

Huntly and District Development Trust Review

31 May 2016

1. Context

Huntly and District Development Trust (HDDT) was established in 2009 to ‘work with others to build an inclusive, enterprising, resilient community capable of dealing with ongoing change’. That community is defined as the AB54 postcode area, which is the town of Huntly and its catchment. The population of the area is 11,500, with 4,300 of those living in Huntly itself. Huntly and District faces challenges including limited affordable housing, employment opportunities and activities for children and young people. Rural isolation affects many especially those outwith the town. The population is fairly stable but aging.

The Trust is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. It is owned by its members, who currently number 416. A Board of 11 Volunteer Directors/Trustees steer the organisation. Daily management and operations are delegated to the four-member staff team (3.25 FTE). A trading subsidiary, Greenmyres Renewable Energy Ltd (GRE), has been established to progress one of our renewable energy projects. The three Directors of GRE are all Trust Directors.

When HDDT started in 2009 it followed on from the work of the Aberdeenshire Towns Partnership, a local authority-led initiative that ran in Huntly from 2004-2008. HDDT requires to be self-sustaining. Its priority areas of work are development of:

- Greenmyres Farm as a community asset.
- The Room to Roam Green Travel Hub, a green and active travel project.
- A shared vision for sports facilities and supporting activity.
- Renewable energy schemes (four key projects of different types).

2. How has the Trust impacted on the lives of people it works with?

HDDT is a relatively new development trust but is already having a positive impact on the lives of the local people and visitors. These include increased wellbeing, community spirit and learning opportunities. These early impacts have the potential to grow in breadth and depth as HDDT secures its financial future. The promotion of wellbeing through physical activity is one particular strength. HDDT inspires children, young people and adults to learn about different aspects of cycling at the monthly winter talks *Tales of the Tyre*. Organised by HDDT, these are held in both the community and as part of local school sessions. HDDT has increased women’s participation in sports activities as a result of the *Ladies Exercise and Activity Taster Days*, that are run by HDDT in partnership with sports groups and organisations. HDDT supports cycling and walking events such as the popular Audax event and the cycle week, that encourage physical activity and wellbeing in both local people and those from across the wider region. In an innovative development, HDDT launched *The Community Car Club* in September 2015. This is starting to enhance the lives of drivers, and a few are now better able to access learning and employment opportunities. HDDT organized *A First Aid in the Workplace* training. This enabled around 15 organisations and businesses to update their skills locally.

The work of HDDT supports a growing sense of community pride. Partnership activities, such as the annual *Huntly Hairst*, raise the profile of Huntly and are attended by both residents of the wider AB54 area and visitors from across the region. HDDT staff support the image of Huntly and District as a vibrant place to work and live by managing several local web and social media accounts. Community members benefit from the Trust’s office being in the centre of the town providing an accessible point for advice and information. HDDT impacts positively on the lives of children, young people and adults indirectly through support to other community organisations. One such example, the *Orbs Bookshop* a community run venture has received advice from HDDT since gaining a grant as part of Creative Scotland funding administered by HDDT. Its 18 volunteers, aged 24–70 years, have improved health and wellbeing through

meeting other people. They are getting satisfaction and pride by making a contribution to their community. The Bookshop provides volunteer experience for a few young people on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme. The *Bike Shack* project, which receives climate change funding through HDDT, improves health and wellbeing in the community through increasing access to cycling activity.

HDDT's Board of Directors are all volunteers and almost all are local. They are confident, skilled and knowledgeable. They are influential and effective in securing human and financial resources for both HDDT and a range of partnership projects. HDDT staff and directors are effective in encouraging local people with relevant skills and expertise to contribute to working groups which are instrumental in enabling key projects to move forward. In total 30-40 people volunteer in the working groups and on the Board each year. HDDT Board and staff are ambitious for their community, working hard to take forward plans which have the potential to improve many aspects of community life in the longer term. HDDT use a variety of engagement and consultation processes to enable local people and other stakeholders to influence their decisions, such as regular member meetings, mobile displays and exhibitions. For example, an extensive community consultation relating to the aspirations for the use of the Greenmyres farm land involved over 300 people.

There is a need to improve Huntly and District community's understanding of HDDT's achievements, vision, plans and strategic direction. HDDT Board should consider developing a communication strategy. This will ensure that community members have greater clarity not only on the successes of HDDT but also their current and planned projects will contribute to the 'big aims' of the area such as town centre regeneration. HDDT should now explore how they will better capture the full range of impacts they have on Huntly and District and the wider region.

3. How has the Trust impacted on the local economy?

HDDT is having a positive impact on the local economy. The Board and staff are effective in attracting and generating income to improve infrastructure, the environment and opportunities in the Huntly and District area. HDDT have attracted over £1 million worth of funds into the local area. Plans to generate significant income through renewable energy are at an advanced stage. HDDT have developed expertise and have been successful in negotiating community benefit from renewable energy projects. Their work in this area has the potential to draw down significant sums of money into the local economy in the coming years. They have purchased their own land, Greenmyres, and are negotiating contracts and funding to build their own wind turbine there. HDDT also have ambitious non-renewable energy plans for Greenmyres. They already use it for community opportunities such as a Fishing Project and are exploring how to make the site accessible and supportive to all. A pathway is in development which will allow families to walk from Huntly to the Greenmyres site.

HDDT have been instrumental in taking forward infrastructure projects which improve Huntly. A town walkway, known locally as the *Portsoy Path*, was built in 2012 by HDDT in partnership with the Forestry Commission. It is well used by local people and visitors and is fully accessible for wheelchairs and buggies. Signage at each entrance to Huntly put up by HDDT improves the first impression of the town. HDDT's involvement in the Leader funded transnational YesCommAct project with communities in eastern Finland led to a cabin of traditional Finnish design being built. This is well used by a range of local groups and visitors. HDDT are instrumental in supporting town developments to celebrate and increase the market for the locally produced food. The annual Huntly Hairst, and the monthly Farmers Markets showcase local businesses and help to pull local people and visitors into the town centre. HDDT employ four staff and also support other local organisations, such as the Networks of Wellbeing Bike Shack project to fund posts. This is directly increasing the number of skilled jobs available

locally. HDDT respond to local needs where possible, for example fundraising small grants for those most affected by flooding.

HDDT leadership are working hard to attain financial stability and growth in order to resource a wider range of projects to meet local community aspirations. The Board of Directors demonstrate strong governance and leadership. They work closely with the staff team and where relevant partners and funders to ensure projects are taken forward. The small staff team are skilled, motivated and confident. The Development Manager provides high quality support to staff and volunteers. Staff are encouraged to undertake appropriate training opportunities which matches the demands of their remit. HDDT staff and leadership are highly valued by partners and local residents. There is now a need to increase the capacity of members, including young people, to take on leadership roles within HDDT. Building on the role and membership of working groups and increasing volunteer opportunities would be two ways to extend devolved leadership.

HDDT are proactive in seeking expertise to inform decision making. They make good use of research, consultation and knowledge sharing to improve outcomes. The Sports Vision working group are exploring whether to develop a Community, Wellbeing and Sports facility. They have visited and learned from other communities in Aberdeenshire and successfully sourced funding for consultants who are carrying out a feasibility study. Partnership work between HDDT and the James Hutton Institute is contributing to research across six European countries and 60 community groups looking at low carbon communities. This research will inform transition to post oil societies and economies. Through this partnership HDDT hosted a field trip to Greenmyres for students and academics, as part of a rural sociology conference. Participants came from across Europe and experienced how a rural community worked together to improve the social environment.

HDDT now need to progress plans to review current areas of work and map a clear strategic and business route forward for the medium to longer term. They should ensure that future projects not only meet the high level mission statement of HDDT but are also prioritised against how successfully they will meet the needs of the area. There is a need to continue to work with partners to ensure strategic plans are efficient and effective in the context of wider community plans and services.

4. How has the Trust improved outcomes through partnership working?

HDDT improve outcomes through working with others. They engage in effective and efficient partnership work characterised by mutual trust and respect. Their 'can do' approach is fundamental to the building and sustaining of many of the effective partnerships which deliver positive impacts across the area. The strong communication, networking and engagement skills of HDDT leaders and staff are valued highly by partners. HDDT engage actively with local and wider area partnerships to influence and inform decisions which are made about the Huntly and District area. HDDT contributes to the Marr Community Planning group, which covers the wider region.

HDDT are a catalyst for change and have become a community anchor organisation. They are instrumental in growing the social capital of the area and provide capacity building, networking, signposting and informal mentoring. HDDT facilitate local sports clubs and groups to come together to coordinate resources and share information about topics including club accreditation schemes and financial support for joint training. HDDT inform community organisations of funding options and provides them with accessible and knowledgeable support to make applications to bodies like the Heritage Lottery. HDDT provide flexible and non-bureaucratic input to community organisations and partners. As a result, they increase positive outcomes including wellbeing and creativity through providing 'back room' support to a range of partners.

HDDT administer the AB54 Health & Wellbeing fund on behalf of the AB54 Health & Wellbeing group. They provide administrative and fund management support to the *Community Kitchen* at the Linden Centre. This contributes to the Kitchen's work increasing the health and wellbeing of local people of all ages including those facing additional life challenges. HDDT worked effectively with the lead agency Deveron Arts to bring a Creative Place Award to Huntly in 2013. In partnership with Deveron Arts and other community organisations including Huntly Community Council they allocated grants to 38 local groups and organisations. This greatly increased the creative opportunities across the town and area and supported several community based projects such as the Huntly Book Festival and the Orbs Bookshop. HDDT continue to work closely with Deveron Arts to deliver community initiatives such as the Walking Challenge and to signpost local people to appropriate opportunities.

Partnership working increases the transport infrastructure and environment. HDDT, Huntly Railway Station and Huntly Floral Society established plant boxes improving the physical environment and many visitors first view of the town as part of the 'Adopt a Station Scheme'. The HDDT Car Club has a hybrid car based at the station and this is starting to increase usage. Partnership with Highlands and Islands Enterprise helped secure Sustran funding for six towns in Aberdeen, including Huntly. This funding is being used to improve active travel through walking and cycling route improvements, improved information in the form of leaflets and boards and improvement to transport interchanges. HDDT has a well-developed partnership with the Forestry Commission which funded and delivered the path network around Huntly. Joint work with Gordon Rural Action on a house insulation project resulted in over 280 homes in the wider area becoming more energy efficient. This is taking place in an area where high home energy costs are a matter of local concern. HDDT work closely with the Huntly Cycling Group to identify and plan to meet local needs for cycling such as the Huntly Bike Week event, which was attended by over 400 people. Ongoing support from HDDT is enabling them to become a constituted group.

Huntly and District would benefit from HDDT working with local organisations and partners to agree shared priorities for the area, taking account of each partner's resources and capacity. HDDT needs to build such priorities into their strategic plans. Capturing and celebrating HDDT's contribution to Huntly and District more effectively should increase the clarity of its role and responsibilities. HDDT should consider increasing the use of formal partnerships agreements to support the understanding of each partner's offer. There is potential to increase the role of HDDT in children and young people's learning through closer partnership work with local schools.

The review of Huntly and District Development Trust found the following key strengths.

- HDDT are improving wellbeing, the local economy and environmental and transport infrastructures.
- Directors, working group members and staff are highly skilled, knowledgeable, committed and ambitious for the future of the Huntly and District area.
- HDDT are a catalyst for positive change and have become an effective community anchor organisation.
- HDDT are a highly valued partner who work effectively with others to improve impacts.

We discussed with partners how they might continue to improve their work. This is what we agreed with them.

- There is a need to now develop a clear strategic plan taking account of local priorities to progress HDDT's ambitions for the future.

- HDDT should consider how they could better communicate the positive impact HDDT has on the community and how HDDT projects and plans will contribute to meeting community aspirations in the longer term.
- There is a need to capture the full impact of HDDT's work to celebrate success and inform future developments.

5. What happens at the end of the review?

We are satisfied with the overall quality of provision. We are confident that Huntly and District Development Trust and partners can build on and take forward the key recommendations of this report. We will make no further evaluative visits in connection with this review.

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