



Portavogie Regeneration Forum Annual Report 2023

This report outlines the work and achievements of Portavogie Regeneration Forum since our previous General Meeting in March 2022.

Please see below a timeline of our project delivery from the start of April 2022.

- Spring-Summer 2022 In Bloom
- Winter-ongoing 2022 LHLH
- Winter 2022 Christmas Festival
- Spring-ongoing 2023 In Bloom

In addition to these achievements, we have continued to work with elected representatives, statutory, and voluntary agencies around many regeneration issues. Throughout the period we have also supported and advertised numerous 'Beach Cleans' and as part of LHLH have a group of 30 volunteers who are looking after nominated spots throughout the village. We look forward to continuing this partnership work within the coming year.

I would like to thank Ards and North Down Borough Council for their support, both financially and in terms of guidance. The ongoing support from elected representatives is appreciated and we hope these strong relationships will continue. On that note we would like to wish Pete every success as a newly elected councillor, he has always been a hardworking, organised, and focused member of our team who quietly did a large share of the work. Pete, thank you for the many hours of commitment you have given the PRF. I know that Pete will do an amazing job at ANDBC. Portavogie and the lower Peninsula was already blessed to have one hardworking councillor in Robert Adair and now they will have two, so the future seems bright for the villages that were in the past so often forgotten.

We would like to wish Lorna a long and happy retirement. Unfortunately, we will also lose Lorna who was one of the founder members all those years ago. Lorna, we can't thank you enough for the many Tuesdays you have stayed after school to attend meetings, that must have felt like afterschool detention, but you never complained. You have always encouraged our close working relationship with Portavogie Primary School. No project was too large or too small for school involvement and each project always warranted a schoolbag drop! You often filled in for an absent Chairperson and recent rolls have included Treasurer and Secretary. It's fair to say that the Forum even managed to teach a headteacher a thing or two

over the years, for instance you now know that strawberries are perennial! We will miss you but look forward to regular updates from you about your life after school and PRF.

The advice and mentoring given to us by Frances McCormick of County Down Rural Network has been invaluable and the Regeneration Forum would like to publicly thank Frances and the network for this, without you the Forum would not exist. Finally, I would like to thank Portavogie Primary School, a special mention to Anne and Susan who spearhead the 'In Bloom' planting and all the volunteers in the community who participated in and helped with projects and initiatives over the last fourteen months.

In recent months, it has become clear that the forum is facing two main obstacles, financial and lack of members. Due to budget delays at the Department of Communities we have seen our running costs budget 2023-24 cut to just enough to pay for insurance and bank charges, thankfully the council have still allocated their part of the grant however I am unsure if we will receive any extra funds from the Department of Communities. We can no longer avail of free monthly meetings due to council budget restraints, whilst it couldn't have come at a worst time, we would like to thank the council for the many years of free meetings we have received which has been a great support. With Lorna's retirement we only have six members, all of whom have work and family commitments, so it has been a struggle at times to deliver projects. It is very clear that we must try again and again to attract more members who will bring a much-needed boost and hopefully key skills that would help make the group more productive in the future.

The Regeneration Forum is dedicated to driving and overseeing the regeneration and community development within Portavogie. It is our hope that within the next year we can raise some funds that can act as valuable reserves. This would enable the forum to apply for more grants that require groups to provide project money in advance to its completion. It is also our hope that this year will see the forum grow, both in terms of numbers on the committee, and in terms of reputation within the village and the wider Ards Peninsula.

James Kelly (Portavogie Regeneration Forum Chairperson)