



Dunbar Harbour Trust What If Event 28th January 2021 (speaker notes)

Speaker: Alasdair Swan, Chairperson, Dunbar Harbour Trust

Slide 1

I will give you a background to Dunbar Harbour Trust and the work of its volunteer Directors, and that will give you some background understanding before you hear from our Harbourmaster, Quentin, about some of the key issues that face him daily, and then from Yvonne on some “What If” possibilities, and finally from Tim on the wonderful work that our wider team of volunteers do around Dunbar Harbour.

Those of you who look up at the remains of our castle, who walk round the historic Cromwell harbour, who dive into the history of Scotland and tales of Mary Queen of Scots, the Reformation and Bonnie Prince Charlie will all recognise that Dunbar’s harbour has been a special place for centuries. With the arrival of the Victoria Harbour, unsurprisingly in the reign of Queen Victoria, Dunbar’s fishing industry, based heavily on the herring season, developed to become the town’s key economy.

By the end of the twentieth century our fishing industry had dwindled to become a shell of what it once was. Amongst its many other commitments East Lothian Council recognised that it could not give the harbour the attention it deserved. The council supported the idea of establishing a charity that would be governed by up to twelve volunteers to look after and cherish this wonderful asset that lies at the heart of Dunbar. The charity is established by an Act of the Scottish Government, and the harbours are now owned by this charity, the Dunbar Harbour Trust.

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The most important feature on the Slide is the blue in the background. The charity does not have to be full of fishermen and sailors, but their contribution either on the Board or on the Harbour Management Committee is invaluable. The charity needs to understand the needs of both those who work on the sea and those who enjoy their leisure activities there. We are now entering our third three-year harbour improvement plan, and these plans have made the harbour a thriving place over the last decade. Dunbar has the largest in-shore fishing fleet in the county and it has been steadily growing, both in numbers and in the amount that it contributes to the Dunbar economy. The charity has made life easier for these fishermen by installing davits to help them to unload their catch, building new stores, re-introducing branders to protect their boats in their safe haven of Cromwell Harbour. At the same time new moorings have enabled more people than ever before to enjoy the leisure activities out of Dunbar Harbour. During the same period Bissets Seafoods and the Tasty Toasty have served the residents, workers and visitors at the harbour, and the renovation of Dunbar Battery has brought events and performances to the town. The blue in the Slide represents the empathy we all have for the sea, the commitment to supporting and growing our inshore fishing fleet, and our determination to make Dunbar Harbour a wonderful place for leisure users, residents, and visitors.

It is important to understand these objectives before we launch into some of the tasks that the volunteer Directors do. One of the things to bear in mind is that anyone can contribute to the work of the charity and there is a wide range of areas that need to be covered.

Administration and finance: The charity prides itself on its good governance and efficient administration.

Events: For those who enjoy helping to run events there are many of these each year at the harbour,

Preservation: The charity is conscious that it has inherited an important part of Scotland's history. This needs to be cherished and cared for.

Engineering: The North Sea is like Covid 19...it takes no prisoners and is impatient. Every year it batters against the sea defences of the harbour, looking for weakness. The charity needs to stay ahead of it. This requires the Board to understand the current state of our key structures, which in turn requires Engineering skill and knowledge.

Project management: Although the role of a Director in Dunbar Harbour Trust is a voluntary one, we need to keep our eye on the ball with major projects, to ensure that money is spent wisely, and that projects do not run away with themselves.

Safety management: The sea is a dangerous place. Movements of commercial boats around a small harbour present risks of their own. The entrance to Dunbar Harbour in a swell has seen at least one yacht get into severe trouble. Keeping everyone safe at Dunbar Harbour is a challenge.

Retail and visitor management: Dunbar has a reputation for welcoming visitors to the town, going back many years to when it was often a destination of choice for those taking their summer holidays. The charity has its part to play in making sure that the harbour is a welcoming and interesting place for visitors to the town.

Communications: Finally, the charity needs to tell everyone what it is doing, what it has done, and what it intends to do.

The Board is therefore, by definition multi-skilled.

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The centre of the charity's activity takes place in McArthur's Store. As part of the Millennium Project this historic building was renovated to provide eleven highly valued fishermen's stores, a community meeting room and the charity's office.

The administration follows the usual pattern of any business, with invoicing for services, processing bills from suppliers, dealing with bank transactions and payroll, and making sure that accounts are always up to date and available in Companies House or the Office of the Scottish Charity's Regulator for anyone to see. Being able to demonstrate good governance and allowing people to see exactly what is going on in the charity, helps in the search for grant funding that is needed to keep the harbour intact.

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The Dunbar Battery project was delivered as a result of a great deal of hard work by the charity's Director's. The pandemic has had its impact on the charity's ability to run a full programme of events and performances. We know that the venue supports community events, such as the Civic Week closing service and the Carol Service at Christmas, and it is extensively used for the Harbour Festival, now approaching its tenth anniversary, and RNLI Day. The Battery Theatre Company has made the space their own, and we have already had international groups performing at the Battery. However, these events take planning and marshalling, and the charity's Directors have an important and ongoing role to ensure that the shows can go on.

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Dunbar Harbour is full of history. Not only do we have Dunbar Castle, the Fishermen's Monument and McArthur's Store to look after, there is the site of the old whaling station, the fish hatchery site, Johnny Cope's steps (which he marched his troops up from their ships before heading for defeat at the battle of Prestonpans), and the beautiful and listed Cromwell Harbour, named after Oliver, who authorised the financing of the harbour walls after his success at the second Battle of Dunbar. All this history needs to be preserved and one of our Directors, as an example, is currently working with Historic environment Scotland to see how much access to the old castle we could give to the public. Given the hazardous nature of this site, and current Health & Safety Regulations, this is a challenge and a half!

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The force of the North Sea is something to behold and batters all the harbour walls from time to time, threatening the Broadhaven breakwater as well as the main sea walls.

For over ten years Robin Hamilton, one of our charity's Directors, has been pitting his wits against the North Sea, spotting points of weakness in our harbour walls before the sea can threaten Dunbar. This has involved using his engineering skills. When the tide is low and the weather is benign Robin can be seen walking round the outside of the walls with engineering consultants, developing plans to keep Dunbar safe. He has then raised hundreds of thousands of pounds needed to do the remedial work to secure our sea defences. Unfortunately, under our governing statute, a Director can only serve 12 years, and Robin will have completed his term at the end of March.

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The largest project in recent years has been the Dunbar Battery Project which cost nearly three quarters of a million pounds.

The wall repair projects I referred to earlier can often run into six figure sums.

This year, to give you a flavour of the constant improvements, we have introduced a comprehensive CCTV system so that harbour users can feel a more secure when they are away from their boats, and have built the new Maggie stores, which will allow us to remove the container which has been the temporary home for the fishermen's forklift truck.

The charity has limited funds which mainly come from mooring fees and landing dues. The core income for the charity is only enough to cover the basic running costs. These projects need to be funded externally, so it is vital that they are planned, costed, and delivered very professionally, so as not to put the charity at financial risk. It is quite a skill.

The Trust has been asked to provide toilets at the harbour, to renovate the maintenance bay for the fishermen, to provide more branders in Cromwell Harbour, to improve the facilities so that fishermen can dry and mend their nets better, to introduce pontoons.

There is no shortage of good ideas for the next three years. The charity just needs people with the energy to deliver these projects.

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Dunbar leads the way for small UK ports in its system of compliance with the Port Marine Safety Code. Although this is principally targeted to keep people safe on the water, the Directors also consider how best to make the harbour safe for the public. We plan to extend the rope rails around Victoria Harbour to prevent vehicles accidentally falling into the water. The North Wall gate was erected to make it clear to the public that lives can be, and have been, lost, if people walk along the North Wall during over-topping. Our safety record at Dunbar is good and we intend to keep it that way.

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Dunbar Harbour is a magnet for visitors and the charity has a duty to determine who should provide services to people at the harbour. Rhona Bell's Tasty Toasty has been well received by fishermen and visitors alike, and James Bisset has provided people with what so many have asked for - fresh fish at a fishing harbour. The harbour is a small place and extending the retail offering needs to consider the other users of the space. However, expect to see developments in this area on a carefully planned basis.

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There is much for the charity's Directors to do, but actions taken can be so easily misunderstood if there is not clear communication about what is being done and why. In this regard we have been so lucky to have Kenny Maule who produces a wonderful monthly newsletter which goes out to a wide circulation list, and who keeps an eye on the Harbour Trust's website with all its news.

So, I hope that has given you an insight into what the charity called Dunbar Harbour Trust does, and what its team of Directors get involved in. However, there are two other members of the team, our Harbourmaster, and our Deputy Harbourmaster, who also perform indispensable roles.

Slide 11 Keynote presentation by Quentin Dimmer, Harbourmaster.

Speaker: Yvonne Wemyss, Director, Dunbar Harbour Trust

Slide 12 What if we had no plastic in the sea.

Did you know....

80% of land waste ends up in our coastal water (Marine Conservation Society).

100,000 marine mammals and turtles and 1,000,000 seabirds are killed by marine plastic pollution every year (The Wildlife Trust, 2018).

Items containing plastic can take anything from 3 to 500 years to decompose (Royal Yachting Association www.thegreenblue.org.uk)

Many items containing plastic are used regularly and disposed of carelessly at the harbour, these include:

Cigarette butts which can take 3 to 5 years to decompose.

Plastic bottles and Plastic bags which can take up to 450 years; and,

Cable ties which can take up to 500 years!

The results are clear, our wildlife is suffering, and our natural habitat is on the decline! Quentin, our harbourmaster, works closely with organisations such as the Marine Conservation Society and Zero Waste. We had some hugely successful events in 2019, including the Littoral Art Project and our environmental open day.

Many children attended the environmental open day, where they were invited to paint tables made from upcycled creels and decorate a fishing net, both of which we now use at our events. They also had the opportunity to learn from marine experts about the impact of plastic in the sea.

Our 'What If' aspiration is to hold more of these events, where children, our future generation, can learn how to help deliver a sustainable future, where our seas recover, and wildlife thrive!

Perhaps you would like to help manage events?

Slide 13 What if everyone took their litter home.

Litter has become an enormous problem – even more so as people take to the streets, parks, and outdoor venues during the current pandemic. We know that litter is affecting our climate and crisis is inevitable unless we act now.

Litter is a huge problem at the harbour where any waste left lying around will inevitably end up in the harbour and then the sea.

The gulls get fat and more aggressive as they feed on the enormous volume of chips left deliberately or when litter is not put tightly in a bin - yet, they are well-fed gulls already, feeding from fresh fish scraps either freely given or stolen from the boats! A much healthier option and one which reduces the chances of them become pesky invaders at picnic outings, or terrifying young children as they eat their ice-cream.

Providing bins at the harbour is not an easy task. The Trust need to consider gull-proof bins, secure positions, the best location to maximise use and who is going to empty them; and it seems the more we provide - even with encouraging poetry, the bigger the problem gets!

It is also taking a great deal of effort to manage waste and at a cost that would be much better spent on other harbour management issues, essential repairs, and improvement.

Our 'What If' aspiration is to reduce litter and improve waste management in the harbour. Please help us to get the message out there – DON'T feed the gulls, take your litter home and, even better, recycle where possible.

Slide 14 What if we sold more of Dunbar's local catch to local people.

I am told shellfish in our local seas can be found in abundance. I am told most of the local catch is sent to Europe because sales in Scotland are limited.

We are aware the situation is changing due to Covid, which saw an estimated 25% decline in landings last year. Brexit will bring different, but equally challenging issues, for our fishing community.

We need to find ways to support and promote our local fishing industry. Its survival counts on it! Sustaining Dunbar's, Local Good Food Alliance, is exactly the type of project that the fishing industry need to do this, where the value of local suppliers is recognised and promoted.

What more can we do? Consider how much fish you buy? Consider where you buy it? We currently have 27 fishing boats operating from Dunbar Harbour, which under normal circumstances, bring tons of fresh fish in every week.

If you know someone with an outlet for selling fish, whether it be wholesale or a restaurant, why don't you ask them to contact Barry Buglass our local fishing merchant.

You can also buy direct from Belhaven Lobster and Bisset's Seafood, who sell fabulous fresh produce.

You could also check out www.loveseafood.co.uk for cooking demonstrations and great recipes.

Our 'What If' aspiration is to help build a sustainable future for our local industry and ensure our fishing community is with us for centuries to come!

We have our own super event ready to go, Tides and Times; a celebration of Dunbar Fishing, when major public gatherings are once again permitted. We hope through this that we can further promote our fishing industry and encourage people to buy local!

Slide 15 What if we had better access to Dunbar's History.

The Dunbar Harbours are steeped in history and the history of Dunbar is inextricably linked to the history of the town and the town's people.

Despite valiant efforts of individuals, like our own Director, Kenny Maule, who developed information boards for the harbour, and our many local authors, who have written countless books on the subject, much is still unknown, and there is a great deal of history that people are not aware of, or perhaps have no access to.

Our 'What If' aspiration is to provide the opportunity for learning, be it a hub at the harbour or digital learning. We are keen to share the journey from then to now and explore ideas, which will become the history of the future.

Do you have any ideas that we could consider, or can you help with digital learning?

Slide 16 What if Dunbar youngsters could learn to sail properly?

Dunbar harbour provides a unique opportunity for many leisure activities, including sailing, paddle boarding, kayaking, rowing, and angling. What we do not have is a new generation of sailors – a key activity for any harbour. Our 'What If' aspiration is to make Dunbar Harbour a place where young people can learn to sail properly and safely.

Dunbar Sailing Club has been around since circa 1965.

It has been a vibrant sailing club in its time and continues to have a core group of keen and experienced sailors, but they recognise the need to grow, and hope to broaden the interest in sailing, particularly among young people.

They would like to provide an environment where youngsters, or anyone for that matter, can:

- Learn to sail in a controlled environment,
- Learn how to become part of a crew and expand their team skills,
- Cruise with experienced sailors

Dunbar Sea Cadets are also supported by the Harbour Trust and provide a great way for children to learn to sail. What if we could get some of the Sea Cadets to join the Sailing Club to secure the future of sailing at Dunbar? If you would like to hear more about what the sailing club have to offer or help us with our aims, please contact us!

Slide 17 What if Dunbar Battery became the go-to place for performing arts?

We have had so many fantastic events in the harbour and the Battery - some 30 events in 2019, including the RNLI lifeboat day, our own Sparkling Dunbar Harbour Festival, and performances by the Dutch Ricciotti Ensemble and the Battery Theatre Company. We have even had a wedding!

It is a spectacular location with its own amphitheatre which has superb acoustics!

Our 'What If' aspiration is to increase the use of the Battery amphitheatre and succeed in making it the 'go-to' place in East Lothian for the performing arts. We might even aspire to make our harbour the coastal 'go-to' place in Scotland.

Maybe you know someone who could use the Battery? A choir, a band, a drama group, or a school group? It is free to book, we ask only for a donation if it is a ticketed and chargeable event. A fantastic opportunity for new or young artists!

Slide 18 Tim Greene, Volunteer, shares his experience.

Slide 19 Tim Greene, Volunteer talks about the glorious Battery garden.

Slide 20 Short films made in collaboration with local people and organisations.

Slide 21 Thank you's to presenters and to Sustaining Dunbar for invitation to hold the event and for their support in facilitating and chairing. Note of Dunbar Harbour Trust contact details and how to subscribe to the DHT newsletter.