

Stratherrick & Foyers Community Trust



Chair's AGM report 3rd December 2014

This Chair's annual report will, I hope, produce no surprises. We have worked hard over the past ten months to dramatically improve both the manner and volume of the Trust's public communication and I hope that you are all feeling well informed about what we have been able to achieve to date.

The detail of what we have achieved is to be found within our Minutes, the regular Chair's Email bulletins, our Boleskine Bulletin inserts and, as a summary of the whole year's work, within the Directors' Report within the Annual Accounts. All of this is available on our website for you at any time. Indeed we are proud of our new 'information lead' website with its various question and answer sections and full details of everything that is going on. If you haven't already done so, I recommend that you give some time to explore it and, as well as coming to understand exactly what your Trust is all about, under the 'What's on' section, you will also be able to see what are the current projects and ideas under discussion.

Indeed, this is an exciting time for this community. Very soon, i.e. in 2016 and then again in 2017 or 18 we will start to receive some large sums of money from those energy projects now being completed and from those still in the pipeline. Over the course of the coming twenty five years, if these projects get the planning go-ahead, then this sum could reach around £20 million. That's an average of £800k per year. It's not all coming at once of course, more's the pity, but if the energy schemes currently in the pipeline do all come off, then come it will.

This is extraordinary money and it is being made available for a very small community..... us. We have a responsibility and an opportunity, perhaps not unlike the Shetlanders in the 70's and 80's to make some hay while the sun shines.....or perhaps more specifically while the wind blows. And grasp this opportunity we must. There are lots of plans and ideas out there and this is our chance to make them happen. If we don't spend the cash, if we don't use this opportunity for developing our community and leaving a legacy for future generations then we will have no one to blame but ourselves.

So, our message today is.....How about stepping things up a gear? How about starting to think a bit big? We have already begun this way of thinking within the Trust and I would also champion the Boleskine Community Care team as a group who are leading the way. If we can start to envisage a community care scheme then why not a community woodland too, a sports centre, more social housing, a new pier, a cultural/arts centre, indoor bowling green, allotments, more apprenticeships, a community bus, a shinty pitch, business premises, improved broadband and more. With the sort of money coming our way, this community could do anything. All it needs is 'desire'.

But it needs more than that of course. Making big projects happen needs skills, time and money. Of these, I would argue that the thing we are most short of is 'time'. People have to work and expecting them/us as volunteers to perform the sort of detailed business planning and project management required for any large projects is, in my opinion, unrealistic and creates a very real risk of 'burnout' and corresponding loss of much needed skills within our relatively small local community of volunteers. Recognising this, your Trust Directors are currently working through a proposal to follow the path already trod by so many other Community Trusts around the country, that of employing someone to help take things forward. We are proposing a Community Project Co-ordinator's role, part-funded and fully line managed by the Trust but, and this is a crucial point, available to all the community to do much of the 'doing' and to act as a catalyst to help us all make the big things happen.

This position of course needs the full consent and support of the wider community because there is no point in employing a high quality individual only then to meet them with a steely stare and a cold shoulder. We have to want this and we have to want to welcome them as a key partner in helping us make things happen. As a Trust, we are already liaising with others to gauge reaction to the idea. This process will take a couple of months and has already involved passing the idea past the Community Council and other local groups, making it available on our website for all, talking with Members and, we are likely soon to have another one of our Open Evenings and perhaps even do some sort of letterbox drop to help gather your thoughts. Reaction to date has been overwhelmingly positive and our sincere hope is that you are all ready and willing to welcome a Project Co-ordinator into the community. If that happens, then watch this community fly!

With your Trust now fully fit for purpose, we are ready to take the next step towards maturity and employ this key position to help the community realise its aspirations. From 2016 some substantial funding will start to appear and we will be ideally placed, not only to provide seed-corn funding for community projects but also to draw down additional funding from other agencies such as Leader or the Lottery etc. to help finance the big stuff. Seed corn funding is usually an essential first step for any new project as it can then help to release 'matched' funds from elsewhere. All it needs is good business planning, dedicated folk who know what they are doing, disciplined teamwork and some passion to make things happen.

But of course, it's not all about big projects. Indeed the bulk of our income to date has gone to the ever-widening range of local groups and individuals who help create our community. Whether it be the Girl Guides, the kids' ski trip, student travel expenses, lunch club, energy saving schemes, transport to the Feis and so much more, your Trust will always budget to provide for these as it is these people-centred activities that define and form our community spirit. Legacy projects such as the big builds etc., are the icing on the cake but the cake itself, if you'll excuse the appalling analogy, is made up of real people doing real things at ground level.....and this we will always seek to support.

So that's it from me. I hope this is an inspirational note and that it will encourage some big thinking to help move forward some of the Legacy projects which the community already have in mind. An able Project Co-ordinator with the skills to help us make the big things happen has been tried and tested elsewhere and has been found to make all the difference. Your Trust stands ready to take this next step and we, like any other voluntary group, rely on good people with a range of skills to come forward as Directors to help us run things as professionally as the community should expect.

When you make your votes for new Directors please do consider what we need. We need local knowledge, yes, but we also need skills. We are responsible for managing very large sums of money on behalf of you all, for running complex grant-giving systems and for investigating complex opportunities such as land purchase and builds etc. To do that well, we need to recruit good skills. At present we are lucky to have the voluntary services of a Chartered Accountant, a qualified surveyor, an ex lawyer, business people, employers and others. All these skills are being used to the full.....and for free. I for one would wish that to continue.

So, thank you for coming and, if you are stepping up for possible Directorship, good luck, and we look forward to welcoming you on board or perhaps back on board, as appropriate, as part of the team.

Thank you.

Ed Ley-Wilson
Chairperson
Stratherrick & Foyers Community Trust