

Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Community organisation taking over management of a historic building.
Name of project/group:	Stradbroke Courthouse and Library Trust
Location:	Stradbroke, Suffolk
Duration (if applicable):	

Short description of project:

Originally built in 1864 as a Corn Hall, the Grade II listed building served as a courthouse from the early 1900s. There was already a small library upstairs, but when the court closed in the 1970s this was the only use in the building apart from the weekly youth club, which eventually disbanded. In 2012, the Stradbroke Courthouse and Library Trust (SCALT), a Charitable Incorporated Organisation, was set up to provide help and support for the library services, aiming to develop a community hub in the building by bringing together a range of local facilities and services on a secure basis. Events were held to generate interest and local volunteers recruited to the Trust. A consultation exercise was launched, involving local school groups. The priorities expressed were: youth group, community radio / broadcasting, internet café and re-housing local Post Office services.

The partners involved include: Suffolk County Council (SCC), Mid Suffolk District Council (MSDC), Parish Council (SPC), Post Office, Radio Stradbroke, Stradbroke Historical Society, Suffolk Libraries IPS, and Suffolk community Foundation.

Grant funding was obtained from: SCC, MSDC, SPC and Suffolk Community Foundation.

What would have happened without this project/group?

The Trust's ambition has focussed on the opportunities offered by the building but it is also motivated by the village's experience of shrinking public services. Actual losses had been the youth club and the Post Office. Further decline in local facilities and services may have included the library service, would have included the potential loss of this historic public building.



The Stradbroke Library in June 2015 (Photo: Mid Suffolk District Council).

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The key stages were as follows:

- negotiate long term lease from SCC; address repair issues arising with advice from MSDC;
- raise funds by fundraising events and grant applications to numerous public bodies;
- negotiate new Post Office provision;
- obtain listed building consent from MSDC for alterations to facilitate recording / broadcasting studio and installation of a post office counter.

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

The Post Office opened in October 2014, and the cafe in May 2015. The achievement of these targets has generated confidence and momentum in the Trust's programme.

In one area success can be measured more precisely – the library service has always been there but use is rising sharply, 59% since October 2014, partly in response to book-launches, poetry readings, and children's bookstart events, but also through the synergy of bringing services together.

Themed community meals were started as fundraising events, but are now recognised as bringing generations together as volunteers.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges? Would anything be done differently?

SCALT's strong local connections have provided a clear understanding of the area's needs. The consultation process has also provided robust support for the stated aims. Consequently there have been no real changes of direction – SCALT's initial vision has been carried through consistently.

The intricacy of negotiating a lease was a lesson in patience and forbearance, taking longer and costing more than anticipated.

What is the future for the case study?

Phase 2 of the project includes alteration of the first floor space to form a permanent home for Stradbroke Radio, with facilities for recording and broadcasting, which will offer young people opportunities for involvement. There will also be a home for the extensive village archive, with facilities for digitising images and records, making them more accessible. Events continue to diversify, with jazz festivals and creative classes appealing to different parts of the community.

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