring the freehold of empty premises, and a sum on refurbishing them. We will also need to employ a CLT co-ordinator to take over the running of some elements of the CLT which we - all working people - cannot dedicate our weekday time to; and also to employ a Project Manager who will oversee the day to day running of the refurbishment contracts. There will also be a sum of money to spend on organising events and publicity for the shopping centre.

The Legal Agreement we will be signing will be done in early February, after which we will be able to begin in earnest on the refurbishment projects. We will need to purchase some properties that are currently empty and in poor condition. Therefore, until we manage to complete a purchase of our first property, we cannot confirm here which property will be the first building that we will tackle.

Although the original deadline for spending the Combined Authority money was set at December 2020 (when we thought we would get the funding by May 2019), that deadline has now been extended to June 2021. Our aim is to have at least one building refurbished and in our ownership before then to begin

earning rent that will help us sustain the CLT beyond June 2021 when the Combined Authority funding is exhausted, bringing us an income that we can continue to invest in the CLT and its projects.

Please keep an eye on our Facebook page for details and photos which will be published as things move forward and we will be free to report more on our progress. We also promise to keep you updated via email as long as we have your current email addresses.

COMMUNITY LITTER PICKS

Not being able to progress the refurbishment programme throughout 2019, our steely volunteers have been conducting a monthly litter pick in the shopping centre involving not only the precinct but also New Chester Road and Grove Street. The litter picks are held on the last Sunday of every month, starting at 10am at the Cleveland Arms Pub. Hi-vis jackets, bin bags, litter pickers and other tools are all provided, along with sandwiches. All are welcome to join us.

PLANTERS, BENCHES, ETC

We have also been using some of our time building timber planters and buying plants for them with a £200 grant we received from the Council's "Wirral in Bloom" fund in early summer 2019. We have pushed the Council to replace some of the benches lost in the precinct after the explosion, and we have repainted some of the lamp-posts in the precinct that were looking shabby.

POP UP MARKETS:

One of the ways we have been trying to bring more people into New Ferry's shopping centre has been holding regular pop-up markets. We have now done two Christmas markets, an Easter market, and a few others. Some have been successful; others haven't. The major problem has been the weather, in particular windy weather which risks blowing over stalls in the precinct. The Christmas market was held inside the PHAB building but did little to help the traders in the street. In future, all the pop-up markets will be held in the precinct by default, and only moved inside the PHAB building if the weather on the day is windy and a risk to safety.

Sue Pinnick suggested that we might be able to use some of the Combined Authority money to purchase our own heavy duty gazebos for events like the markets. This MIGHT be possible, but the main problem is where to store them. We will look into this possibility in association with New Ferry Village Hall.

COMMUNITY GARDEN ON LAN'S HOUSE SITE:

Rather than look at a weed-infested bomb site, we asked the Council could we turn the Lan's House site into a community garden. They agreed, but finding funding and sponsorship for it proved difficult as the garden would be only temporary until redevelopment took place.

Last summer, the Council cleared the site of vegetation and brought top soil for us to lay turf on (with a £500 grant which the Councillors gave us from a their fund), but the subsequent wet weather has left the soil waterlogged and unable to support the turf we were about to purchase. On top of that, whilst we have been waiting, the Council has now concluded buying the former Griffiths building and is set to demolish it. Development of the community garden is therefore on temporary hold until this had been carried out.

We will be asking for the Griffiths site to be gravelled, and a pecker to be used to pierce the compacted ground under the topsoil already laid on the Lan's House site to help its drainage so that we can put the turf onto it. As soon as this has been done, the plan is to put large planters on parts of the site which will be used to grow flowers, fruit and vegetables by local schools. The back board to the rear of the site will be painted with artwork. The garden will be available for community use until the new development scheme commences on the site.

FURNITURE WAREHOUSE SITE

We understand that the Council now owns this site, purchased with some of the money from their £1.3million acquisitions fund. They have told us they want to break up the remaining foundations and lower it to street level. We are going to ask them to surface it - with either gravel or tarmac - so that it can be used for events in the next year or so until new building works begin on the site.

FUTURE REDEVELOPMENT

We also understand that the Council is in negotiations to buy the last three plots on the Lan's House side of the precinct. When this is concluded, the Council will then have both major sites either side of the precinct in their ownership and will be able to push for a redevelopment scheme to happen sooner rather than later. They have already told us that some Registered Social Landlords have indicated their willingness to build the new scheme. We will be pushing the Council to make all of this happen as quickly as possible. The New Chester Road scheme (and partial build over the Woodhead Street car park) could be delayed for up to two years by the CPO process potentially needed to buy properties from any owners who may not agree to sell.

On the subject of WHAT will be built in New Ferry, the Council accepted our redevelopment plan drawn by the community which includes ground floor retail with flats above on the two sites either side of the precinct. Our plan had been drawn up after the community rejected the three development options produced by the Council in January 2019 and which concentrated on purely residential development including taking out most of - and in one option - all of the Woodhead Street car park. The plan now accepted and endorsed by the Council will keep 70 car parking spaces at Woodhead Street, create some new ones off Grove Street, and will allow for new flats above shops, many of which will be affordable.

Some registered social housing providers have offered to build the shops/homes, and the CLT will be working closely with the Council whilst a preferred developer is announced later this year and planning applications start coming through for the community to view and comment on.

The precinct (Bebington Road) needs to be completely relandscaped. It had been previously suggested by some residents and businesses that it should be reopened to one way traffic with potential parking spaces as the businesses alongside it feel "invisible". The Council currently has no funding to do anything, but have made a bid to the government's Future Highways Fund to win the money needed to conduct a full study of how traffic needs to get from Bebington to New Chester Road. If we win it, the precinct will be redesigned in accordance with the wishes of the community. We understand that the government will not be making a decision on Round 2 of this fund until after the summer this year.

BANK ACCOUNT:

The treasurer was unable to attend the meeting and sent her apologies. She did however update us with a photo of the latest statement showing £1,044 in the account, out of which we still need to pay the Community Land Trust Organisation the latest £350 instalment for our membership with them; whilst some £500 of the remainder is ring-fenced for turf for the community garden.

CHRISTMAS LIGHTS REFURB/REPLACEMENT:

The existing Christmas lights are now over 15 years old. We are currently looking into using some of the funding from the Combined Authority earmarked for "events" to refurbish or replace them, and to buy some new stock. We understand that the lighting columns along New Chester Road will be replaced later this year, and the new columns will have better electrical sockets that are joined, meaning that from 2020 we will be able to do a simultaneous christmas lights switch on.

FUTURE EVENTS:

With the unique support of the Combined Authority funding, we would like to make this year's events in the precinct a little more "special".

It was agreed that an Events Committee will be established to organise and run this year's events. The proposed dates will be:-

- **Saturday 11th April 2020:** Easter Market in the precinct (may also involve other attractions including some small funfair type stalls). It will also coincide with the Farmers Market;
- **Saturday 11th and Sunday 12th July 2020:** New Ferry Festival. The preferred location this year will be in the precinct rather than in the park. We are hoping to use the community garden site and the explosion site IF the council has carried out its promised remediation work by this date. Classic cars, military vehicles and possibly the fun fair will go on these sites, with stalls in the precinct as was done for the festival last year. Choirs, dancers, music makers will be invited. This date will also coincide with the Farmers Market.
- **Saturday 12th September 2020:** Autumn Market (may also include some other elements such as Army assault course, tbc). Coincides with Farmers Market.
- **Saturday 28th November 2020:** The Big Christmas Lights Switch On Party. This is to be confirmed IF the council replaces the New Chester Road lighting columns as promised; and if we can agree a format for the event and what additional attractions there might be.
- **Saturday 12th December 2020:** Christmas Market. We are currently looking into having a major attraction on the explosion site with this. It could possibly be something like an ice rink depending on costs.

ELECTION TO POSTS:

The meeting then moved to election of board members for the next year. The posts allocated (all unanimously by those present) were:

- CHAIR - Ann Grimes (elected unopposed)
- VICE CHAIR - Chris Locke (elected unopposed)
- TREASURER - Jan Richardson (elected unopposed)
- SECRETARY - Mark Anthony Craig (elected unopposed)
- RESIDENTS ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE - Mark Anthony Craig (temporary) (elected unopposed)
- TRADERS ASSOCIATION REPRESENTATIVE - Margi Kegg (elected unopposed)..

An appeal was also made for additional help from members. We will need people who have experience of organising events, dealing with builders and contractors, painters and decorators, etc. Anyone who comes forward as we progress to the next stage of the CLT's activities will be co-opted onto the board as necessary.

The meeting closed at 9pm.