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# Taking ownership of a local pub as a community

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# The Trout Inn, Barrhill

\* [www.barrhilldevtrust.org](http://www.barrhilldevtrust.org)

## About

The Barrhill Development Trust became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) in 2019. It is run and controlled by local residents. Their most recent project was the purchase and refurbishment of the village pub.

Barrhill is a small village in South Ayrshire. One of the major challenges for the village is the ageing population and loss of local facilities. There is a well-established history of community-led development in the village which has been supported through income from local wind farms.

Numerous regeneration projects in the village have taken place including a memorial hall, a car park, and a play park.

## The Trout Inn

Barrhill Development Trust purchased the village pub with the intention of retaining an important amenity. They wanted to develop it for the benefit of the local community and economy.

By the time of the community buyout in 2020, the pub had been closed for a while. There was no focal point for the community, even before the closure, the pub operated on very limited hours. This left a big gap in the social life of the village.

Following the negotiated purchase with the building owner, extensive refurbishment works are taking place. Alongside the building works, the community are taking steps to set up a community business structure to allow trading when the Inn opens in 2022/3.

“ Without a pub we literally have nothing, we just have homes. This is why people are so keen to get this up and running! ”

The Trust is taking advantage of the large building. In addition to a new pub, there are plans to create new accommodation.

They are set to offer a new Bed & Breakfast for visiting relatives. Due to the nature of local housing, residents have trouble when their families visit, as space is limited.

Currently, the inability to host visitors locally can lead to elderly locals feeling isolated in this rural community. The Trust is taking action to solve this issue by creating visitor accommodation at reasonable rates.

income from local  
wind farms



# The Swan, Banton

\* [www.theswanbanton.co.uk](http://www.theswanbanton.co.uk)

## About

Banton is a small, picturesque village near Kilsyth in North Lanarkshire. The village saw the closures of multiple businesses and facilities in the five years preceding the community buyout, including the village shop and post office.

The local bus service was also under threat and other local facilities, like the play park, were falling into disrepair. Similar trends were visible in neighbouring villages. One pub was converted and another has been demolished and the site where it stood put up for sale.

The community was already experiencing the social impacts of the loss of common amenities like the shop. **Locals weren't bumping into each other and having the casual conversations that make a community.**

The village was becoming unsustainable for some of the older residents who had been there for 40 years. They were heavily impacted by the twin challenges of the loss of the village shop and fewer buses to get about.



**The Swan Inn was much more than a local pub – it felt like the heart of the village.**

“ Actually, the first meeting wasn't necessarily about community ownership. The first meeting was for people that felt we needed to do something and were open to anything. And we came out with that meeting pretty sure that if anything was going to work it was community ownership. ”

## The Swan

The Swan is one of Scotland's first community-owned pubs. When the building was threatened with demolition in 2016, the community quickly started organising to save it.

Losing the only pub would have been devastating for the village and the local economy. The signs of decline were already visible in the village. Luckily the owner of the building wanted to support the best outcome for Banton. Following a negotiated sale, People United for Banton (PUB) became the new owners of the pub in 2017. That brought them closer to their real ambition of creating a real community hub for the village.

To take ownership of the pub, the group had to pull together all the local skills and resources that they could. The committee included people with skills in project management, finance, marketing, accounting, HR, even the previous owner's son who was an architect.



one of Scotland's first  
community-owned pubs



However, there were a lot of things that needed to be done that no one had previous experience of! The group had to do a lot of homework and access support. Bringing the community on board with the idea of a buyout was another major task, particularly as there weren't any community-owned pubs in Scotland at the time.

Support from the Plunkett Foundation was crucial in both running a community engagement campaign and supporting the case for community ownership through the evidence they'd gathered with community businesses across the UK. Community Shares Scotland helped with support and funding in running a community shares offer to support the buyout.

Following the purchase and refurbishment of the building the overall footprint expanded.

There is now a restaurant and bar, a glazed walkway and something the community calls 'The Wee Hub'. This Hub was meant to house the village shop, however, the shop reopened under new ownership. The Wee Hub is now a space for creativity, hosting different pop-ups such as a bookshop, toy shop, gift shop and a maker's workshop.

The Swan is now also fully accessible. Following the opening, the group are running the pub both as a business and as a community hub. A staff team that oversees the running of the restaurant and pub. A committee oversees activities and events.

They run events such as a preschool morning with special offers for kids and their grown-ups, a primary café at three o'clock on a Tuesday when children get to go to the Swan for a meal for £5, a high school café, and senior teas.

***Barrhill and Banton have both benefited from community ownership. They saw the potential in sites that otherwise would have been lost to the community. Their experiences showed similarities when they expressed their future plans, successes, challenges and advice for other communities looking to save their local amenities.***

### Future

In Barrhill there is no shortage of ideas. Some of the land-related projects that are being considered include a community shop (there's only one shop and no other facilities in the village) and running a roving post office.

The Swan would like to be able to hire a community worker to oversee events and activities, such as a carers café. In Banton, there's a lot of hidden formal and informal care provision. To have a space where carers can go and receive support is something the group considers important.



## Benefits of Community Ownership

The communities shared how they felt they had benefited from Community Ownership:

-  Increased confidence in their area
-  A sense of achievement – community ownership has given people a boost.
-  Sustainability and resilience – Community ownership acts as a catalyst for more things to happen
-  Local tourism - in Banton two holiday cottages were supported by the Kelvin Valley LEADER programme contributing to the creation of a small tourist infrastructure.

## Funding

Both communities receive funding for their buy-outs from the Scottish Land Fund:

-  The Trout Inn received £184,490 for the purchase of the building
-  The Swan received £135,000 for the acquisition

The communities also looked to other sources to support them for development and revenue such as Kelvin Valley LEADER, The National Lottery Community Fund and The Clothworkers' Foundation. The Trout Inn was also in receipt of Community Benefit Fund from the local wind farms.






## Success Factors

Communities reported on the things that went well during the buyout process:

-  Listening to the community - Regular consultation allowed community members to share their priorities.
-  Communicating the idea and getting community support
-  Creating partnerships for resources and Funding
-  The willingness of people to help with the projects.
-  Scale of community support - in Banton, for example, over 73% of households took part in the consultation process and over 150 people volunteered their time to the project.

## Challenges

Communities were open about the challenges they faced:

-  Dealing with dissatisfaction - not everyone in the community can get exactly what they want.
-  Maintaining professional boundaries – in a small community, those involved in the running of the organisation can feel as if they're never off duty.
-  Fitting in with the rules of funders – sometimes changes are required to be eligible.
-  Not having a proof of concept for a community-owned pub - The Swan was among the first community-owned pubs in Scotland
-  Taking on a failing asset – having no resources for the upkeep of an old building which was falling into disrepair

## Advice

Think forward to the sense of pride that you're going to have at the end of this, that you know it's going to be visible to everybody in the village. Think of creating something like this as a community. Think of the impact it has on your kids growing up in this sense of possibility. Just remember how many ways you're going to benefit beyond that you know.