

## **Report from the Kirkby Lonsdale and Lune Valley Community interest Company, August 2023**

### **Overview**

The impact of the pandemic, the loss of grant funding and various other challenges had left us in a difficult financial position. We simply set ourselves two aims for this year and beyond:

- To restore and maintain the financial viability of the CIC
- To contribute to sustaining the Town's economic viability and vitality

While there is continued uncertainty in the economy which has impacted both these aims, and the latter is incredibly hard to measure, we believe we have made, and will continue to make, good progress in both of these areas. We will continue to work for the town, residents, visitors and businesses. Inevitably, we will still be reliant to some degree on financial support from the likes of the Town Council, the CoT and the new WFC.

### **Activities**

We have continued to encourage visitors to the Town while contributing to our community, through staging and promoting events, providing visitor information and public toilets and running a successful charter market.

The Charter Market is now under local management. It is much improved with an increased number of regular stallholders.

The Information and Gift shop saw over 17000 visitors between November 21 and October 22 and those numbers could reach 20000 this year. The Shop Manager has been analysing sales records to build a more accurate picture of what sells and adjusted ordering accordingly. She has also brought new lines into the shop.

In the last few weeks we have undertaken some limited alterations in the shop to make better use of the sales space.

Securing and retaining enough volunteers to staff the shop continues to be a challenge. A recent recruitment exercise resulted in just one more person on the shop rota.

In the last twelve months we have limited events to just three: the Christmas Fair; the Jubilee and the Coronation. Across all of these events we have increased the level of involvement from various organisations within the Town. It's fair to say that while varying in scale, feedback suggests all have been seen as great community events

while at the same time bringing visitors to the Town. Comments during the evaluation of the Christmas Fair suggested it was the best ever. Although generally guarded about sharing such things, a couple of local businesses reported having their best ever trading day during the weekend. And feedback from some stallholders reported similar.

Of course this year saw our Marketing and Events Manager leave to further develop her career. She has been a big loss. We have set up a trial contract with Cumbria Tourism to carry out our Marketing and PR activity. While at an early stage, initial results are positive. A CT arranged Newsquest visit resulted in double page spreads in local newspapers as well as coverage in wider regional publications such as York, Durham, North Yorkshire and Carlisle all promoting Kirkby Lonsdale to potential visitors. With the help of financial contributions from the Town Council and the Chamber of Trade we have set up individual contracts to run our events while a decision is made and whether we should employ an events manager for the Town.

## **Finances**

Our financial year runs from 1 November to 31 October. Our accounts at the end of October showed a loss of £8514 substantially reducing our account balance.

The public toilets continue to drain our resources. Our SLDC grant halved in 21/22 and will be nil this year. "Sales" remain steady and we have increased the cost of use to 50p. However the cost of maintenance and repairs have increased substantially and this year the toilets will likely cost us around £7k more than the income generated.

Elsewhere the rising cost of utilities has impacted hard. The rent of most of our tenants includes utilities. This means the burden of increases falls wholly on the CIC and there is little incentive, beyond our encouragement, for tenants to economise. We plan to review this in future years as it is patently not cost effective.

This year we hope to get closer to breaking even. The majority of our income comes from subletting. The YDNPA also makes a valuable partnership contribution, though this may be impacted by the Authority's review of visitor services. This year we have negotiated rent increases from the majority of our tenants as well as the charter market. We have appointed a Shop Manager rather than a Town Manager, whose sole focus is to make the shop more profitable. We are operating with one permanent employee, using contracts for marketing and event management at a lower cost than employing someone.

With the demise of SLDC, who have provided funding in the past, we have lobbied Councillors from the new Westmorland and Furness Council. No funding is yet

forthcoming though we are in the process of bidding for funds towards the Christmas Fair - hopefully enabling us to divert money from there into general running costs.

## **Going Forward**

Our initial focus is to continue to work towards our aims. The Christmas Fair Contractor has made a great start with seemingly boundless enthusiasm. He is bringing fresh ideas as well as keeping what works. The theme for this year will be Klrkby Lonsdale: A Christmas Story. We look forward to working with other stakeholders to make this the “best ever”.

We will further develop our interactive attraction the Vault. The Vault contains seven video shorts which tell stories from Klrkby Lonsdale’s past through the eyes of characters who lived in or visited the town. We have secured most of the funding we need, and are bidding for the rest, to produce four new stories. Filming will begin in the new year. We will further develop our linked Vault guided walks particularly promoting ad hoc walks for visiting groups as they generate far more funds than the scheduled walks.

We will continue to monitor and, if appropriate, further develop our relationship with Cumbria Tourism who bring professionalism to our marketing and PR. Despite the inclement weather of recent weeks, the town has certainly been busy, perhaps more so because of increased publicity generated by CT?

We will continue to work collaboratively with the Town Council, the CoT, the CSG and WFC for the benefit of our local community. And finally, we would like to thank the Town Council and other key stakeholders for their continued support.