

The NESPT has been working with Mill of Benholm Enterprise for some time and without doubt they are the most sensible, realistic and able community group we have ever worked with. The project to renovate the buildings at Mill of Benholm and to get the site back working as a visitor attraction is without doubt a challenging one but if anyone can do it Mill of Benholm Enterprise can.

Paul Higson, Project Manager/Trust Administrator has been helping the group with feasibility work and a fund-raising plan. He has over 32 years' experience developing and managing projects and securing grants from a variety of sources including European Programmes, Heritage Lottery Fund, Big Lottery, Historic Environment Scotland, Aberdeenshire Council, Wolfson Foundation, Scottish Government, Pilgrim Trust, Coastal Communities Fund and others. He recently raised nearly £2 million in grants for the Sail Loft Project in Portsoy, raised £250,000 for the Tullich Kirkyard Project, has so far secured £371,500 towards the 49 – 53 Bridge Street Project in Banff and has received a round 1 pass from HLF for the £400,000 Auld Kirk of Cullen Project.

The Mill of Benholm Business Plan sets out realistic costs for the redevelopment of the site and identifies achievable targets for grant funding to undertake the work. However, in a project such as this nothing is set in stone and changes will need to be made as the grant funding environment evolves and the priorities of funding bodies changes. It took the NESPT 11 years from the purchase of the derelict building at Back Green, Portsoy to the opening of the four-star Sail Loft Bunkhouse. During this time £160,000 of European Fisheries Fund grant was lost and applications to the Coastal Communities Fund were unsuccessful twice before the third attempt was successful.

One of the things the NESPT has learnt over the years is to be flexible and adaptable. If funding applications are successful projects can proceed as planned; if they are not, changes must be made to live within the resources available. For example, it may be planned to employ a full-time member of staff but if funding is not achieved for this a part-time staff member might be employed or volunteers used to achieve the objectives.

Most grant funding programmes in the heritage field are for capital costs. Funding revenue costs from grants can be difficult, particularly for established projects. However, several funders provide revenue grants over the first few years of a new project and this is the funding identified by Mill of Benholm Enterprise. For example, the HLF's Heritage Enterprise Scheme and Heritage Grants Programme can grant aid increased management and maintenance costs (including staff costs) for up to five years (the NESPT received £36,000 from HLF towards staff costs at the Sail Loft over three years). The Big Lottery, Robertson Trust and the Scottish Land Fund all grant aid revenue costs, including staff costs, for the first three to five years of a project.