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The Grapes, Whithorn Dumfries & Galloway

2 refurbished units by All Roads Lead to Whithorn
Due on site early 2021

Location

The Grapes, Whithorn -
Dumfries & Galloway



Priorities

- **Meeting local housing need**
- **Town centre regeneration**
- **Tackling fuel poverty**

Background

All Roads Lead to Whithorn (ARLTW) was formed following a community consultation event in 2013. The charity's priorities since its creation have been to support the local community through job creation, improved wellbeing and to keep young people and families within the town. While almost 50% of housing stock within Whithorn is social housing, there is a very low turnover and no new houses have been built for many years; consequently there is a real need for particularly family housing.

ARLTW acquired the former Grapes Hotel in 2018, which has lain derelict in Whithorn's historic main street for 30 years. A previous owner of the Category C listed Georgian building secured funding for a new roof and windows some 10 years ago, however no further work was undertaken and the building otherwise was susceptible to further deterioration. Local pressure to do something, even demolition, was mounting.

With a large 'burgess' plot to the rear of the building which lends itself to further development, ARLTW have decided to take a two-phased approach to the project: Phase 1 will concentrate on refurbishing the Grapes Hotel to create two family sized homes, while Phase 2 will see development of the remainder of the site to deliver a further two houses, which will be fully accessible. The houses will all be let at a social rent level, using a locally agreed allocation policy which will prioritise local families in housing need. ARLTW have yet to decide how the properties will be managed.

“With no interest from the local authority, housing associations or the commercial market, we bravely rushed in to save The Grapes”

Julia Muir Watt, Director - All Roads Lead to Whithorn

A full funding package is now in place, a planning application has been submitted and the project is currently out to tender. With work expected to start onsite early in 2021, tenants should be moving into the first two homes by early 2022.

Funding

Following a grant from the Scottish Land Fund to purchase the building and site, a Rural Housing Fund award was secured towards the development costs, along with grants from the Scottish Government Town Centre Capital Fund, Dumfries & Galloway Council's Town Centre Living Fund, the Architectural Heritage Fund, and loan financing.

The Grapes Hotel, Whithorn
which will be converted
into two, family sized
homes.

Image credit:
Hazel Smith

Architect:
ARPL



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**Julia Muir Watt, Director
All Roads Lead to Whithorn**

Support

With no paid staff, all project development has been led by volunteer directors. South of Scotland Community Housing (SOSCH), formerly Dumfries and Galloway Small Communities Housing Trust, have supported ARLTW through the acquisition process, including funding applications, business planning and financial modelling, along with community engagement and housing needs assessments. The relationship has been a positive one and SOSCH's expertise in affordable housing delivery was particularly welcomed.

Outcomes

Community ownership of the former hotel will not only provide much needed affordable, long-term family housing in Whithorn, but also preserve a historic building and revitalise the historic town centre. The architects' innovative and sympathetic design will ensure the historic exterior of the building is retained, whilst providing modern, high standard homes within. High energy efficiency standards were a priority for ARLTW, to tackle the high levels of fuel poverty locally, and to ensure the homes would be affordable to maintain for tenants, despite the historic fabric of the buildings. The architect's bespoke solutions include secondary glazing and above standard insulation levels, to achieve almost Passive House heating standards.

Future Plans

Having secured planning permission for the entire Grapes development, ARLTW are keen to move on to Phase 2 once Phase 1 - and other plans - are complete. However they acknowledge that the availability of development funding support will be critical to Phase 2 moving forward.

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