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**PRESS RELEASE**

For immediate release 23rd November 2016

**Doonhamers offered the chance to buy back their High Street**

Over 15th and 16th November, The Stove Network led a two-day event in the Bakers Oven on Dumfries High Street to talk to people about bold new plans for the town centre. Midsteeple Quarter is an innovative way to encourage people to live back in the town through a community-led company developing a section of the High Street as a live/work quarter. Over the past year The Stove has consulted with members of the community and a consensus has emerged that re-populating the town centre is a major part of any plan to bring new life back to the High Street.

Matt Baker of Community Development Trust: The Stove Network, commented, “Over the last year we have noticed a real shift in attitudes – in the past people tended to look to the Council to do everything. Now the conversation has changed to ‘what can we do ourselves?’. This is a very positive change and one that has been confirmed by the number of local groups becoming part of the Midsteeple Quarter project – these include: Loreburn Community Council, Third Sector D&G, Unviversity of West of Scotland, NHS D&G, Crichton Institute, Upland, MakLab Dumfries and many more including the Council.”

The Bakers Oven became a lively project hub over the 15th and 16th November, featuring a pop up living room, discussions and workshops. It also featured the exhibition, ‘People’s Dumfries’; a collection of Dumfries inspired artworks, including models of buildings within the town by Frank Brown. The Bakers Oven also played host to in house writer and Stove Curatorial Team Member, Martin Joseph O’Neill. Through the night of the 15th November, Martin spent 12 hours writing as part of ongoing project - Midnight Moonlight Smalltown Rain. Words and thoughts appeared in real time on the windows of the Bakers Oven. Come dawn, the story was complete.

Over 100 people signed up to ‘The Dumfries Pledge’ in support of community development in the town and people also shared their stories of old Dumfries and contributed to the vision for a Midsteeple Quarter. Suggestions included a focus on the Whitesands as a tourist destination and entry point to the town, affordable live/work premises in the town centre to encourage new enterprises, bringing services like healthcare and education into the town centre and more of a focus on the history of the town, with Tour Guides and History Tours throughout the region.

People’s comments and plans from the exhibition will be on show in the Stove Café from Tuesday 29th November for the town to continue to comment and get involved. The project recently received a boost at the beginning of this week with news of seed funding from The Scottish Government’s Activating Ideas Fund. This will allow the local community’s ideas to be taken to the next stage of reality and The Stove building will continue to be the information point for the project. Anyone interested in contributing or signing up to the Dumfries Pledge is encouraged to drop in or get in touch with The Stove – [info@thestove.org](mailto:info@thestove.org).

Notes

The Stove Network is an artist-led organisation based in Dumfries and creating new activity and opportunities in the town centre based around The Stove, 100 High Street.

Contact: Matt Baker 07855 957401 [matt@thestove.org](mailto:matt@thestove.org)