

# UPPER NITHSDALE ARTS AND CRAFTS COMMUNITY INITIATIVE – MOVING INTO A NEW ERA

## EXPANDING INTO NEXT DOOR HELPED ARTS CENTRE REVIVE TRADITIONAL CRAFT KNITTING IN SANQUHAR

### OPPORTUNITY FOR COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

Contributing to a rich local tradition of arts and crafts, including the historic Sanquhar knitting pattern, Upper Nithsdale Arts and Crafts Community Initiative runs an arts centre, the 'A' the Airts' on Sanquhar High Street. The centre had operated for almost five years with considerable success when the property next door appeared on the market, providing the chance to expand the centre and its activities, specifically by adding a garden to the café and offering more gallery space.



### HOW THE COMMUNITY ACQUIRED THE ASSET

The group received an award of £62,442 from the Scottish Land Fund to purchase the property and stage 1 Big Lottery funding to hire a design team. This consisted of a small retail unit which had been lying empty for years, plus a double storey maisonette above A' the Airts.

The group is preparing to submit its business plans for the new property and hopes to get Stage 2 Big Lottery funding to see the redevelopment of the new premises fully realised.

### HOW HIE HELPED

HIE worked with Upper Nithsdale Arts and Crafts Community Initiative to put together a business plan for the extra unit, and to complete its application for funding to purchase the building.

Scottish Land Fund Advisor Catherine Francis said: "Having enjoyed great success in their first five years, the availability of the unit next door was the perfect way for the A' the Airts centre to expand, and guarantee its place on Sanquhar High Street.

"We ensured they had a comprehensive business plan in place and now they are set to put those plans in action."

### IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

The shop and two-storey maisonette will be redeveloped and integrated into the existing Community Arts Centre, providing the community with a larger retail outlet for arts and crafts and a bigger, brighter café. It will also accommodate improved facilities for arts and crafts activities, including dedicated pottery and knitwear studios. The group also hope to include a sound recording studio which can be used by local musicians

A spokesman for Upper Nithsdale Arts and Crafts Community Initiative said: "An added bonus is that the building comes with a large area of ground to the rear, which has been neglected and overgrown for years. It is hoped that we will soon be working with other community groups to develop it into a lovely community garden with outdoor seating areas, arts and crafts projects and plots for growing healthy food."

In the meantime, the group is putting the retail unit to temporary use. It is being used for crafting Sanquhar knitting, a local tradition that dates back to the 1700s. The centre has been training more people in this local craft as well as producing knitwear such as gloves. They have taken more than £10,000 worth of orders for this sought-after knitwear already.

