

Cushendun End of Project Report



A report highlighting the work of the partnership project between the National Trust and Supporting Communities between October 2019 to February 2022 in the village of Cushendun.

By Christine McNeill
Cushendun Community Development Officer
Supporting Communities



Introduction

This project was created due to the National Trust's relationship with the local community in Cushendun. The relationship was described as turbulent, unsettled and strained at times throughout the years. The National Trust recognised the need to have a respected independent intermediary to help them re-engage with the community, and the local stakeholders within the village of Cushendun. To assist them in this process the National Trust approached Supporting Communities, as they are an organisation with over 40 years' experience in Community Development and Tenant Participation, which led to the creation of this partnership project.

The project started in October 2019 and has been delivered by Supporting Communities through their appointed Community Development Officer for the area. The role of the CDO has been to engage with the community in Cushendun, build a trusting relationship with Community Groups and Stakeholders, to scope out potential partnership projects and act as the intermediary between the community and the National Trust- as a way of opening up lines of communication.

The National Trust have been eager to become a trusted partner in the village and the surrounding area. Our goal for the end of this partnership project was to build "trust back in the trust" so that the community feel empowered to work with the National Trust.

This report details evidence of how this project has assisted the National Trust to positively re-engage with the community, and ultimately build "Trust in the Trust".

Aims and Objectives

The aim of this project was to work on establishing working relationships between the community and the National Trust. Through creating partnership opportunities that would allow the National Trust to work towards the goal of positively engaging in the community. To make this happen the past issues and challenges faced between the National Trust and the community had to be identified.

A priority was for both the Community Development Officer and National Trust staff teams to work collaboratively; to create opportunities for key stakeholders to be involved in the work of the National Trust; and become more aware of the work of the National Trust in Cushendun.

As a result of the coronavirus pandemic, continual lockdowns and remote working, the aim of the project changed in year two. It was agreed that my main aim was to identify potential projects that could be worked on in partnership with community groups and the National Trust. This would allow opportunities to build on establishing working relationships when the National Trust staff returned to work, while encouraging positive engagement from the National Trust in the Village.

Some of the main objectives within the project were identified and measured using key performance indicators listed below:

- Work collaboratively with NT staff team
- Create opportunities for partnership work between the trust and stakeholders
- Identify past issues and challenges between the trust and the community
- Connect positively with stakeholders and community groups
- Develop a functioning process to give the community opportunities to ask NT questions and understand the work they do
- Build Upon the Village Forum
- Provide a support role to the Community Groups within the village
- To continue to explore sustainable and viable options for the use of Glenmona House

The Process

As mentioned above, one of the main aims within this project was to work on establishing good working relationships with the various groups, key stakeholders, and residents within the village. There was a clear need to establish trust between myself, the key stakeholders, and the community due to general opinion of there being “No Trust in Trust”. It also involved ensuring that I created effective working relationships with the National Trust staff team in Cushendun to work collaboratively on identified projects.

To gain a sense of understanding around some of the issues raised by the community, I completed my own research of looking into previously completed consultation processes. These included the Cushendun village plan, which was led out by the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council and a Masterplan completed by the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust. As well as this, I used various engagement tools and we worked with the community to ensure that their needs, concerns, and issues were being listened too. This was achieved by:

- Carrying out a Baseline Survey within the first 6 months of the project.
- Regular check in calls and support meetings with the various groups
- Coffee Morning at Glenmona (pre Covid)
- Providing funding support
- Assisting to coordinate partnership projects
- Supporting the Village Forum by taking on a temporary administrative role
- Liaising with National Trust Tenants
- Working with external Agencies who provide a service in Cushendun
- Carrying out a Village Walkabout and creating a Village Inspection Toolkit.

The below information will explain the process of how these various engagement tools were used to strengthen relationships, the work that has been achieved and how partnership work has progressed through this project.

Baseline Survey

The first major piece of work carried out was the completion and delivery of a Baseline Survey. The survey was created using information obtained from previous consultation processes, including a council lead Village Plan which highlighted many of the communities asks and needs. It acted as a starting point to gauge residents and the general community's needs, as well as their understanding of the work of the National Trust. A total of 70 surveys were delivered to residents living within the village and a housing estate in neighbouring Knocknacarry. It was decided that these two locations would be the best to target out of the whole parish, as people living within these areas would be more likely to be living within National Trust owned land and houses.

The results from the survey were used to provide a starting point for this project. It was essential that the survey was created and distributed as soon into this project as possible, to gain a true sense of the community's feelings and understanding at that present time. One of the main aims from this survey was to gain an authentic reflection of the residents understanding and opinion on much of the work of the National Trust in Cushendun.

To gain insight into the community's opinion on the National Trust we asked respondents to "Score out of ten your perception of the National Trust's willingness to be involved with the community."

1=Low	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10=High	N/A
6%	6%	11%	11%	31%	2%	14%	6%	-	11%	2%

The above results show that majority of respondents sat in the middle when answering this question, which can be viewed positively considering the current relationship.

Another question asked was "What do you believe the National Trust are responsible for in Cushendun?" and the table below shows the results.

	Responses
Maintenance of land in the village (cutting the grass etc)	28
Streetlights	2
The Beach	32
Public Toilets (Glenmona carpark)	13
Litter picks	17
Carpark	24
The Harbour	28
Paths and trails	31
Signage	11
Woodland	25
Caravan park	7
Glenmona House	33
Recycling facilities	5
Main Roads	1
Have no responsibility	-
Unsure	2



These results highlighted the need to clearly showcase and communicate what the National Trust are responsible for in the village. These results were one of the reasons that the Inspection Toolkit and Village Walkabout idea was suggested to Village Forum members.

To drive this project forward and strengthen the relationship between the Trust and the community we had to create opportunities for the National Trust to be involved in the community. This was achieved through engagement with local stakeholders, partnership work and the National Trust sitting on the Village Forum.

Engaging with Key Stakeholders and Community Groups

At the beginning of this project, I started work on a stakeholder mapping exercise, ensuring that it included all groups/residents and tenants. This exercise made it easier to identify key groups within the community and formulated a plan of work by highlighting who I needed to contact. While speaking to groups they pointed me in the direction of other groups I did not know about. I also included business owners within the village in this mapping exercise. I added to this by including a stakeholder analysis as a means of indicating what is important to stakeholders, while highlighting what, if any their issues are with the National Trust.

I worked closely with the community groups to build rapport and form effective working relationships. At the beginning this proved difficult due to the fractured relationship between the National Trust and the community, many associated my role with the National trust and so there was an unwillingness to meet with me. However, continued emails and phone calls led to further conversation and so an understanding of my role was formed. Contact meetings proved vital in learning how past decisions of the National Trust had impacted directly on specific groups. It became very clear that the communication lines had been broken for some time, and that groups felt frustrated that they couldn't get a response from the National Trust, while feeling that their asks were shut down with no explanation as to why.

Many of the Community Groups that had specific issues and concerns with the National Trust took some time in opening up and sharing these. The result of groups opening up and sharing their issues and concerns, allowed me to act as the intermediary and communicate this back to the National Trust. It was from here that meetings between the community group(s), the National Trust and I could take place. Issues were talked about openly and a plan of how to move forward was created. One of the main examples of this was the work achieved with the National Trust and the Cushendun and District Development Association.

It was important that we quickly created opportunities to show a National Trust presence in the Community and their wiliness to invest here. One of the first partnerships that I co-ordinated was with the National Trust Ranger team and I linked in with the local Primary School. We referred to this as a "quick win" regarding partnership work. The result of this was two events which the National Trust hosted; one was the turning on of the village Christmas tree lights- highly significant as this was a community event which had never happened before. This gave the National Trust confidence in their efforts and led to a further event being held down in Glenmona specifically for the Primary School children. The partnership created here is one in which the National Trust staff team and I were keen and

passionate about continuing. The pandemic resulted in many National Trust staff structural changes and new posts being created. Following this, National Trust staff have engaged with the Primary School and a great partnership has been formed.

I hosted a coffee morning in Glenmona as an engagement strategy to bring in those residents who are not part of a community group. It was a beneficial morning and a great opportunity for those present to learn more about Supporting Communities, my role within Cushendun, and the partnership between the National Trust and Supporting Communities. Some of those present were tenants of National Trust properties and discussions turned to some of the issues that they face. This information made it evident that a tenant's group or steering group is greatly needed for these residents.



Following these conversations and because it was highlighted as one of my Key Performance Indicators, over the past year and half I have worked on engaging with National Trust Tenants to discuss the possibility of a Tenants Group or Steering Group.

To start the process off and find out if Tenants were interested in this suggestion, I created a poster with some information and my contact details for those interested to get in contact with me. This wasn't as successful as I hoped, however when one tenant contacted me, we discussed how we could get others involved.

I held an initial Zoom meeting with a few tenants, Emma Cunningham, the General Manager of the North Coast National Trust to look at what a Tenants Group would look like and how to encourage other to join. The suggestion was to host a zoom meeting due to remote working and lockdowns and advertise it as an informal coffee morning.

I worked with the Tenants that had put their names forward and joined in on the Zoom on a poster to advertise the Zoom Coffee Morning. When the virtual coffee afternoon took place a few more tenants had joined in addition to the others.



This meeting was very insightful, and I listened to what the tenants' needs were. Discussions around tenants housing needs and the perception of the National Trust in the village took place. We discussed communication as being one of the main barriers between Tenants and the National Trust. Tenants felt that a communication tool such as a Newsletter or Newsheet for National Trust tenants only would be a great starting point.

Due to National Trust being furloughed or made redundant, conversations around the production of a Newsletter as a communication tool are currently taking place. The National Trust are looking into this as an option and plan to host informal meetings with the Tenants twice a year, as a way of opening up lines of communication.

As well as engaging with local stakeholders and community groups, it has also been a crucial part of my role to engage where necessary with external agencies. I have been in contact over the years with various external agencies including Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council's Community Development Officer, North Area Community Network, Causeway Older Active Strategic Team, Grow the Glens, Good Morning Ballycastle, Causeway Coast and Glens Local Councillors, SOLAS Moyle, Causeway Coast and Glens Policing Community Partnership, Mae Murray Foundation, Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust.

It has been vital to engage with as many stakeholders who work within the village as possible. As a result, I established a clear understanding of the work that they do, and the potential for future partnership work.

Lockdown extensions and rising Covid cases meant that Supporting Communities staff remained working from home since March 2020. Regular communication with groups was more important than ever and remote working provided the opportunity to have regular check in calls with group members allowing a trusting relationship to develop.

I had roughly 200 support phone calls & Zooms calls with groups and stakeholders which has consisted of morning, afternoon and evenings calls and meetings to assist groups with their needs.



To ensure that groups had opportunities to develop their digital skills, as well as offer training that supported group's needs, Supporting Communities developed short online training courses. These opportunities were sign posted to the groups within the village and many members benefitted from a range of trainings including writing funding applications skills, creating a community Newsletter, and returning to community bases sessions.

Through signposting funding opportunities and helping groups to complete small funding applications, I have helped groups to secure approximately £6,000 to assist with the work they carry out.

Revisiting the Village Plan

In year one, I worked with Mel from the National Trust's project team on elements of "quick wins" identified for the community. However, Mel's post was made redundant due to the impact of the pandemic. Subsequently, Lisa Mc Caughan was identified as my new point of contact within the Trust. Lisa and I had many conversations about the history of the National Trust working in Cushendun and discussed various ways that the National Trust can work within the Village going forward. One way to do that was to revisit the Cushendun Village Plan with the Community Groups and Stakeholders.

The Village Plan (2018) was a huge piece of consultation work carried out by the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough council with the key stakeholders and community groups in the village. As this plan shared and highlighted much of the communities need, we decided to revisit this plan, to look at what is no longer a community need. and ways in which both Supporting Communities and the National Trust can support this plan to move forward. Looking at the plan also helped to identify projects through listening to groups priority needs.

We have successfully met with community groups and from this I have developed an action plan of follow ups from each meeting. The groups have welcomed the consultation on revisiting the plan however, there has been a feeling from groups that they are ready to see action. We hope that by the work being put into revisiting the plan and a further understanding of groups needs that further partnerships between groups and the National Trust can take place.

Revisiting this plan has allowed opportunities for Lisa to build rapport with groups and stakeholders, as well as giving us an opportunity to probe on issues with the National Trust raised in the past and discuss ways that we can move forward.

The Village Walkabout

Supporting Communities is an organisation with over 40 years' experience in community development and Tenant Participation. This year we decided to incorporate "Estate Inspections" into this project, something that Supporting Communities have successfully been co ordinating within communities across Northern Ireland for many years. To meet the needs of community here we have decided to call this a "Village Walkabout" and carry this out using a similar approach to estate inspections.



We decided to use this approach within the village because many issues were being raised at Village Forum meetings that required answers from external agencies. The suggestion of a village walkabout was made to the members of the Village Forum, as we firstly needed to find out if this was something that members would be willing to take part in and we were met with a welcomed response.

To start this process off, I began working on an example Village Toolkit to show members at a Village Forum Meeting. I used Supporting Communities Estate Inspections Toolkit as guidance for a template to create the village toolkit. I went out around the village and took a few pictures to add into the tool kit as examples from some of the issues that had been raised, such as "beach maintenance". The toolkit and the walkabout were raised at a village forum meeting, and I explained how these would be used. Members seen the value in going forward with this process, so as soon as our board gave the go ahead for staff to proceed with Estate Inspection and the Village Walk About, I started contacting agencies to join Forum members on the walkabout.

The other benefit of carrying out the village walkabout means that members of the Forum will learn who has responsibility over what area. Many members and residents alike believe that the National Trust have responsibility over areas which they do not. If we reflect on the Baseline survey question "What do you believe the National Trust are responsible for in Cushendun?" The results show that the residents believe the National Trust to have responsibility over areas not in their remit and through the walkabout we can change that.

The Walkabout took place with great success on the 15th of November 2021. On the day we were joined by representatives from the Village Forum, The National Trust, Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council and Local elected councillors. When areas of concern and issues identified by groups were raised, it gave the responsible agency the opportunity to take that concern on board. As mentioned above it also provided the opportunity for the community to learn which agency had responsibility of that area.

I used the Inspection Toolkit to note the issues and concerns raised on the day and this was then completed and sent out to Village Forum members and discussed at the previous Village Forum meeting. These issues will then be reviewed at every Village Forum meeting until they have been actioned.

Cushendun Village Forum

The Village Forum is the only place that brings representatives from all community groups and stakeholders together. This is the reason why we were keen to support the forum as a way of keeping those communication lines open.

We have assisted with the coordination of every village forum since October 2020, which has resulted in successfully hosting bimonthly Village Forum meetings for over 12 months. I have provided an administrative roll within the Forum by taking the minutes of meetings, sending these out to members, setting meeting agendas with input from groups and creating and sending out zoom links to members. As this project was coming to a natural end as part of the phasing out approach, we offered training on running effective committee meetings to the members of the Village Forum, unfortunately they did not avail of this.



This is the most important and effective communication tool within the village between groups and stakeholders. Forum members have continuously voiced how appreciative they are for the administrative support, as well as the support in bringing issues forward.



A village Forum member said,

“The Village Forum is a vital communication tool between the community groups within the village. Christine’s role within the Village Forum has been greatly appreciated & has enabled meetings to take place” CDDA

Through speaking to my colleagues and hearing their updates at staff and team meetings about inviting agencies and other support organisations to their meetings, I suggested this to some members of the Village Forum, and they thought it was a great idea. In the second half of the year, I invited Declan Donnelly, to discuss an environmental project developed by Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council to a village forum meeting. The result of this was that environmental issues such as littering was discussed, and members enquired about ways to tackle this issue. Since then, the council and the National Trust have had conversations on how these issues can be tackled together. Inviting external agencies to Forum meetings has proved successful in identifying ways that collaborative approaches can be applied in tackling issues.

The Village Forum is going from strength to strength. Looking back on where we started to where we are now, there has been massive improvements in how meetings operate. Forum meetings has made a significant difference to the work that we have been able to carry out within the community, as it has proved a platform to discuss & share ideas.

Sustainable Uses for Glenmona House

A key aim within this project is to look at sustainable and viable uses of Glenmona House. A general perception from the community was that Glenmona could not be used by the wider community. I ensured that anytime this would come up in discussion I made everyone aware that this was not the case, and that Glenmona was available for Community use & for renting for small businesses. One success story of sharing this with the community was Rachel. Rachel is a local barber and opened up a room within Glenmona at the start of October 2020. Very quickly word of mouth helped to spread this within the community and people were keen to learn how Rachel acquired a space in Glenmona. The interest grew and very quickly people began to see business opportunities through renting a space within Glenmona.

Rachel said “The process of getting in contact with Christine to help put me in contact with the National Trust was a very easy one. After the conversation I had with Christine, she had given me an email address for a National Staff member and within months I was renting a space in Glenmona House. The National Trust were so helpful and accommodating throughout the process”

Reflecting on the baseline survey the number one response for the use of Glenmona House was to be used as a community centre.

Viable/Sustainable Use	1st	2nd	3rd
Youth Hostel	1	4	6
Wedding venue	6		7
Residential centre (youth groups, retreats)	2	6	3
Community Centre	15	9	1
Rooms rented by businesses (hairdressers, beauty salon)	5	4	5
Tourist information centre		1	1
Library/Bookshop	1	2	1
Education centre		3	2
ALL OF THE ABOVE	3		

The timing of this survey may reflect that response, as the Parochial Hall had just been sold for housing development. This meant that there was no longer a space within the village that could be used by the community. Over the past year Glenmona may not have become a community centre, but it has certainly become a space for the community. There are now various businesses and tenants renting a space within the House and providing a service for the residents living within the village.

The long-term plan for Glenmona is yet to be decided. The National Trust have gained funding from the Community Renewal Fund. Some of this funding will be used to carry out a feasibility Study that will provide some options for Glenmora’s future. Until then, we will continue to highlight that Glenmona is available for community use and business options can be discussed, which will help bring in small pockets of revenue to assist with maintaining the building.

Conclusion

The Purpose of this project was to create opportunities for community engagement, to identify ways in which the National Trust can work in partnership with community groups and stakeholders, to overcome barriers which have been raised from the past and to “build Trust in the Trust”.

I hope this report highlights the journey of this project and details how we began working on assisting the National Trust to positively re-engage with the community of Cushendun, by evidencing details of the processes.

It has been challenging at times, given that that project had only started 3 months when the implications of Covid-19 began. However, we worked hard on ensuring that work continued in whatever forms possible. As a result, many of the aims have been met which includes the forming of key partnerships with stakeholders, resulting in the beginning of healing those fractured relationships, helping to make Cushendun a more thriving community.



A local community group said this:

“The appointment of a local Community Development Officer, with local knowledge has been most acceptable. Liaising and networking with outside organisations and bodies especially the National Trust. The Trust owns the villages and adjoining lands. This frequently impacts on our plans and projects. Having a ‘go between’ is most helpful” (Cushendun and District Development association)

I have been so lucky to work within my own community through this project. I can leave knowing that my involvement has assisted the National Trust to re-engage with the community, and form working relationships with community groups and stakeholders.

As my time as Cushendun Community Development Officer comes to end, I am delighted to have been able to coordinate a Red Squirrel Project with the Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust, the National Trust, and the St. Ciaran’s Primary School as one final partnership project. As well as being part of the conversations to revisit the idea of “Youth Ranger’s” with local young people, National Trust staff, The Education Authority Youth Service and a National Trust Ranger Team based at Cushendun.

This project has been an essential link between community groups and the National Trust for the past two years. As we have reached the end, I am confident that through working collaboratively with National Trust staff that they have a grasp on the dynamics of the community of Cushendun. They now have the confidence to drive forward the projects and plans that have been identified, and to continue with the partnerships that have been formed.

The National Trust now has a fantastic staff team based at Cushendun and we have worked together on ensuring that the community are becoming aware of their roles and responsibilities within the Village. We have proactively engaged with community groups and assisted them in identifying their key priorities, and this is making all the difference to community relations.

Moving forward the National Trust now have the opportunity to be involved with the community and their events; and have established relationships with community groups that will allow that to happen. Communication lines have been opened which has allowed trusting working relationships to begin- all adding to building trust in the trust.