

Helensburgh Czar says research is vital before action

By Nick Cowie

The Helensburgh Partnership was set up with a £600,000 budget and a brief to enable the development of the town and its pier front.

The Helensburgh Partnership was set up with a £600,000 budget and a brief to enable the development of the town and its pier front. Representatives of Scottish Enterprise, the Council, Retailers, Chamber of Commerce and Community Council serve on its Board - but few people seem to know what it is doing. So the first question to Chief Executive Derek Anderson was blunt: "Is the Partnership bad at communicating or does it have nothing to say?" Derek was frank: "I assumed that the background to our work was more widely known, so perhaps we should have

said more, but in these early stages we haven't had a lot to tell people. Regeneration is not a short term process. You have to do preparation work - and you may well only have one chance at it." Two studies will be completed this month: The first, a traffic study, is looking at issues like pedestrianising key streets and new car parking solutions if the pier head is to be developed. The state of retail in Helensburgh is the second study. Started in March, it aims to sort out hard evidence from anecdotal. Derek said: "So far we have



Chief Executive Derek Anderson

interviewed 700 households on their shopping habits. The second part is a health check on whether Helensburgh as bad or better than people think it is. We aim to analyse annual turnover, spending potential and how much capacity is needed in food and non-food shopping." Derek Anderson's personal priority is West Clyde Street: "To me the pierhead site is severed by that and we need to try to find a solution somehow to integrate the pier site into the town. "I can't think of many towns that have a site with so much potential. We have not finalised our own study, but I believe we need retail, recreation and residential there. I don't think there is enough leisure/recreation

demand to fill that site, which after all is seven acres or the size of two blocks."

But back to the groundwork, development frameworks, briefs, Anderson admits, are dry sounding, but they are vital to give comfort to both the community and potential investors.

"We have to give investors the comfort that things can happen - because there are quite strong views externally that nothing ever happens in Helensburgh. On the other hand - and this is where we must communicate better - we have to give the community a belief that design standards, conservation, and environmental issues will be rigorously observed." Anderson is optimistic. "I fundamentally believe this town has tremendous potential and it is case of trying to fulfil that. I am not going to give up or be sidetracked. I am quite proud of my experience and intend to do the best possible, professional, job for the town."

The Partnership is happy to hear from residents: info@helensburghpartnership.co.uk