

BEITH TRUST – REFRESHING THE TOWN'S IMAGE WITH MAJOR REDEVELOPMENT

FORMER BOYS HOME COULD BRING VISITORS TO TOWN THANKS TO COMMUNITY PURCHASE OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

In a bid to refresh the public perception of the town, the people of Beith formed Beith Trust in 2012 to harness the community spirit and develop the area. One of the town's longstanding features was a Church of Scotland residential property for boys going through the criminal justice system. However, Geisland Campus was eventually decommissioned and Beith Trust saw this as an opportunity to develop the site and put Beith firmly on the map.



HOW THE COMMUNITY ACQUIRED THE ASSET

The trust began discussions with the Church of Scotland over the six-hectare site, which included a chapel, education plot, joiners' workshops and sports hall, as well as accommodation which the trust eventually hope to rent out as tourist cottages.

Afterwards, the Trust got in touch with The Scottish Land Fund and received £512,000 in SLF II funding – enough to buy the site and cover some of its legal costs.

HOW HIE HELPED

Advisors from Highlands and Islands Enterprise advised the team at Beith Trust throughout their successful SLF funding application.

Scottish Land Fund Advisor Catherine Francis said: "Beith Trust had big plans for this site and were really enthusiastic about the positive impact it could have on the community. We advised them on the technical aspects of the bid and offered general support throughout the process. They got a big grant – over half a million pounds – and their plans have the potential to really transform the area into a hub of activity."

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

Following the purchase, the Trust moved its training activities to the site, opened the sports hall for community use, developed partnerships for use of the garden ground and started using the chapel as a mini-cinema. Beith Trust is now seeking a £600,000 Big Lottery grant to redevelop the property. Its plans for the site include not just community assets such as workshops and space for artists, but also hospitality facilities to help attract people to the region, such as a B&B and gypsy-style caravan accommodation.

A spokesman for Beith Trust said: "We believe the campus should be re-positioned as a 'Gateway to North Ayrshire' – a community asset which entices visitors and residents to stop and linger in Geisland, Beith and the wider region, spending their time and money as consumers of local produce, goods, recreation and amenity.

"Geisland Campus will also support the delivery of a range of activities, opportunities and initiatives which will create the conditions to enable local people to learn and develop to actively contribute to community life. Through this, we hope to establish a progressive environment which creates and retains wealth locally in the widest possible sense - financially, socially, environmentally and culturally."

The full plans for Geisland include: a commercial growing facility; outdoor education and free play facilities; workshops; artist residencies and gallery space; a variety of accommodation for leisure, business, and care uses; training, learning and skills development; shared office space and shared services support; micro enterprise and entrepreneurial support; and events and Festivals.

