

# **LEADER PROJECT NO. DG160 FINAL REPORT WATSON BIRD CENTRE AND CELEBRATION**

## **Background to the project**

### **1. How was the idea for the project developed?**

The original idea was proposed in spring 2009 by Roger Crofts to the Watson family as owners of the property Barone, Main Street Dalry and the copyright holders of Donald Watson's paintings and other materials. A feasibility study was commissioned in late 2009 funded by LEADER and SNH which gave sufficient credibility to the proposal to merit detailed investigation, development and implementation. This second phase from 2011-13 was primarily funded through the LEADER grant being reported on, with supplementary funding from SNH and the Awards for All fund of the Big Lottery.

During the current phase of the project, the ideas have crystallised through engagement with the steering group and partner organisations, although the same basic aims and objectives and project components have remained having stood the test of time.

### **2. Who was involved in the project? Individuals and Organisations.**

Immediately prior to this LEADER funding, it was decided that the status of the project should be formalised as a charity. Following preliminary assessment of a free-standing charity, the Project Director and Watson family agreed with a proposal from The Glenkens Community and Arts Trust (GCAT) that Watson Birds should become a component project of that charity. The alternative was too expensive and not effective compared with joining with an existing charity based in the area with a track record of achievement.

Formal steering arrangements were put into place led by the Project Director with representatives of the local community in Dalry, GCAT, and two key partner bodies, RSPB and the Pamela Young Trust (PYT). In the later stages of the project we set up two separate groups one dealing with the celebrations element and one dealing with the centre so that these could be progressed more efficiently. The Project Director was common to both. These arrangements have now been changed and a single steering group will be re-established in the near future as the business planning is completed and the major project fund raising programme swings into action.

Key partners during the current phase have been as follows:

GCAT as overarching charity, providing governance and line reporting as well as administrative support and fund raising expertise;

Watson Birds Patrons: the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensbury, Dame Barbara Kelly and Richard Agnew;

the Watson family comprising Donald's three daughters plus daughter-in-law as the owners of the property and contents which is the potential Watson Bird Centre;

PYT, a locally based charity in Dalry, as the potential partner in the development of half of Barone for low cost rental accommodation complementary to the Bird Centre;

SNH as funder and stimulant for the events and activities elements of the project;

the Galloway and Southern Ayrshire Biosphere as this project is a model 'biosphere project' engaging local communities with nature all within the physical envelope of the biosphere and the Project Director is chair of the Biosphere Partnership Board providing added synergy;

Dalry School, both secondary and three feeder primaries, as participants in activities in the classroom;

Dalry Town Hall Committee as the governing body for the main venue used for Watson Birds events;

RSPB as providers of education expertise for schools projects and bird expertise; and

The Watson Raptor Science panel comprising three professors of international repute who select the annual winner and runner up for the award.

Two part-time project officers were employed for the majority of the project: Sarah Keast led on the Celebrations element and David Whyte on the Bird Centre element. For the last few months, Sarah was replaced by Aaron Edgar following her resignation due to other commitments.

A large number of volunteers have been engaged in the project predominantly from Dalry and other parts of The Glenkens, but also from the birds and arts communities. In total, we calculate that around 70 volunteers have played an active role during the life of the project.

### **3. What were the aims and objectives of the project?**

#### **Our Aim**

To inspire, enthuse and engage local communities and visitors and to encourage economic development by linking birds, landscape, arts and community in The Glenkens, and especially St John's Town of Dalry, Galloway, stimulated by the work of Donald and Jeff Watson

#### **Our Objectives**

- Celebrate the outstanding and unique contributions made to bird study, literature and art by father and son: Donald and Jeff Watson;
- develop community pride in the achievements of two famous citizens and inspire others;
- increase economic opportunities through nature and arts based visitors and local participation; and
- enable all ages and abilities, residents and visitors to engage in activities under the broad theme of birds, nature and the arts for their own benefit.

### **4. How was the funding package assembled?**

Based on the results of the feasibility noted under section 1, GCAT Board members and staff worked with the Project Director to identify principle funding sources and make applications. Applications to the Big Lottery, SNH and LEADER were all successful.

### **5. How much money did LEADER provide?**

£43,323.54

### **The project experience**

#### **6. When did the project take place?**

From 3 May 2011 to 2 May 2013.

#### **7. What actually happened?**

The two components of the project have progressed at very different speeds with the celebrations of events and activities much more active in delivery than the capital project of

the bird centre. This was inevitable as capital projects take longer to scope and define, and to determine resource requirements and target funders. This has been exacerbated by the economic downturn and its effects on public sector funding and funding from other sources in the charitable and private sectors and from individuals.

The celebration component has had a number of successful events. Working with schools has been effective; with Dalry school especially the primary schools at Kells in New Galloway, Carsphairn and Dalry through the active support of the senior teachers and the active leadership of resident and peripatetic art teachers. The results have been displayed publicly at events in Dalry and at the Scottish Bird Fair 2013. A link was also made between Dalry Primary School and the Dalry Road Primary School in Edinburgh as both were engaged in bird-related projects and a group from the latter school visited Dalry. Out of school activities have been undertaken under the umbrella of Room 13 a creative arts programme for school children.

The scientific element has progressed with the award of the Watson Raptor Science Prize in 2011 and 2012 and the selection of the winner for 2013. At the festivals in 2011 and 2012, the award winners or representatives gave presentations and stimulated debate with the audience. The outcome was demand for more of these events at subsequent bird festivals (this is planned in the programme for the 2013 festival).

Two festivals have been held and a third one at an advanced stage of planning by the end of the project. The first was held under the aegis of LEADER Day of the Region and enabled the project to test out our ideas and approach. A foot fall of over 350 during the weekend, from a standing start, proved that the plans were on the right lines and merited repeating and developing further for the following year. This was endorsed by the outcome for 2012 with a footfall of around 750 and a larger number of events and participants. The plans for the 2013 festival are a further extension and have been developed during the life of the LEADER funding.

Two trails are under development with funding from SNH and the Cooperative Community charity with input from the project officer funded by the LEADER grant, the Watson family and RSPB. The trails for car/cycle and walking are identified and leaflets for self guiding almost complete with formal launch at the 2013 festival.

The capital project has progressed. A number of iterations of the business plan have been made, each one seeking to drive down the operational costs and the restoration costs of the centre and raise the level of income, and to ensure realistic projections of visitors. Basically, a staged approach has been adopted whereby only the ground and first floor will be restored in the first phase and the basement left to a later phase. Also the portion of the house to be purchased by the PYT has increased marginally to meet their requirements and to reduce Watson Centre costs. The agreed version of the business plan is appended to this report and will form the basis of funding bids, the agreement with the PYT on purchase of the property and to meet the requirements of an anonymous donor. The latter has been identified and has provided £100,000 to support the purchase of the property. Successive valuations of the property with and without the building plot (which has planning approval for a house) has ensured that the valuations reflect the declining market for properties in the area. Formal negotiations with the Watson family are now at an advanced stage with the expectation that ownership will transfer from the Watson's to GCAT for the centre and to the PYT for the other half of Barone completed in early September 2013. An intensive fund

raising phase will follow. This means that the specific targets in the LEADER grant for Barone have not been met as has been explained to and accepted by the LEADER Case Officer at the review point in autumn 2012. This is for the reasons started above.

#### **8. How was the project delivered?**

Two project officers were employed by GCAT on a two days per week basis each throughout the project. They reported to the Project Director and interacted with the steering group and the two groups subsequently set up, as indicated in the second and fourth paragraphs of section 2 above.

It was agreed that the project should have a base in Dalry to connect with the local community. An office was established in the session house of Dalry Kirk. However, this proved to be an unsatisfactory situation due to lack of good internet connections, poor working surroundings for staff, high costs and demands of other users. An arrangement was therefore made with Dumfries and Council's Libraries Service to occupy space in Dalry Library. This was used for a year and terminated at the end of the LEADER funded project to save money.

#### **9. What marketing was undertaken?**

For each event held in Dalry every household was leafleted, posters placed in local business premises, and adverts were placed and articles published in the Glenkens Gazette. For the larger events, adverts were placed in the Galloway News and a news item broadcast on BBC Radio South West news bulletins.

Brochures about the project have been produced and widely distributed by email, at events in the area and further afield, and in The Glenkens through local businesses and at The CatStrand.

A fund raising campaign for the celebrations component, Watson Birds Feathers, was run over the 6 months from September 2012. Adverts were placed in the 2012 Bird Festival programme and direct mailing was made to over 150 individuals by the Project Director. Over £25,000 was raised through this campaign.

A two-page spread reporting the 2012 festival was published by the Galloway News.

Watson Birds took a stand at both the 2012 and 2013 Scottish Bird Festivals to promote the project over the weekend event. The Project Director also attended the Rutland Bird Festival in England, the premier bird event in the UK, in 2012 to promote the project and to assess the potential of the event for marketing and promotion.

Copies of media coverage are appended to this report.

#### **10. Who benefited from the project?**

We had a number of target groups and all of them benefited from the project activities.

The local community was a clear beneficiary for a number of reasons. There were events to attend which had not occurred previously and there were activities to participate in, especially for the locally based artists and for school children. For example, long standing residents reported that as a result of the bird walks as part of our annual festivals they had seen birds that they never knew occurred locally. Local businesses reported additional

business during the festivals. More generally residents reported a greater sense of something happening and potential for the future as a result of the project. The expectation has been very positive, as reported anecdotally and also through the community questionnaire undertaken in autumn 2012.

The artistic community had another outlet for displaying and selling their work. Locally-based artists, part of The Glenkens Art Workshop, have participated as have other artists based in south west Scotland and a few from further afield, including Ireland, the Western Isles and East Lothian.

The bird community have benefited from attending the Watson Raptor Science events and participating formally and informally in the debates on the winning subject. They have also benefited from visiting a part of Scotland they were not necessarily familiar with.

The Watson family have benefited from the exposure of father and son to a wider audience and will benefit from sale of the house.

GCAT has benefited by having, for the first time, a project based in Dalry to counteract the focus on New Galloway through the CatStrand. It has also benefited by having a new project at a time when it was maturing as an organisation and looking for other possible projects.

And the Project Director has benefited through making connections with the local, scientific, artistic community and from all of the help and support from individuals and those working in and associated with GCAT and the principle funding bodies.

#### **11. How did the final budget turn out?**

The budget was strictly adhered to in-house but unfortunately due to a small overrun Leader did not pay all the expenditure incurred. We had a change of staff during the project which made the project overrun but we were told we could not amend the final date of the project.

#### **12. What lessons have been learnt?**

Four key lessons have been learned. First, that capital projects take much longer than initially anticipated and certainly much longer than host communities expect. This means that managing expectations is a key issue which has to be addressed throughout a project of this type. Second, that imbedding a project in an existing charity is absolutely the correct approach rather than setting up a separate organisation. Third, fund raising, even with the informal help of experts in the field, is extremely difficult, time consuming, frustrating and often does not bring the results anticipated. On the other hand, one off unexpected donations from unknown sources provide a tremendous fillip and indicate that just getting the project known to a wide spectrum of interests locally and further field can bring unexpected benefits. And, finally, that the use of events at key points in the year and an annual festival provide profile, maintain the interest and enthusiasm of key interests. The pursuit of the celebrations at a faster pace than the capital project could have been run has been of great benefit to the project and to the perception of it among key interest groups, especially within the local community.

#### **13. Will the project be mainstreamed or transferred?**

The project is already mainstreamed as a key component of GCAT's programme. The new chair and newly elected members of the board have indicated their strong support for the project as a mainstream element of the Trust's programme.

#### **14. Detail the sustainability of the project and/or the exit strategy**

The two components of the project will require additional funding to maintain them in the longer term. In this they are no different from most other projects. The prospects are extremely good. For the celebrations, we already have £25,000 raised through the Feathers Campaign for the future programme of annual festival and individual events. This is unrestricted except for being ring fenced for celebration events and activities. In addition, we anticipate being able to raise further funds for specific activities, such as development of the trials, developing an oral archive, and archiving the written material to be acquired on purchase of Barone from the Watson family.

With the purchase of Barone imminent using funds from the anonymous donor and partnership funding from the PYT, and the recently completed business plan, we will begin a focussed fund raising campaign to raise the £320k needed to restore and refurbish the house into the Watson Bird Centre. The track record of GCAT, and in particular its former chair, in this regard is well known and we do not anticipate any difficulty in raising these funds. For the operational phase, GCAT will use its tried and tested model of seeking funds from charities, trusts, and the lottery sources as well as from patrons and friends groups, to raise the necessary funds. It will also use its extensive and well organised volunteer network to undertake many of the necessary operational tasks rather than having to pay staff.

We have looked at exit strategies, particularly for the Bird Centre, but have now discounted these given the availability of funds for purchase, a robust and conservative business plan for funding refurbishment and the charity's track record in funding operations and engaging volunteers

#### **15. Detail how the project has addressed the LEADER issue selected in the application**

We indicated in our application that the project would focus on the LEADER issue of 'strengthening community spirit and civic pride'. We consider that this has been achieved in a number of ways indicated earlier in this report. Specifically, we highlight the attendance at events by local residents, the increase in trade for local businesses during our festivals, the active participation of local people as volunteers, and the support for the project indicated by respondents to our community questionnaire. The additional income to Dalry Town Hall as the key venue for Watson Birds activities has also been significant. The intangible spirit and pride in the local community is always hard to pin down. Suffice to say, the Project Director is a well-kent face in the community and residents ask with positive interest how things are going and provide feedback on events and activities. At the two festivals held so far, the key feedback has been 'there was a real buzz in the village'. Looking to the future, there are no other options even on the horizon and villagers make it abundantly clear that they are looking forward with eager anticipation to announcement of the purchase of Barone and to its development as the Bird Centre.

