

Colwyn Bay Heritage Group

Colwyn Bay Heritage Web and Walk – Project Evaluation

Executive summary

The Colwyn Bay Heritage Group was set up in 2008 to assist in the regeneration of Colwyn Bay by increasing the community's awareness of the town's heritage. With funding mainly from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Group has undertaken a series of interlinked and mainly intergenerational projects:

- Heritage walks. Two walks with accompanying bilingual booklets have been produced, one with an audio version, and both featured interactively on the Group's web site. A number of conducted walks have been undertaken.
- School activity pack. A web based pack based on the town centre walk with information and exercises to introduce young children to the history of the town.
- Oral history. Interviews with members of the older generation to capture their memories of the town, especially of the 1940s and 1950s.
- Web site. The establishment of a web site to ensure easy availability of the material being produced by the Group and to promote its activities.
- Other projects have included the creation of a time capsule, the production of a video by young volunteers and the establishment of a Facebook page.

Although the length of time to carry out the package of projects has taken much longer than originally anticipated, all have now been successfully completed. In particular, the take up of walk booklets has been high, conducted walks have been well received and the web site is having a significant level of hits.

By adopting a flexible approach, especially in the use of the available funds, the Group has been able to be more ambitious, not only in developing the originally planned projects but also by adding others when the opportunity has arisen. However being volunteer based, it has learned the lesson of the need to be more realistic in its timescale programming of projects.

The achievement of this ambitious series of projects has enabled the Group to become sustainably established with a sound platform from which further projects can be confidently undertaken.

Project background

Colwyn Bay has been designated a Communities First area as it contains one of the 10% most deprived sub wards in Wales. As part of the associated community regeneration process an intergenerational workshop identified culture and heritage as a regeneration theme to be pursued. The establishment of the Colwyn Bay Heritage Group in 2008 grew from the implementation of this theme, with the purpose of engaging with all generations of the local community to make the town's heritage accessible to all. Since 2008 the group has met regularly and has worked on devising and implementing project ideas to achieve this aim.

Community consultation took place at a number of local events and meetings and reached a wide cross section of the community. The Group's ideas were very positively received and over 30 local volunteers expressed an interest in becoming involved. A positive response was also received from local infant and primary schools regarding their involvement. Additionally the project ideas were included in the Communities First newsletter, 3,000 copies of which were circulated throughout the area. This resulted in members of the community approaching the Group to express their interest.

Project aims

In aspiring to achieve its purpose the Group developed a coordinated series of projects which were the subject of the successful grant application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). These projects aimed to increase the community's awareness and appreciation of the town's heritage through:

- its built environment - principally the legacy of its Victorian and Edwardian town centre and the adjacent residential area of grand houses, both of which have Conservation Area status and contain Listed Buildings
- capturing the memories of those associated with the town in the inter war and immediate post Second World War era

The latter intergenerational, oral history element aimed to bring the human aspect to the project, widening the appeal and enabling greater community involvement.

The overall project

The specific elements of the project that were the subject of the HLF grant were:-

- the development of an initial heritage walk around the Victorian/Edwardian core of the town with:
 - the production of a bilingual walk leaflet and audio guide
 - the production of a bilingual workbook for school children based on the walk
 - the assembly and training of a group of volunteer guides to lead groups around the walk

- the capture and recording of oral history from older generations with the involvement of school/ college students
- create an updatable web site where oral history and walk routes can be accessed

Project management

- The Heritage Group
The core of the Heritage Group that undertook the projects was initially five in number, but has since grown to seven. Initially a community worker provided invaluable support during the early stages. However the Group is now well established and she has moved to another job.
- In addition to the core Group, the individual projects have involved in excess of 70 members of the local community, including both the young and the elderly, and latterly, Cytun, the local association of churches.
- Funding of the project has primarily been the £20,600 grant from HLF, but with a further £3,587 from the Communities First Trust Fund.
- The time contributed by the volunteers has been estimated to have been in the order of 1,000 hours, well in excess of the 610 hours initially anticipated at the time of the grant application. The value of this volunteer time has therefore been approximately £20,000, compared with the original estimate of £13,185.
- The initial project plan indicated a completion date in October 2010, although with a caveat that it was dependant on the full cooperation of parties that were not members of the Heritage Group. However, whilst the processes and actions of that plan have, in general, been followed, the timescale involved has been substantially extended, necessitating the cooperation and agreement of HLF to extend the period of the grant.

The individual projects

During the course of the overall project, detailed considerations and the presentation of opportunities have enabled the achievement of an enhanced output, both qualitatively and quantitatively. The individual projects that have been achieved have been:-

- The Heritage Walks
 - Town Centre Heritage Walk
This walk featured 29 buildings/items of interest around the older core of the town centre. The walk has presented by means of:
 - An illustrated booklet of 18 pages, produced in English (3,000 copies initially) and Welsh (1000 copies). Due to a high level of interest and demand a subsequent reprint of 2,000 copies in English and 1,000 in Welsh has been necessary.
 - Bilingual audio versions of the walk. This uses MP3 players purchased by the Group and available for loan at Colwyn Bay Library. In addition to the

spoken text of the booklet there are also short reminiscences to be heard. It may also be listened to or downloaded from the Group's web site.

- In an interactive form on the Group's web site, where there are also links to pages with more information about some of the buildings and people featured on the walk.
- Conducted walks. Walk leaders conducted heritage walks within Conwy's 2011 Walking Week programme which was circulated to an audience of over 1000. The demand for heritage walk necessitated it being re run on 3 separate occasions. Walk leaders also led walks within Colwyn Bay's 2012 and 2013 1940s festival. They also assisted in the interpretation of Heritage Walks around Colwyn Bay during Conwy's 2012 Walking Week. Total numbers of participants in the conducted walks has been in excess of 120. Requests have been received from other groups such as "British Lung Foundation" for heritage group leaders on all-ability heritage walks and this is likely to increase. The involvement of heritage walk leaders with other agencies has spawned the creation of a Conwy wide walking group aimed at all sectors of the community and involving other heritage groups across the county.

- Churches and Chapels Heritage Walk

In the light of the success of the Town Centre Walk and following an approach by Cytun, the local association of churches and chapels, a second walk has been prepared featuring 24 religious buildings in the town. The research and production of this walk has been undertaken jointly with members of Cytun and has enabled the Group to widen its links with the local community. This recently completed walk is or will shortly be available via:

- An illustrated booklet of 24 pages, produced in English (4,000) copies and Welsh (1,500) copies.
- In an interactive form on the Group's web site, with links to pages with more information about each of the buildings featured on the walk.
- Conducted walks in conjunction with Cytun.

- A school activity pack

The Group made an early link with Colwyn Bay's Pendorlan Junior School with a view to working together to produce a bilingual workbook based on the Town Centre Heritage Walk. The intention was that such a workbook, containing information and exercises, would enable children at the local schools to learn about the history of their town and its buildings. The outcome has been the production of an "on-line" workbook by one of the teachers at Pendorlan School. An originally intended printed workbook hasn't been produced on the advice of the teacher that an on-line version could be more easily updated and that parts could be printed selectively as required. Such an approach also avoided incurring printing costs.

– Oral history

- A total of 23 people have been interviewed to date, primarily about Colwyn Bay during the Second World War. Interviews are still continuing. Six different people have conducted the interviews, two from local secondary schools.
- An intergenerational heritage discussion meeting was held in February 2011, attended by 35 people. Ten were young people from local secondary schools. People brought photographs of themselves and Colwyn Bay when they were young, and in small groups older and younger people shared memories of the town and their hopes and expectations for its future. Older people were encouraged to give fuller accounts of their experiences in more formal oral history interviews. A second heritage discussion group is being planned.
- A training course was held in 2012 on conducting oral history interviews. Of the 16 people attending, 10 were from local secondary schools. Later, training courses were held on using recording equipment and editing interviews.
- The Group provided a telephone at an exhibition in the Oriel Gallery in Colwyn Bay through which people were encouraged to leave short memories of the town on an answering machine. A stall at the town's 2012 '1940's Day' was used to recruit further interviewees.
- The Oral History Sub Group remains in touch with over 50 people who have an interest in recording memories of the town. Interviews have prepared for uploading to the group's website and the possibility of an e-booklet is being explored.

– Web site

From the start the Group has intended to make full use of a web site to widen the availability of the material which it produces. Initially this was to be the walk booklet and the oral history material. Following a tender process, the Group commissioned a local web development company, Colony of Ants, to design and establish the web site. As this design progressed, further ideas were incorporated into the site content.

The Group's bilingual web site www.colwynbayheritage.org.uk now contains the following main pages:-

- History – Notable events in the history of the town together with the oral history interviews.
- Heritage walks – the walk booklets with interactive walk maps, audio versions of the booklet text.
- Architecture – describing the town's more notable buildings.
- The youth – items of interest to the younger members of the community and includes the children's activity pack.
- News – items of current interest in Colwyn Bay.

A number of the Group have undertaken training from the web site developer to enable the Group to maintain and add content to the site itself. However the Group has been fortunate that the web site developer has continued to show a personal interest in the continuance of the site and the activities of the Group.

The Group has endeavoured to promote the use of the web site where possible and its level of usage has been encouraging. For example in the period from January 1st to March 31st 2013 there were 1823 visits to the site, and from April 1st to June 31st 2013 there were 3953. Further details of the web site usage are given in Appendix 1.

– Video

As part of the Group's desire to involve local children it commissioned a local media company, TAPE Community Music and Film, to work with a group of local children to produce a video about life in Colwyn Bay in 2011. The children produced a theme song to accompany the video. Both are on the Group's web site and were featured in the formal launch of the Group at Theatr Colwyn to the delight and pride of both the children and their parents.

– Time capsule

Two of the young people involved with the video suggested that the Group should organise a time capsule. Following a press invitation to submit ideas for items to be included, a time capsule has been located in Theatr Colwyn in Colwyn Bay to be opened in 50 years time.

– Facebook /Twitter

The Group has also established an active Facebook page with 237 "likes" and 52 "talking about this". (June 2013)

The Group also has a Twitter following, numbering 813 in June 2013.

The Group has endeavoured to make its activities known in the local community and to attract people to contribute to the work of the Group, such as to pass on their memories or to provide information to be incorporated in the Group's projects.

It is estimated that approximately 70 people have been involved in one or more of the projects. In order to bring the completion and availability of the Town Centre Walk to attention of the community of Colwyn Bay, a successful launch was held in December 2012 in Theatr Colwyn to which 69 invitations were sent.

At the request of HLF, the Group manned a stand at the National Eisteddfod at Wrexham, which was well attended and included a visit by Colwyn Bay's MP, David Jones, who has subsequently been appointed as Secretary of State for Wales. Following this Mr Jones

requested an in depth briefing meeting with the Group members, after which he expressed his support for the aims of the group.

Project successes and failures

Successes

- Numbers involved

Overall in excess of 70 people have been involved in various aspects of the project.

- Intergenerational involvement

An encouraging number of older people have been involved through coming forward with their memories of Colwyn Bay in the past - over 23 interviews having been obtained through the oral history project. Two young people have undertaken interviews, although 16 were involved in the heritage discussion event and as many as 10 attended the interviewing training sessions.

Some 10 young people between the approximate ages of 11 and 16 were involved in producing the video and the associated song. It was also two girls, aged approximately 16, who were responsible for suggesting and assisting with the time capsule.

- Walk booklet

In view of the success of the initial Town Centre heritage walk a second one, Churches and Chapels has been produced. The popularity of the initial print run of the Town Centre walk booklet, 3,000 English copies and 1,000 Welsh, has been exhausted and a rerun of 2,000 English and 1,000 Welsh has been undertaken.

- Conducted walks

Although the number of conducted walks has so far been modest, each has been well attended and the feedback has been encouraging.

- School activity pack

The involvement of a teacher from the local Pendorlan School and the production by her of a high quality school activity pack

- Oral history interviews

The achievement of generating the interest of sufficient older members of the community to produce over 20 oral history interviews

- Web site

The production of a well used, high quality interactive web site.

- Skills learned

New skills learned by the members of the Heritage Group – interviewing, web site maintenance, and use of Audio Editing software for editing of oral history. The role of walk leaders stimulated training under the Communities First programme in Walk Leadership Skills and in basic first aid.

- Sustainability of the Heritage Group

The projects funded by this grant were the first undertaken following the formation of the Colwyn Bay Heritage Group. Whilst in its formative period the Group was heavily dependant on the support of a Council Community Development Officer this officer has now moved elsewhere. The Group has subsequently become fully established with terms of reference and a constitution embodying best practice and corporate governance and is now looking to pursue further heritage projects. The involvement and active contribution of the Council's library service, individually and corporately, ensures the continual promotion of the role of the HLF and the Heritage Group in particular.

Failures

- MP3 audio

The demand to undertake the Town Centre walk using the MP3 audio version has been disappointing and consequently it was decided not to produce an audio version to accompany the Churches and Chapels walk. It is interesting to note that technological changes during the course of the project have indicated that the use of Smart Phones and I-Pads has grown and future availability of trail information may well encompass this technology.

- School activity pack

There has been a disappointingly limited use of the activity pack by local schools other than Pendorlan School. This may be because of inadequate awareness promotion or the demands of curriculum activity and achievement of specific targets have overtaken the use of resources developed in house.

- Lack of involvement of those in the 20-60 age group.

Those involved in the Group and its projects have predominantly been from the younger or older sections of the community. This may have been partly due to the demographics of the area and a reflection of the deprivation of parts of the area.

- Time taken to complete the projects

The timetable of the initial project plan indicated a completion of the projects in 6 months. However the time up to the launch of the walk booklet, web site and the time capsule in December 2011 was in fact approximately 20 months. Completing the final expenditure of the grant with the completion of the oral history interviews and uploading them to the web site and the completion of a second heritage walk has taken a further 18 months.

Lessons learned

- To be more realistic in estimating the length of time required to undertake and complete tasks when they are being undertaken by volunteers. The times indicated

in the initial project plan were far too optimistic and assumed that those undertaking the various tasks would be able to give them a much higher priority of their time than was the case. In addition support from sponsoring organisations cannot be guaranteed for the full duration of the project. Only the professionalism and experience of the volunteer project team ensured the successful outcome of the project,

- Although careful thought may be given to a project prior to its inception it is important to be flexible to react to new ideas and other issues that may arise during implementation. It is considered that the Heritage Group did demonstrate flexibility, for example by accepting the advice of the teacher involved in the production of the school activity pack to only produce an on-line version as it would be more easily updatable. This saved money which was able to be used to expand other aspects of the overall project. Also in this respect the Group was able to take up the idea of having a Time Capsule which was initiated by the involvement of a group of secondary school pupils during the project.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Web site
- Appendix 2 (1) – Social media – Twitter
- Appendix 2 (2) – Social media - Facebook
- Appendix 3 - Photos of activities of the group
 - 1 Guided walk photos
 - 2 Out and about photos
 - 3 Intergenerational event photos
 - 4 Training
 - 5 Oral history recording
- Walk leaflets - Colwyn Bay Town Centre – see Heritage Group’s website
- Churches and chapels – copies sent under separate cover

PD/August 5th 2013