

West Linton Village Centre Trust – Business Plan (June 2022 update*)

Summary

West Linton Village Centre Trust (WLVCT) was registered as a SCIO (SC048916) on 17/12/18 by OSCR to take over the management, income & running costs of the Village Centre from Scottish Borders Council in April 2019, as a conveniently located / sized venue, for community groups, local businesses and public bodies to hire for group meetings, a variety of recreational activities and curating the West Linton village archive (albeit ownership of the building / adjoining outdoor space remains a SBC asset)

This document and the 3 sets of annual accounts (included separately) summarise WLVCT's purpose, business strategy, income (hires, fundraising & grants) / running costs, as well as key achievements in the first 3 years of operating independently of SBC. (An initial CAT application was first submitted to SBC early in 2020 but was shelved due to the Covid Pandemic. An updated version will be resubmitted for SBC's consideration in June 2022.)

From the outset, WLVCT Trustees recognised that WL Village Centre is an important venue for various groups and individuals, so we have never lacked interest or moral support within the local community. But equally there have been significant challenges to overcome in terms of starting a SCIO from scratch; generating lots of new hire income; raising funds / applying for grants to update its fabric & facilities inside; and of course the unprecedented disruption / restrictions of the Covid pandemic, affecting 2 out of the first 3 years of operating.

3 years later, WLVCT continues to be governed, managed and promoted for a variety of uses by six West Linton based trustees who meet regularly in person or online. Via a mix of increased venue hires, local fundraising and 2-3 community grants / donations, WLVCT has been able to cover its annual operating costs of c. £2000 as well as improve its heating, insulation and catering facilities substantially, whilst maintaining a bank balance of c.£5000.

Background

West Linton is a large village in the north west corner of the Scottish Borders. It has a population of around 2500 people. It is in a rural setting, around 14 miles from Peebles, 7 miles from Penicuik and 15 miles from Edinburgh. There is a wide demographic in the village ranging from families through to older residents living in the sheltered housing facility.

The Village Centre is still owned by Scottish Borders Council and used to be a Registrar / wedding venue but prior to 2018 was being used seldomly apart from by the local Historical Association to store the village archive of photographs and other documents. SBC had intended to close it permanently in 2018 because it was loss making due to its relative lack of use as it hadn't been promoted for years and there are several much larger and better equipped halls / rentable spaces nearby e.g. community space in WL Primary School, the Graham Institute, New Church Hall and Bowling Club. Hence many WL residents and potential users, were either unaware of WLVC availability or preferred to use other venues.

However, the main benefits of WLVC are that it is all on one level, with easy access from outside and within. It is very central and walkable for most WL residents. It comprises two rooms, a larger main room that can be used for meetings / events and a smaller room (ex Registrar's office) that now has a fully serviced kitchen. There is capacity for 30-40 people in the main room along with storage cupboards for the archive material. So it is an ideal size and cost to hire for community groups / smaller seated events / temporary retailers.

Hence upon learning about SBC's intentions to close WLVC in Jan 2018, a group of interested WL residents worked successfully since then to increase usage of the WLVC and to demonstrate its value as a community asset. In August 2018 five of them were elected by the members to form a management committee, again to help increase usage but also to run a community consultation in September 2108, develop a constitution and submit a successful SCIO application to OSCR, following meetings with SBC / The Bridge, Peebles.

The trustees meet regularly on a monthly basis (online during Covid) to discuss new bookings, review operational costs, liaise with suppliers and occasionally SBC officials regarding the lease / the CAT process. Over the last 3 years the original 4 trustees have been joined by 2 new ones. Between them all, they have organized a range of fundraising events such as Xmas coffee mornings / online local concerts / jumble sales etc as well as successfully been awarded and received approx. £9000 of community grants and donations.

Mission

WLVCT purpose is to ensure it remains a venue, as it currently is, that can be used by the whole community for meetings, recreational and cultural purposes, health & wellbeing as well as for exhibitions & pop up shops, in a manner fitting with its environs and is financially viable.

Aims & Objectives

The WLVCT has the following aims:-

- To maintain, manage and promote WLVC as a small central venue accessible and used by as many members of the community as possible
- To develop both rooms WLVC in a manner that is welcoming, optimizes their usage and ensures that VC has a thriving & sustainable future
- To promote an ethos that celebrates a community spirit, that embraces inclusiveness, diversity and access for all WL demographics.
- To provide space for West Linton & District Historical Association's village archives.

Charitable & Business Objectives

The SCIO application that was approved by OSCR mid December 2018 aims to develop / promote WLVCT as a recreational venue for the West Linton community, potentially open 7 days a week 09:00 - 22:00, with hourly hire rates ranging from £5 for Local Not for Profit groups, £10 for Local businesses organisations (discounts for longer hires). In time, there is also a possibility that the adjoining small kitchen room may be hired out separately.

Some variable running costs have increased substantially, electricity being the main one, despite the VC having new heaters and improved insulation. Not being open in spring / summer of 2020 and the first half of 2021, has meant it was harder to accurately predict income and expenditure but the annual accounts for our first 3 years of trading indicated the VC has annual running costs of c. £2000. Any substantial improvements to the interior of the building which cost in excess of £500 need to be separately funded by additional fundraising.

Charity Clients

WLVC will be open to all demographics within the community, with no group being given priority over another. Rates for hiring the Village Centre are set at an amount to ensure that the Centre is open to all, with discounted rates given to local and voluntary organisations.

Staff and Volunteers

WLVCT is now run by six volunteer Trustees, with a larger group of Members there to be called upon where necessary. The current Trustees have a comprehensive set of skills and a good network of friends / contacts in the village, that have enabled them to establish the WLVC charitable status, encourage & increase regular hires, organise fundraiser events and progress initiatives like WiFi, new heaters and insulation, exterior improvements to windows / gutters, the installation of a projector screen, the production of the CAT draft and a new kitchen for the smaller room.

Position

The WLVCT has been set up to run the Village Centre. It will not support any one group but is available 7 days a week for recreational facilities, to allow anyone who wants to hire the Village Centre to do so. Currently there are no formal partnerships envisaged, but informally several not-for-profit groups use the facility e.g First Responders / SBC What Matters.

Operations (WLVC was closed due to Covid 19, Mar- Oct 2020 and Jan-June 2021)

The WLVCT SCIO (SC048916) is responsible for:

- Running & managing WLVC facility, comprising one large room and kitchen room
- Allowing anyone wishing to hire it for socially acceptable community purposes
- Maintaining a space for the WL&DHA to store its archives
- Delivering these services by
 - maintaining WLVC to a reasonable standard
 - keeping the facility open
 - taking bookings from groups and individuals
- Managing the service by
 - Running a successful SCIO that adheres to the regulatory framework
 - Engaging with the community to maintain a pool of volunteers and trustees to run the organisation
 - Publishing updates and any other relevant information to help the community understand what the SCIO is doing with the facility
- Success will be measured by the actions of maintaining WLVC as a financially viable place for the community to use in the long term and ensuring there is a vibrant mix of activities taking place in WLVC to engage with as many of the community as possible

SWOT Analysis

Strengths - Centre of village / known as Village Centre; Toilet and separate smaller kitchen room; Both entrances / exits are easy access; WLVC already has a range of regular users.

Weaknesses - Relatively small venue (30-40 max); No bespoke parking; Some current users pay v. little; much larger community venues available e.g. Primary School community space / Graham Institute / New Church Hall / Bowling Club

Opportunities - WL has lots of active community groups; Local population growing (2000+ people); WL is relatively wealthy / generous community; Ideal for small meetings.

Threats –; Exterior building repairs; Commercial users rental income unpredictable; SBC may want WLVCT to buy or wish to sell building for >£50k;

Challenges for the 2-3 year period ahead

- Maintaining a pool of interested people to run & support WLVC
- Covering costs from letting out the facility, which are expected to be circa £2500 per year
- Fundraising to develop reserves / cover any exceptional & unexpected costs
- Identifying grants to carry out further upgrades required to the facility, inside and out
- Complying with any future legislation
- Ensuring good engagement with the community for WLVC and facilities

STRATEGY

Achievements to date (from Sept 2018)

- Carried out a community wide consultation exercise (Sept 18)
- Applied to OSCR and establish SCIO (Dec 18 SC048916)
- Set up bank account; booking & invoicing system; cashflow (Apr 19 / on going)
- Developed & executed business plan (initially Mar 19 / on going)
- Consulted with lawyer before agreeing to 1 year SBC lease for WLVC (Mar 19)
- Established WiFi, Email (revamped West Linton website subsequently closed)
- Ensure public liability / buildings insurance; secure entry system (April 19)
- Promote Village Centre for new hires and organise fundraising events (on going)
- Improved heating, insulated roof space and improved window frames (Sept 19)
- Drafted CAT process to secure much longer term lease (submitted Spring 2020)
- Received 2 grants:- The Tourle Foundation (£4500 for series of professional community concerts) and Alice Hamilton Trust (£2000 for building improvements)
- 2x WL photography competition / fundraising calendars for 2021 / 22
- Installation of a fully serviced kitchen & cupboard space in smaller room (Mar 2021)
- Received 1 large donation from WL Music Society (£2500 for community events)
- Various fundraising initiatives including coffee mornings, book & jumble sales
- Attracted several new community group regular users e.g. WL Bridge Club, Royal Voluntary Service, WL Folk Music Sessions and local mental health support group
- worked in partnership with the Eastgate Theatre, the Whipman Play Society and the Knot (local community shop)

Short Term (on going)

Resubmission of the Community Asset Transfer (Summer 2022)

Retain current regular users (Whipman Society / First Responders / Community Council) by charging £5 / hour and offer special annual rate of £2.50 / hour for WL Historical Association, who curate the village archive and meet every week. Also incentivise more weekend hires of WLVC by offering local business £10 / hour for first 4 hours or £50 for a full day (7-8 hours)

Attract more new users on weekday evenings with repeatable, catered, ticketed activities for 30-40 people e.g. Concerts & Comedy / Arts & Music Classes / Yoga / Local Lectures

Attract more Antiques / Exhibitions / Pop Up shops alternate Sat / Sun that don't impact local retailers e.g. charge £50 per day

Organise at least 1 bigger fundraising event annually (June or December) e.g. Whipman Play raffles, fundraiser concerts and Xmas coffee mornings, to raise £500 pa

Apply for local community grants in order to fund specific VC improvements e.g. new toilet

Medium term (2022 for 2-5 years)

- Maintain the profile of the organisation
- Identify longer term aims and opportunities, including making better use of the smaller kitchen room.
- Improve exterior fabric of building & interior facilities
- Identify further income streams and specific funding to implement longer term aims
- Ensure good mix of Trustees for longer term viability and co-opt on skills as needed
- Succession plan for trustees and volunteers
- Investigate viability of WLVC as Wedding venue by working with local ministers / organisers) e.g. charge £100 per wedding or £200 with flowers / bottle of bubbly etc

Long term (up to 10 years)

- Firmly establish WLVC as a well-run, sustainable facility that meets the needs of the community and maintain its profile
- Offer a vibrant mix of activities that engage with many different community groups
- Potentially purchase the building from SBC, assuming sufficient funds available

PEOPLE AND ORGANISATION

Trustees

All Trustees are volunteers, live in WL, one of whom directly opposite the Village Centre. The SCIO has no staff. A Trustee Board has been established for over 3 years now, including a Chair, Secretary and Treasurer with an additional three members on the Committee. This Committee is responsible for all day-to-day decisions about WLVC.

At our three Annual General Meetings to date (generally March), the Trustees all stood down and then were re-elected by the other members of WLVC present. In 2021 one of the original Trustees stepped back to become an ordinary member and a new Trustee was elected. And in 2022 a sixth Trustee was elected by the members present at the AGM. At any time members with any specialist skills required may be co-opted onto the Board as appropriate.

Members

Community involvement happened initially due to raised awareness of SBCs original plans to close WLVC. Several public meetings in summer / autumn 2018 organized by the group who were voted by the members present to become trustees (some meetings were attended by SBC community and estates officers) plus the WLVC consultation in September 2018 that got 140 responses. There are now over 20 members (some of whom live very close by) and another 70-80 residents who have expressed an interest and are regularly kept informed via email about WLVC progress, several of whom are willing to undertake specific tasks.

Training

Trustees will take advantage of any training as required, through tapping into specialist help delivered by organisations such as The Bridge in Peebles. There are also opportunities via organisations like SCVO to gain further training as required and many law and accountancy firms also offer free training on being a Trustee which can be another source of information.

Policies

WLVCT has established policies & practices including:

- Insurance, health & safety, an operating manual for hirers and secure entry
- Conditions of bookings, online invoicing, WLVCT purchasing & financial management
- Safeguarding
 - Child and Vulnerable Adults Protection
 - Equality and Diversity
 - Disability Awareness
- Cleaning rota; waste, parking and considerations to neighbours

MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

- Promotional communications, including social media e.g. WLVC Facebook page (& Twitter tbc), with wider audience to update the community on a regular basis
- WLVCT email (westlintonvillagecentre@gmail.com) already established and WL Website (www.westlinton.org was revamped in 2020 but subsequently closed)
- Paper based communication with wider audience to update on an occasional basis
- Grant funding “end of grant reports” as required by terms of the grant
- Promotion & publicity of WLVC as necessary to maintain its profile
- Minutes from Trustee meetings circulated to members
- AGM organised & held (generally March) for members & interested parties, at which the WLVCT Chair and Treasurer present the annual report and accounts
- Financial Statements are required under the Charities SORP and these reports have been submitted to OSCR for each year so far, well before the nine month deadline
- Develop an ongoing relationship with our local newspaper, providing them with information about VC events
- Use local events to advertise VC activities

INCOME GENERATION AND FUNDRAISING

Core Funding:

- Rental of Village Centre facility by 20+ groups and individuals
- Fundraising events – Coffee Mornings, one-off fundraisers
- Individuals fundraising through sponsored events
- Donations in kind of time and materials to maintain and run the facility

Non-Core Funding

- Potentially more funding from local trusts (e.g. Kenneth Paul Trust and The Alice Hamilton Trust) for one off modest spends & upgrades
- Grants from national grant awarding bodies for capital spend and upgrades e.g. Scottish Landfill Communities Fund, Tesco Community Grants

FINANCE

2022 Current & Forecast Position

Currently as of June 2022, WLVCT has approx. £5000 surplus in its bank account. Income from venue hirers fluctuates with the seasons / school terms but generally our monthly income now balances with our costs, now that there are no Covid restrictions in place. It is only exceptional expenditure items which normally require WLVCT to apply for grants.

Financial Records

The financial records are maintained regularly on an Excel spreadsheet which was developed by a former trustee who is a Chartered Accountant. As the SCIO gets exemptions under the Charities SORP from preparing full accruals based accounts, this will be sufficient to ensure that the financial records are compliant. There is no VAT Registration of the business which requires VAT compliant records. Appropriate financial policies are in place. The current Treasurer has prepared three sets of annual accounts to date and presented them at each AGM, having been independently verified by a local chartered accountant.

WLVCT Business Plan Next Steps

Trustees resubmit WLVCT Community Asset Transfer application to SBC in Summer 2022.
Agree on next 6-12 months expenditure priorities and investigate their detailed costings
Continue to approach local and national sources of grant funding in order to fund further improvements to the VC e.g. new toilet facilities
Test monthly ticketed, catered & repeatable event concepts for demand e.g. Lyne Lectures
Start to plan for next 1-2 fundraising events e.g. Xmas coffee morning,