

Chopwell Regeneration CIO
Year ended 31 May 2022
Chairman's Report

Objectives

Our objectives are to regenerate Chopwell in Gateshead including:

- Creating employment and training opportunities;
- Improving education and skills learning opportunities;
- Improving local environment;
- Improving health and well-being;
- Stimulating growth;
- Reducing social isolation in our rural community;
- Facilitating inter-generational communication;
- Bringing empty buildings back into use;
- Addressing the shortage of family housing; and
- Improving the lives and life chances of local people.

Achievements

Our financial year to 31 May 2022 has been transformational for Chopwell Regeneration CIO.

The Bank

We completed the building work and opened 'The Bank', a welfare and enterprise centre, bringing a historic building on Chopwell's main street back into use for our community.

Over the summer 2021 a large group of volunteers were involved in decorating, procuring fixtures and fittings, recruiting staff, planning events and fundraising activities.

We opened the upstairs of the building as offices to rent on 1 October 2021. By 1 November 2021 all the rooms were let. Occupants this year have included small and start-up local businesses that rent the upstairs rooms from the local area, and include a social enterprise promoting young people's engagement in sport and the outdoors, a social enterprise helping people with hidden disabilities towards employment and 3 small businesses/sole traders. Having a dedicated and affordable work area locally is highly valued in our rural community and we have a waiting list for rooms.

We opened the ground floor on 3 March 2022 as a pay what you feel café and community market. We have had a very positive response, averaging 450 people a week coming into the building including those most acutely experiencing social isolation and food poverty.

In the first 3 months of being fully open The Bank generated a reputation for the warmth of its welcome. People talk about increased confidence, developing a 'can-do' attitude following the loneliness of lockdown, and feeling more positive about where they live and the opportunities around them.

Cafe and community market

At The Bank we are alleviating immediate needs caused by food poverty which is increasingly severe in Chopwell. We source the majority of our supplies for the pay what you feel café and community market from surplus food sources including FareShare and local supermarkets. The opening of this facility has co-incided with the growing cost of living crisis and every week even more people are coming into The Bank saying they don't have any money for food or haven't eaten for a day or two. The cafe and community market attract people from a variety of backgrounds across the community because of the warmth of the welcome at the cafe, the excellent food served by our chef and volunteer team and our sustainable approach to sourcing food.

Activities and events

This year we have also run a wide range of activities which provide for a cross-section of ages and needs.

- Our monthly 'Memory' cafe is run in conjunction with our local GP surgeries to support people with dementia. It provides a rare opportunity for their family and friends to meet and share experiences with others in the same situation.
- A computer coding club initiative for 7-11 year olds has been extremely popular, giving young people the opportunity to develop new technology skills and an awareness of opportunities for them in the future to put these skills to use.
- We have provided a variety of craft activities and board games for those who are at home during the daytime to learn new skills and improve their well-being. Members of these groups have been helping us to plan and apply for funding for future activities and are currently meeting regularly in our cafe as a new friendship group.
- One-off events such as a pre-loved school uniform market and low cost Italian restaurant evening have also been held in response to the needs and interests of the community and provided further opportunities for much needed social events.

Other projects

Although opening The Bank has been our primary focus, it is not the only project we have worked on this year.

- The volunteers at Chopwell Community Allotment have made further improvements at the allotment which is kindly leased to us for free by Chopwell Officials Club;
- We made further progress in our role as co-founding members of the Chopwell and Blackhall Mill partnership working towards long term change for our two neighbouring villages, agreeing a 5 year strategy and submitting a significant grant application.
- Volunteers redesigned our website including a gallery of 2000 photos of Chopwell's history.
- We continued to produce and hand-deliver the Chopwell Regeneration Group newsletter;

- We now have over 1,800 members of our very active Facebook page; and our quarterly newsletter has been delivered to every household and business ensuring all c3,600 residents are kept informed of our activities and future events.
- We have continued to hold regular public meetings so anyone who wants to share their thoughts and ideas for our village.

Staff

This year we have successfully transitioned from being solely run by volunteers to being an employer with 5 staff and crucially – 4 staff members live in the local community.

Volunteers

We are also overwhelmed with the volunteering support we have had from within our community with over 200 volunteers taking part in various activities throughout the year.

Volunteers include 2 work experience placement volunteers (via DWP) who had been unemployed for many years. After the 8 week placement they both continued volunteering with us. One has since found employment at a local café, while the other continues to volunteer and to grow in confidence and skills, taking more and more responsibility for the running of the kitchen alongside our chef.

We have a further 16 regular volunteers (5 of whom are young people aged 16-18) who help in the cafe at busy times and tell us that volunteering is of huge value to them for reasons including loneliness, learning new skills, work experience, building confidence and “being part of something”.

Support received

We are hugely grateful to the grant funders and organisations who have supported us this year including:

- North East Local Enterprise Partnership
- Gateshead Council
- Virgin Money Foundation
- Tudor Trust
- National Lottery Reaching Community Fund
- Tyne and Wear Community Foundation
- Bernard Sunley Foundation
- Rothley Trust
- Barbour Foundation
- Ballinger Charitable Trust
- Garfield Weston Foundation
- Sir James Knott Foundation
- The Fore
- Trusthouse Foundation
- Hilden Foundation
- LGA Foundation
- Rothley Trust
- Tony Platten Fund

- National Lottery Awards for All
- Carolyn and Tony Brookes Fund
- Big River Bakery
- MOA Architecture
- Co-op Community Fund
- Tesco Bags of Help
- LGA Foundation
- Warburtons Foundation
- Hospital of God
- Well Newcastle Gateshead
- Muckle LLP

We are also very grateful to the hundreds of local people in our community who have donated and got involved in our fundraising activities.

Our structure

We continue to be a grassroots community charity and our achievements come from hundreds of people in our village working together because we want to bring about change for the better in Chopwell, a place we are proud to live.

All our 8 trustees live and / or work in Chopwell and strong community engagement is our most fundamental principle which underpins, and is embedded in, everything we do.

We are a membership organisation with over 120 members.

Financial Review

Our income is predominantly generated from grants, donations and fundraising. We also receive membership fees. This year we began to receive rental income at The Bank from 1 October 2021 and trading income from The Bank from 3 March 2022. The trustees are pleased with the level of income generated. We anticipate this income should grow year on year.

All expenditure incurred meets our objectives. We have incurred interest costs on loan funding as it was necessary to borrow £100,000 towards the building work at The Bank. This was because the capital grants from the North East LEP and the National Lottery Reaching Communities Fund were paid to us in arrears after the work had been completed and the building expenditure incurred.

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- Warburtons Foundation
- Hospital of God
- Key Fund
- Well Newcastle Gateshead
- Muckle LLP

Future plans

Now that The Bank is established, as well as continuing to deliver existing services, the Trustees and staff also plan to focus on:

- Delivering newly funded programmes including an evening craft class, Junior Masterchef, jam-making classes and nurturing a group to learn to grow fruit and vegetables in our allotment and orchard.
- Beginning an adult literacy programme as literacy is a real issue in Chopwell,
- Beginning activities with new partner organisations such as Methodist Homes Association, Men's Pie Club and the WEA.
- Installing solar panels at the bank to further reduce our environmental impact and reduce costs.
- Beginning our apprenticeship programme offering up to 4 hospitality apprenticeships and 1 finance apprenticeship. Providing apprenticeships is a core part of our business plan to make a significant difference to people's lives, both helping young people in Chopwell find a career, and helping long term unemployed people into permanent employment. Having the additional resource will free up our staff team to organise new projects and work with a wider group of people.
- Completing CRG's transition from a charity run by volunteers to a professionally run charity where the trustees are no longer involved in day to day operations.

- Focus on new long term strategic development projects including the regeneration of Derwent Street, our housing project, the plans to use cycling and the pump track run by Friends of Chopwell Park as part of Chopwell's much wider regeneration.
- Continuing with the development of the Chopwell and Blackhall Mill partnership and delivery of its 5 year strategic plan.

Many of these activities are dependent on fundraising which will continue to be a very important responsibility of the Board of CRG.

Jodie Barwick-Bell
Chairman
Chopwell Regeneration CIO
August 2022