

Project 14 - report on 2023/24 by Charlie Lambert, Chair, Norman Nicholson House Community Interest Company

The big development this year has been our purchase of 14 St George's Terrace which was finalised at the end of February.

Making the decision to go ahead with the purchase was a change of approach by the project team. Originally we had wanted to secure all the funding for the entire project before taking the plunge and buying the house, even though we had secured the funds to make that purchase a couple of years ago thanks to a very generous benefactor who prefers not to be named. Over the course of last summer it became clear that the funding organisations would not entertain applications from us unless we either owned the house or had a long lease on it. They regarded it as too much of a risk to themselves. So our directors decided to activate that promise from the benefactor and go ahead with the purchase, something we could only do because of the success of our crowdfunding campaign in 2022/23 which has given us the financial security to look after the house while we launch a new round of applications to funders.

The situation now is that we are the owners of Norman's old home. We've been getting on with the practicalities that that involves – insurance, utilities, business rates. At the same time we've completed another update of our business plan, which I thought I'd explain in a bit more detail.

The plan is a substantial document spanning 106 pages. It covers the reasons behind our ambition to do something constructive with the house, describes the process by which we will repair and renovate it, add an extension at the back, and equip it for its future role with its financial future underpinned by the creation of a good quality coffee shop on the ground floor, to be called the Eat the Equator café. The décor and surroundings of the café will echo the way this space looked in the 1950s when Norman's father ran his gents outfitters there. The exterior will be restored to reflect that same period, and this will contribute to Millom's conservation area which includes St George's Terrace. Upstairs will be the Norman Nicholson museum plus an en-suite double accommodation room for use by a writer in residence or general tourists. The business plan includes detailed costs and financial forecasts, analyses of demand and of risk, how our project aligns with local and regional strategies, and what activities will be hosted from the house which range from the Nicholson museum/display to community support groups based in the café area. These will include dementia groups, social inclusion, and an adult literacy programme. We've brought together an impressive list of professionals to ensure that the plan has authority – architects, cost consultant, heritage specialist, specialists in historic decoration, museum consultant – and we have statements of support from a host of influential figures including

Copeland's MP Trudy Harrison, Baroness Sue Hayman, the former MP for Workington, top people from Cumbria's leading cultural locations including Wordsworth Grasmere, Tullie House, and Brantwood, and of course our own president, Lord Melvyn Bragg.

Now that we own No 14 we're in a strong position to approach funding organisations again. I don't know what the outcome will be, but I do know that we have a very good case; in fact it's hard to see what more we could have done.

A couple more items I'd like to mention regard to the NN House CIC. We launched a third walking trail last December, accessible through our app. The new trail is based on Haverigg and it's a lovely walk from the car park by the beach café around the village, across some fields, visiting numerous episodes from history and seeing a bit more of Nicholson's home territory. If you don't have the app yet, it's called Norman Nicholson's Millom and you can download it to your phone from wherever you obtain your apps.

Finally, we've strengthened our line-up even further by the appointment of Garth Lindrup to our board as company secretary. Garth was already a member of the Society and a retired lawyer who spent his career at the top of his profession, acting for government departments, NHS trusts and local authorities among others. Garth also has experience as director of a CIC and played a leading role in setting up Lancaster Judges Lodgings Museum – a charity established to run this museum as a community enterprise. We're delighted that he has joined us.

Thank you again for supporting us in this project, and a special thank-you to Sue Dawson whose intervention when the house was put on the market some seven years ago now protected Norman's home from unsympathetic development and enabled us to reach the very promising position we're in today.

Charlie Lambert
April 2024