

Chair's Report, AGM 2022

The period the AGM covers spans from July last year through to June this year, consequently most of the information looks back to this period.

It is worth a quick reminder of the world we were living in then. June 1 last year was the first day there were zero Covid deaths since the start of the pandemic in March 2020. Controls on social contact were pretty well removed and people started to go back to their workplace, although millions elected to stay at home. Emma Raducanu winning the US Open was a bright spot before we saw, in September, the first surge in gas prices and the government became embroiled in 'Partygate.' Spring this year brought Russia's invasion of Ukraine that set the seeds of the Cost-of-Living Crisis. Putting a Trust hat back on, with Kirsty Balfour in the chair, the review of the activities of the Trust falls into the following areas:

- Implementing the Community Action Plan
- Professionalising the Trust's operations
- Improving social cohesion with new and improved community events
- Enabling legacy projects
- Looking after the legacy fund
- Easing the cost-of-living crisis for residents
-

Kirsty: Community Action Plan

The Trust is the first to acknowledge that the activities Community Benefit Funds are spent on must be decided by the people who live here. The community was asked in early 2021 what it wanted the 'windfarm money' invested in. The task in the 12 months under review was to convert that 'wish list' into a plan of action. This work was led by our external advisor Nick Wright who held a series of themed working groups with residents to draw the hundreds of responses and ideas into a draft strategy. Five core themes emerged from this work that covered improving our homes, transport and communications, the way our community organises itself, outdoor activities, and life in general. You will find more information about this work elsewhere in the newsletter. In summary there are a dozen or more projects up and

running that are now bearing fruit. We have very recently entered the final phase of the consultation process when we are asking, village-by-village, what residents would like to see happen on their doorstep.

Gareth: 'Professionalising Trust Operations'

Historically the Trust was run by volunteers with limited paid support. However, as the volume of projects expanded, it became clear to the Directors that we had to put the operation on a more professional footing. This was partly about bringing on board additional staff but also to put in place policies and processes you would expect to find in a high-performing middle-sized business. We have worked on the Trust's strategy, the skills, staffing, systems, policies etc. The hugely ambitious Highland Gathering was a good example of what can now be achieved. However, we all continue to be frustrated by the time it takes to get major projects off the ground which we will talk more about later.

We commissioned an independent audit of the operation (available on the website) that highlighted the strengths and areas of weakness we have to work on. The independent audit will be repeated annually. You will have seen from previous newsletters that we now have a complement of ten staff (equivalent of five full time equivalent) working a combination of full and part time. The driving principle is that this is a group of specialists who support not just the Trust, but community groups too. To track our progress we also introduced an annual 'pulse' survey that provides the community with the opportunity to tell us whether you think we are doing a good job. Tony will provide a summary of the results over the last couple of years.

Catriona: Improving Social Cohesion

The Trust's commitment, particularly in the wake of COVID-19, to advance citizenship and community development has never been more important. This year saw the Trust facilitate some great social events that brought people together. Winter Wonderland, although constrained by social distancing, was a great success and we were delighted to assist with the Jubilee Celebration. The Piece de Resistance was the Highland Gathering (staged at the invitation of the owners of Corriegarth Estate) which was well received by those who braved the windy weather to attend. We stress, these events are only possible because of the volunteers who run them on

the day. We hope that although misconstrued at times, it is recognised that the Trust's ethos is to facilitate and support individual's and community groups.

Mark: Enabling Legacy Projects

The power generation companies, that provide the Community Benefit monies, are keen to see a focus on activities that bring long lasting benefits to a place. It is with this in mind that we pour considerable energy into major projects such as the community hubs. It is frustrating that it takes a long time before you see any great change on the ground.

However, the review year is notable for the progress that was made on planning the new facilities. The biggest projects have either received planning permission, are in planning or very close to submission. We are delighted to see the new toilet facilities underway in Foyers, partly as the result of a great collaboration between the Community Council and the Trust.

Thanks to the groundwork completed over the last year, we will soon start to see more 'boots on the ground.'

Large projects can also be controversial. It means substantial change – particularly by those directly affected. Communication is key and we haven't always got this right. Our commitment this year is to re-double our efforts to ensure you, the community, feel a strong sense of ownership and empowerment to influence the way large projects develop.

Chris: High Speed Broadband

Last, but not least, of the big projects is the provision of high-speed Broadband. The Trust had great foresight to bring Crommarty Firth Wireless on board all those years ago. However, the position became very complicated when it was announced that fibre would be laid to the doors of some but not all the homes in the area. Thanks to excellent input from one of our directors, we ended up with the best of both worlds; an Open Reach service (eventually) and agreement from CFW to continue to maintain a service where Open Reach doesn't reach.

Ken: Looking After the Legacy Fund

We have often written about the foresight previous directors had to establish a legacy fund. A substantial percentage of the Community Benefit monies goes

straight to an investment company that is building our own 'sovereign-type' fund. It is currently valued at £1 million and should grow to £8 million plus over the next 20 years. It will be the interest from these investments that will sustain the Trust's activities when (or if) the Community Benefit monies dry up. Earlier this year we established, courtesy of two directors who have a very good understanding of the financial markets, to work with our investors to ensure the returns are maximised.

Maureen: Easing the Cost-of-Living Crisis

We never thought it would happen: Community Benefit funds are again being used to help vulnerable residents. After monitoring the situation for several months, the decision was taken to provide grants to individuals and families who are being badly affected by the Cost-of-Living-Crisis. It looks as though Community Benefit Funds will continue to be used in the future to ease damaging national and global catastrophes that have their roots many miles away from where we live.

Maire: Community Grants

The bedrock of the Trust's reason for existing is of course to channel Community Benefit Funds straight into the community in the form of grants. You will find elsewhere the list of grants that were awarded during the review period. Voluntary groups were slow getting off the ground but, even so, the number of individuals and organisations that benefitted was substantial and the number of applications continues to gather pace. The one gap that causes real disappointment is that we don't have Green Space or its equivalent driving the ecological agenda. This year we hope to address this gap.

Gareth: Directors and Staff

I would like on behalf of the community (if I may!) to thank the staff, past and present, for their hard work and dedication. We now have a talented team that is wholly focused on making life better for everyone who lives and works in the area. Our thanks also to the Directors, again both past and present, who served on the Board last year. And a special thanks to Kirsty for steering the ship in her role as chair. It is humbling to see the patience, effort and resilience that directors demonstrate month after month, year after year, for what can be at times be a thankless task.

Gareth: Members and Volunteers

A final word about the Trust members and volunteers involved in delivering a wide range of community activities. As mentioned earlier, our ethos is to facilitate and support – provide the resources that enable individuals and voluntary groups to perform at their best. I feared just post COVID-19 that community volunteering was dying. The evidence of the last few months is that it was wounded by the pandemic. However, in the last few months we have seen the community getting back on its feet. Remember the Trust and the Community Benefit is yours; let's work together to use it, and use it wisely, to make Stratherrick and Foyers a better place.

Tony: Pulse Report

6.5 out 10

Questions received prior to AGM from the Floor

The Fundraisers employed by SFCT have a target of £4m over 4 years and commenced work in March 2022. Please can you tell me how much they have raised to date?

- Currently raised £95,656 with £266,064 worth of applications in.
- We have identified approx. £2- 4 million projects for BCC, Errogie, slipway, Riverside Housing, Pathways, Childcare, parks and other projects
- In this early stage a lot of the effort has been focused on developing information about the projects to the point that we can make good quality applications and identifying the funds we will target – which number between 25 and 30
- As mentioned earlier, the fund raisers are also working on behalf of other community groups such as Knockie Trust, Boleskine Community Care, Baby and Toddlers etc. Warm Space Wednesday for the Wildside Action Group recently received funding for a community fridge

Has SFCT concluded the purchase of the land adjacent to Wildside, given that in April 2022 the Board agreed to an immediate Housing Needs Survey and that successful test pits and investigations were undertaken in September?

- We haven't concluded the deal. However, we are now in a position to progress to agreement
- Over the last few months we have confirmed that the site is suitable for housing, we have the housing needs analysis, we are asking the community on where they want to see housing and today SSE confirmed that we can proceed to purchase (as it is over £25,000.00)

4. Exactly when does the Board intend to undertake any physical work on any of the projects currently discussed, and why does the Board apparently consider that the development of Errogie Church (budget currently £1.8m) is more important than the provision of housing for our Community when there is a demonstrable need for affordable accommodation across all age groups?

- Delighted to say that a significant project the Trust has been closely involved in – the toilet block at Foyers – has finally begun construction. First project you got me involved in three years ago. Credit to Sharon. Good example of close cooperation
- As work down the Strath gun club now has electricity, stratherrick public hall is being repaired and will open after Christmas, the Wade bridge has been saved for now
- As Mark reported legacy projects are in planning – which takes an inordinate amount of time – Next spring it will be two years since Riverside First went to the planning department
- There has been good progress on implementing the more straight forward recommendations from the CAP. As a Board we have spent a lot of time discussing how we can push major projects through faster
- Between a rock and a hard place - one project manager to work on all the planning - policy is not to pull in additional resource until planning permission is received
- Review of project management processes, detailed planning with milestones and ensure all staff have very clear objectives. Changing role of directors - all responsible for governance - some greater focus on policy and some will focus on key project. Support of councillors to push through projects. With regards to Errogie. There is no decision on prioritising that project. Which one

goes first is dependent on a number of factors - is planning in place - is funding in place etc. All feel housing is high on the priority list

- Four or five major projects developed at the same time – shovel ready – attract funding.