

The Sunday Times, January 6, 2019

Local dram comes true with Whisky Galore distillery

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Hebrideans will be given the chance to win back more than the angels' share with a stake in a new distillery on the island that featured in the classic movie Whisky Galore.

Part shares in the long-awaited development on the island of Barra are to be sold to members of the local community, to help bring the project to fruition.

Under his business plan Brown has developed a community benefit society model, in which the project is owned and run by the community for the community. He has launched a community share offer, with shares from £250 for those living locally, through which he hopes the society will raise a minimum of £1.5m.

If successful he believes the new company, Uisge Beatha Nan Eilean (uisgebeathananeilean.co.uk), will invigorate the local community, which, with a population of about 1,200, depends economically on tourism, fishing and fish processing.

Brown believes the venture, producing 25,000 litres of whisky annually, could generate millions of pounds for other local community projects.

“We’ve seen so many good traditional and modern businesses in Scotland sell out and take the capital, with the business ending up in overseas ownership,” he said. “Jobs are often lost, and they’re not wholly Scottish any more. We want to retain 100% of our retail value profit, by selling our products ourselves, and for the distillery to be owned for posterity by the community it serves. It will provide long-

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term employment, an attraction for the tourist industry with the distillery visitor centre, and products in a growing market.”

Community Shares Scotland, an organisation which supports community enterprises and is funded by the Scottish government and Big Lottery Fund Scotland, has been advising Brown on the community share offer. James Proctor, programme manager of Community Shares Scotland, said: “Community shares are a democratic form of governance, offering one vote per member investing, no matter how much you invest. They can also offer 4% interest to attract investors, and often see money rolled back into other projects which will benefit the community.

“This is the second Scottish distillery we have advised on the elements of raising essential funding through a community shares scheme. GlenWyvis Distillery in Dingwall raised more than £2.5m in 2016, from 2,441 supporters in 30 countries around the world. This was more in community shares than any other UK organisation. And they have an ongoing open share offer that is very close to its £1m target.”

It might take a few more years until the Barra distillery’s first product is ready for bottling, but already the firm has generated £45,000 from its first cask offers, which closed in January 2013. A ghost spirit can be bottled within the first three years, but it cannot be called a whisky until it has matured for at least three years.

“The finished product will be not only local but also natural, as we will not add anything to the whisky. There will be no freeze filtering and no added caramel. It will be a product Barra can be proud of,” Brown said.

“Barra whisky will be a top-quality niche product, sought after by whisky connoisseurs the world over. Whisky sales are increasing worldwide, against the general tide of alcohol sales, and in countries where there is no overall market growth there is a move from blended to single malt. And there is a trend towards people increasingly seeking a unique artisanal product, which is true to its roots,” he added.