

Project 14 - report on 2022/23 by Charlie Lambert, Chair, Norman Nicholson House Community Interest Company & Chair, Norman Nicholson Society

This time last year I seem to remember saying that the upcoming 12 months would be decisive in respect of Project 14. OK, I hold up my hand. They weren't. Not quite. But they did turn out to be hugely important. They did give us solid grounds for optimism. And they end now with Project 14 in a much stronger place.

As an illustration, let me invite you into the study in my home in Liverpool. It's around 3 o'clock on the afternoon of Tuesday January 31st and my mobile phone beeps out an alert from GoFundMe. There's a new donation to our crowdfunder. My laptop is already on the page. I look, and there are the details: £163 donated by one Laura Day, committee member of this parish, and the total raised now stands at (wait for it) exactly £20,000. The peace around the cul-de-sac of our little close evaporates with a howl of delight and triumph. We've done it. Laura did it. YOU have done it. Between us, we've hit the target of £20,000 on the day of the deadline set by the Architectural Heritage Fund to unlock exactly the same amount of money in match funding. What an achievement, and what an endorsement of this project to turn Nicholson's house into a worthy celebration of his life and an important player in the community life of Millom. Thank you, thank you to everyone who contributed. I know that a lot of our friends have donated more than once, some have donated in memory of special people, some have put in four-figure sums, some have put in five pounds – whatever the amount, the support has been quite breathtaking and I and the Nicholson House directors as well as the committee of the Society are very grateful.

This last year has turned out to be, if not decisive, at least pretty good. That crowdfunder initiative has turned out to be worth £40,000 to us. And also last year, in July, we were included in the Millom Stronger Towns bid for £20 million of Government money under the Levelling Up scheme. In November, the Government accepted Millom's submission. It means a grand total of £29 million – the extra coming £9 million coming from other funding organisations – has been set aside for projects in Millom. We were told that we are a 'priority project' but exactly what that means in terms of financial support we don't yet know. We've been told to await a further announcement from the Town Deal board, so, we wait. We certainly hope to receive a significant sum, but we know we will have to justify that, and I don't think it will come anywhere near meeting the entire cost of the project. I hope that it will be enough to prompt other funding organisations to commit, to show them that this is a viable project which will make good use of their investment.

You'll have noticed that in the last 12 months everything has been costing more. That includes all the costs associated with Project 14. We have had to review our financial projections, both for the construction and renovation phase and for the first few years of operations once the house is open for business. We've also been through some detailed work to satisfy Building Control's requirements over fire regulations. I would like to pay tribute to Copeland Community Fund for providing funding to pay for the work of our cost consultants Fairfield Cost Consultants of Kendal and for updates to the drawings by John Coward Architects of Cartmel. The total cost now exceeds £700,000. I know, I had a sharp intake of breath as well. But we've already raised or secured over £150,000, and the true value of that impressive figure is not just the pounds-sterling, it's the unequivocal message of support that it sends out to anyone who's listening. And talking of support, I'd also like to thank Jeff Cowton of Wordsworth Grasmere who continues to be a wonderful source of advice and encouragement; to say thank-you to the Heritage Trust Network which makes a

huge amount of information and expertise available to us; and also to thank the committee of the Society for their enthusiastic support.

As you'll hear elsewhere in our officers' reports, No 14 has hosted various events and visits over the last year and these are important not just in themselves but also to keep reminding everyone of the potential of our plans.

One final word from me concerns a change to the board of directors of the Nicholson House company. In May Nick Lancaster stepped down having made a terrific contribution since the company was first set up in 2020, giving us the benefit of his experience in the hospitality and tourism sector from his years as MD of Langdale Leisure. Last month I was delighted to welcome to the board John Baker, CEO of Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners, who will bring similar expertise to our endeavours, a very valuable addition to the team.

As the Society's President, Melvyn Bragg, says in an endorsement of our business plan, 'There is something about the houses of artists which never fails to illuminate their work and to enliven and excite the interest of visitors, particularly the young. It would be a real triumph for Millom to have Norman's house become such a centre'.

The year 2022-23 has seen some very substantial steps taken in that direction.

Charlie Lambert
10/3/23