

Campbeltown Picture House

Stefanie Fischer AoU explores how the recently completed project to conserve and develop Campbeltown Picture House, viewed alongside other initiatives in Campbeltown, serves as an example of cultural and heritage led regeneration of a town that had slipped into decline, economically and in terms of the state of its historic environment, including over 140 listed buildings.

When Campbeltown Picture House was built in 1913, occupying a prominent position overlooking Campbeltown harbour, Campbeltown was a thriving maritime town. It was once one of the richest towns per capita in Scotland, and its sheltered port played a key role in growing the whisky, fishing and tourism industries.

Campbeltown Picture House, designed by Albert V Gardner of Glasgow in 1913 is an important and rare example of an early purpose-built cinema.

It was included in the statutory list in 2008 as a Category A building in recognition of its high architectural and historical significance and is flanked on one side by another Category A building by Glasgow architect J J Burnet and by the 19th century Category B listed Royal Avenue Mansions on the other side.

The Notes contained in the Statutory List state:

“Stylistically the building is highly distinctive with a strong street presence overlooking Campbeltown Harbour. The exterior treatment is Glasgow School Art Nouveau and it uses a combination of concentric ovals in plan form and multiple verticals to the principal elevation.”

“Its interior is of equal significance. It retains elements of a 1930s ‘atmospheric’ refurbishment undertaken by Gardner (the original architect).”

The Campbeltown Picture House has always had a strong connection with the Campbeltown Community. In 1913 over 40 local people got together to fund its development. It was then run by three generations of the Armour family, some of whom still live in the town, before being taken on by Campbeltown Community Business Ltd (CCB Ltd), one of the first Community Businesses in Scotland. It has been run as a charitable company ever since.

Scotland’s 20th century industrial decline contributed to the damage to Campbeltown’s economy, and in common with the urban fabric and historic environment within the town centre, Campbeltown Picture House had fallen into disrepair.

CCB Ltd launched the Centenary Project to conserve the Picture House and to upgrade it to meet the expectations of a modern cinema operator and cinema-going audience, so as to provide it with a sustainable future.

The vision is for Picture House, following completion of the Centenary Project in late 2017, to be more than a cinema, providing a cultural, leisure, social and community hub for Campbeltown and Kintyre, and to continue a tradition of cine variety, making use of the original variety stage for small scale comedy acts and amplified music performance.

The completed development has provided a new accessible entrance and foyer in the gap between the historic cinema building and adjoining Annexe, which

is also listed as a Category A building. This houses the single sales point for tickets, food and drink and the café/bar, with views over the harbour. To the rear are a multi-use space, and a second screen which allows greater programming diversity and helps to attract younger audience members.

Significant public funds were invested in Campbeltown Picture House including funding from Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF), Historic Scotland, Creative Scotland, Argyll & Bute Council, Highland and Island Enterprises (HIE), The Architectural Heritage Fund and Coastal Communities Fund, in recognition of its significance. The Robertson Trust, which provides funding awards to charitable organisation in Scotland, also contributed to the funding package.

The impact of the project on urban and economic regeneration needs to be viewed within the context of other projects in Campbeltown which have resulted in new market conditions, and improved townscape and facilities.

The impetus for regeneration was the high level of deprivation in a remote area, a decreasing population, rising unemployment, a lack of inward investment and a lack of repairs and maintenance, resulting in deteriorating buildings.

Regeneration projects include:

HLF's Townscape Heritage Initiative Scheme and Historic Scotland's Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme, both heritage-led regeneration schemes run by Argyll & Bute Council which have led to a significant upgrades of the townscape, attracting new businesses to locate there, and visitors to linger.

A first Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) funded by Historic Scotland secured in 2007 and Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) funded by HLF and running from 2009-2015, were rolled up into one large regeneration project in 2009 and delivered in tandem. A second CARS (2015-2020) was secured before the THI finished. Both the CARS and THI provided funding to grant aid repairs to historic buildings, primarily concentrating on Main Street and surrounding streets.

The restoration of the Town Hall, a dominant building in Main Street, was completed in 2016 and provides meeting rooms and a large function hall, managed by South Kintyre Development Trust, as well as making a contribution to townscape improvements.



Above: Town Hall following refurbishment © Raymond Hosie
Below: Elevation to Hall Street © Keith Hunter Photography



Around the harbour, Argyll & Bute Council's CHORD Programme initiated improvement of the marina, increasing the number of berths to 51, and providing new showers and changing facilities in Old Quay.

Significant investment is being made in extending facilities in the harbour to accommodate larger freightliners, delivering steel for the wind turbines and shipping out finished turbine manufactured at 'Wind Towers' on the former Machrihanish Airbase, outside of Campbeltown. The improvements support other industries and have made the return of the ferry between Ardrossan (near Glasgow) and Campbeltown possible, as well as an increase in the visits of cruise ships like Hebridean Princess.

The potential for development of the former Machrihanish Airbase, designated by Scottish Government as a Renewable Hub, and supported by HIE and Argyll & Bute Council, will further support the regeneration of Campbeltown.

Investment in the Royal Hotel, located on the waterfront, and forming part of the context to Campbeltown Picture House and adjoining listed buildings, which together with the Ugadale Hotel in nearby Machrihanish, is linked to a new golf course at Machrihanish, creating three links golf courses in South Kintyre.



Above: View of Campbeltown Picture House looking along Hall Street

Bottom Left: Interior of Screen 1

Bottom Right: Interior of Screen 2

© Keith Hunter Photography



Other visitor attractions include Springbank and Glen Scotia Distilleries, providing Campbeltown once more with a distinct whisky brand, which can be enjoyed in the award winning Whisky Bar at the Ardshiel Hotel, as well as in the bar at the Royal Hotel.

The Campbeltown Picture House and other local attractions help to retain visitors in Campbeltown, and reverse the tendency for visitors to travel in and out of Campbeltown Airport solely for the purpose of playing golf. The cultural and leisure offering includes the:

- Annual Film Festival, initiated by the Centenary Project;
- Mull of Kintyre Half Marathon and MOKRUN 10k;
- Mull of Kintyre Music Festival;
- Kintyre Songwriters Festival;
- Kintyre Way relay along the 90 mile distance peak at Tarbert at the north end the Kintyre Peninsula and Southend, at the south end, passing through Campbeltown;
- Campbeltown Malts Festival;
- Gin Festival;
- Summertime visits by Waverley Paddle Steamer.

The enhanced cultural and leisure offer together with an improved urban environment and the opening of a new grammar school will help to retain existing residents and attract new residents to relocate in Campbeltown to work in emerging and evolving industries.

The Centenary Project viewed together with other initiatives in Campbeltown is illustrative of the cumulative impact of public-private investment, in a linked, programme of townscape improvements and economic regeneration supported and sustained by the development of transport infrastructure and leisure and cultural facilities.

The role of Argyll and Bute Council in securing and managing the CARS and THI was key. Due to the success of the Campbeltown scheme the council has secured funding for similar projects in Rothesay, Inveraray and Dunoon. The council has invested match funding and officer time in all these projects and has developed a reputation for deliverability.



Historic Scotland are classing Argyll and Bute Council as one of the best proactive councils in heritage led regeneration. Standalone projects ranging from Rothesay Pavilion and St Peters seminary are also being supported by the council.

60 Main Street prior to refurbishment



60 Main Street following THI grant for refurbishment



Top: Campbeltown Picture House, prior to the Centenary Project © Martin Hadlington
Bottom: Campbeltown Picture House, following completion of the Centenary Project in December 2017 © Keith Hunter Photography

Campbeltown Picture House opened to the public on 22 December 2017 and its success in delivering CCB Ltd's vision for the project is evidenced by comments on its Facebook page. It makes a positive contribution to cultural, social, community and leisure activities in Campbeltown and Kintyre and to the regeneration of the town centre.

"What a great attraction for the local community and any visitors to the area! Two of us took four kids ranging in age between 2 and (almost!) 8 and it could not have been a more pleasant experience. Clean and comfortable, friendly, relaxed staff, a great range of food and choice of films. Well done, all involved! We shall be back!"

"I was last in the Picture House over 25 years ago and it was dark, dingy and a pretty sorry sight. Just been back to see a film in Screen 2 and I have to say, the Picture House is the new jewel in Campbeltown's crown. I don't live here anymore but when I next visit I'll be back."

"Went along today with my six year old son, it was my first visit since it had reopened and I wasn't disappointed. ... Brought back a lot of happy memories of going when I was a youngster, will definitely be back."

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