

THE WHISSTOCKS PROJECT

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Whisstocks gets national support

The Whisstocks Project took an important step towards local community ownership of the Whisstocks former boatyard yesterday at a meeting in Woodbridge. With refreshments provided by the newly refurbished Crown Hotel a dozen people spent the afternoon thrashing out a plan of action.

The site, which lies on the river between the scenic attractions of the historic Tide Mill and the attractive waterfront moorings outside Woodbridge railway station, has become the focus of growing local frustration and anger over the past 20 years of neglect. There is a determination to build public support to change this state of affairs.

Formerly an active and important yacht-building yard, Whisstocks used to be a hub for maritime activity on the waterfront. But in recent times the buildings have become increasingly derelict, as developers have pursued unrealistic expectations of profit from the site.

Suffolk Coastal District Council has always been clear that Whisstocks should be developed in a way that benefited public interest and supported local community trade. Now The Woodbridge Riverside Trust with active support from the Woodbridge and Melton Riverside Action Group, the River Deben Association and many other local organisations - united under the banner of The Whisstocks Project - has met with national network organisations responsible for successful community enterprises across the country, to plan the way ahead.

Three initial goals were agreed:

To find ways to improve public access to parts of the site to improve views of the waterfront;
to enhance the appearance of the site for visitors to the area;
to engage with local marine industry interests to bring the slipway back into use.

Whisstocks Project leader John Gibbins said: "We are actively talking to both SCDC and site owners to bring forward a commitment to public ownership. We are developing meaningful plans to enhance and develop the site for the benefit everyone in Woodbridge, and the growing number of visitors to our town."

Hugh Rolo of Locality, the UK's leading network for community-led organizations, said after the meeting: "I am impressed by the local work already done. Locality has supported community enterprises, which now generate £330mn of activity in local communities annually. We will use our networks and experience to link The Whisstocks Project to other groups round the country working to develop schemes for community benefit."

"The current Government is finalising the details of the Localism Bill which will give local people a 'Community Right to Buy' precisely so that sites of community value will not be left to languish in limbo", he added.

"It is a crying shame that the Whisstocks site has not been used in such a long time and local people are clearly determined to change this - we will do all we can to help," he said.

The Whisstocks Project team is now visiting other successful community projects across the country where local people have come together with local and national government support to fund similar initiatives.

A strategic plan for the site will be developed first for the purchase of the site under community ownership, and for its development as a self-funding community project. The support of the community is vital to ensure success. Please contact The Whisstocks Project at enquiries@whisstocksproject.org to show your support.

Trustees – Peter Clay, John Gibbins

Project Coordinating Group – Peter Clay, John Gibbins, Claudia Grist, John Perry, David Poole
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