



CollaborationNI: Case Study Two: The Raglan Project

Institute for Voluntary
Action Research

Part One

Background

Partners

1. Brookeville Enterprises (provides accommodation and facilities to community and voluntary organisations in the Harryville area of Ballymena)
2. Harryville Partnership Initiative (an umbrella organisation providing accommodation and facilities to community organisations in the Harryville area of Ballymena)
3. Slemish n tha Braid Credit Union Limited

Project Description

The Raglan Project is based in Ballymena. The partnership aims to regenerate the Harryville area of Ballymena by re-developing the derelict Raglan Pub into premises for the Credit Union and as a community and social enterprise hub.

Slemish purchased the Raglan Pub, and the first phase of the Project was to refurbish part of the building to serve as new premises for the Credit Union. This first phase completed in summer 2015 and the Credit Union has now re-opened in the refurbished premises. It was launched on 15 October 2015, International Credit Union Day.

The second phase of the Raglan Regeneration Project will require the remainder of the building to be rebuilt, refurbished and relaunched as a community and business development and social enterprise facility.

CollaborationNI has been supporting the Raglan Project since September 2013. Staff met with representatives of the three partners, as well as other community organisations, following three expert facilitation sessions.

The meeting focussed on issues such as: which organisations should be involved; the development of the project plan; funding; the role of the partners; and the most appropriate legal structures. The CollaborationNI Legal Adviser then prepared a first draft Memorandum of Understanding for the project.

From March-June 2015 CollaborationNI staff met with the Raglan Project representatives on three occasions. The key issues were to:

- **Progress Phase One of the Project** – the refurbishment of part of the Raglan building and its re-opening as the Slemish Credit Union premises
- **Support Brookeville in making its application to the Charity Commission** for Northern Ireland for charitable status
- **Support the Project in accessing funding for Phase Two** of the Project. NICVA's Funding Advice Officer provided information about potential funders

- **Negotiate the Memorandum of Understanding for the Project.** Phase One could be driven by the Credit Union alone – Phase Two would require a genuine partnership approach and a strong steering group.

CollaborationNI will continue to provide on-going support to the Project as its focus moves towards accessing funding for Phase Two. In order to support the development of a sustainable business model for the Raglan Project, CollaborationNI has proposed it meets with representatives from similar projects in other parts of Northern Ireland.

The partners are discussing what to do next now that the building is ready. They are looking at offering office space and retail units to local businesses, to further help regenerate the area.

Part Two

Summary of interviews

Drivers to collaborate

Slemish needed new premises and, in discussion with Harryville and Brookeville, decided to buy the derelict Raglan Pub. All three interviewees saw this as a means of starting the regeneration of that area of Ballymena, and shared a vision of seeing *'the building being used to its full potential and helping the community'*. Having a very supportive local MLA who is also on the Board of Brookeville Enterprises, helped in driving the project forward. Partners brought different skills and capabilities, but critically all shared in the vision.

Hoped for benefits

The most visible benefit is having a very smart credit union building in place of a completely derelict pub. Interviewees felt that this is already having benefits for community pride: *'We've renovated an eyesore into something for the community.'* There are two other main areas of benefit:

1. Local financial capability and resilience

Slemish is already seeing a significant uptake in membership. Half their annual new members (128) joined in the two months since opening the premises. Having a visible presence also leads to greater interaction with the community, allowing for more informal opportunities to discuss finances. With the post office and another bank branch recently closing, Slemish is now the only financial institution in that area of town. Along with the longer opening hours, this helps more people to have access to bank accounts. Slemish are planning a course on well-being and debt, targeting local people and customers. This will look at how to use money better, and help people to improve their financial situation. Running a course such as this would not have been possible without the new premises.

2. Longer term regeneration

As discussions about the future of the building progress, the partners hope to facilitate greater local employment and spending power as new businesses and potentially voluntary sector organisations move into the office space and retail units:

'A bespoke business/community hub providing employment opportunities for all, plus community facilities for the local, ever ageing community at competitive rental rates; any surplus left would be used to further develop local community activities.'

Concerns and challenges

There were wide differences in financial capability between the partners, perhaps inevitably given that one is a financial institution: *'It was very easy for the principal group to have a vision for the project. Projecting that vision to other groups was the most difficult part, especially where there is a conflict with the current function of that group.'* This created tensions as there were different levels of comfort around money and debt. Overcoming these meant that the MoU had to go through several drafts to reach the point where the partners could all sign up to it.

Views on collaboration support

Interviewees were very appreciative of the support received from CollaborationNI. The external, objective and professional advice was hugely appreciated in reaching the point of the MoU being signed. Alongside this, they credited the expert facilitation as helping them to overcome the challenges of having different levels of understanding and capability:

'Their facilitation from the start was fantastic, it assuaged a lot of concerns.'

'We came out wiser than when we went in.'

'It couldn't have been done without that external support – you need somebody from the outside.'

Reflections on collaborative working

Interviewees felt that the challenges have been overcome effectively. The organisations have clearly defined roles – particularly Slemish – which has helped to keep the collaboration going. They are aware that there is a great deal of work still to do, but feel that there is a shared vision now between all the partners:

'We still need the advice as we move towards implementation.'