



Chair's Annual Statement: Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust Ltd AGM. 30th October 2019

Good evening. It is good to see such a healthy attendance this evening and I hope it reflects the attitude of our members, that such an interest is shown. I will now give a brief overview of your Trust's activities over the past twelve months, some suggestions as to our future direction and ask you to consider where you think we should go, what should be our priorities and how best to achieve them? I will give you some detail, but should there be any further information you require, please don't hesitate to ask myself or fellow Directors.

The Board and our Staff have been immensely busy, in what has undoubtedly been a very challenging, yet productive year for the Board. We have again received a huge number of Grant Applications, have distributed a record amount of Community Funds - and have been pressing on with projects and undertaking acquisitions and investments for the Community, as well as ensuring your Trust is managed on a day to day basis, in accordance with our Articles of Association and the principles of good governance and efficiency.

Frank Ellam, our FD, will deal with our Accounts, Investments and finances immediately after myself and I am sure he also will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

I will, as last year, deal with Grants first. The document displayed gives a lot of detail (copies will be available), but I would like to focus on one or two more significant figures. We received fifty-nine Grant Applications over the past year – a very similar figure to last year. The total sums involved in grants and projects are in excess of £442,000 pounds – and I would point out that there are uncompleted works, or we await invoices, that will make that total even higher. This represents a 40% increase on the previous year – that's a huge sum of money being distributed around this Community and is hopefully a real sign of things to come. Frankly, it must be – if we don't use these funds, then our funders will question their worth to our Community – and if we really want and will use them!

Something I have found interesting is the increasing variety of grant applications we are receiving. Groups that were relatively new last year, such as the Wellbeing Group, go from strength to strength, have established themselves and increase their activities. The schools, with their Parent Councils and FIRA, work hard to offer our children a marvellous selection of extra-curricular activities. Students are also well catered for, with a record number of grant applications being made by young folk looking to better themselves. Several new groups have appeared – a Baby and Toddler group, a Support Group for those who wish to improve their health, a "Spin and Chatter" group preserving old crafts and skills (by the way, if you ever need to relax and clear your mind, sit and watch them at their wheels for a few moments – it is incredibly serene and calming). I am also aware of a proposal to form a "youth group" to promote social activities amongst the younger generation.

By far and away the largest recipient of grant funding remains BCC. The acquisition and refurbishment of the Hub for BCC, along with the funding, for three years, of their Support and Development Officer and the renewal of their "Operational Grant" have all been completed this year. BCC offers a splendid range of services to our Community and you should all take pride in the fact your Trust is significant, to say the least, in making these services possible. I am also pleased to say that initial discussions have commenced with a view to establishing occupation of the Hub on a long term basis.

Please don't forget that all the groups I have mentioned are organised by unpaid volunteers, working hard and selflessly for the benefit of this, our, Community. We should all be grateful to them – hopefully more will follow their example.

An important part of a thriving Community is the opportunity for them to get together in a congenial, social situation. We are a very diverse Community with folk from all walks of life, of all ages and varying family circumstances. That is a wonderful circumstance, and the Board of the Trust have endeavoured to provide opportunities to bring all these people together to enjoy each other's company. The Summer barn dance was a huge success, the Fireworks display is always popular and again this year, a Christmas Ceilidh will be held at Stratherrick Hall - not forgetting as well as the annual Children's Christmas Party! We hope you have enjoyed them all.

The Directors of the Trust have also, as I hope you are aware, been working very hard on various larger, long term, legacy projects. These include the acquisition and development of the building currently known as "Wildside" (more of that soon), the Riverside Field and of course Foyers Bay. The Directors have been very careful to invite the Community to discuss proposals, have organised Open days, have listened and are putting in to practice the ideas put forward.

More specifically: The result of the Riverside field consultations has been communicated to our architects and the results are being prepared for a further presentation to the Community. Thereafter, work will commence to build a facility that will be the envy of many.

Foyers Bay continues to develop and again, more will occur, following a consultation where all were invited to comment. This will be wonderful facility, offering numerous opportunities to "mess about in boats", for all ages and abilities. If this is of interest, don't hesitate to get involved – the more folk help, the sooner and better the facility will be!

The Broadband Scheme has entered a new phase, following a huge amount of background work by Directors. The Board have approved a significant spend on the completion and expansion of the network, and infrastructure works are now extremely advanced. The scope of work involved to achieve this has been huge and immensely varied - from peering across hill-tops to establish suitable routes to negotiating leases for sites with Edinburgh solicitors. All this has been undertaken by volunteer Directors. They have done a great job and very soon we hope the vast majority of those who desire it, will have a first-class Broadband connection. These things take time, probably more time than any of us like, but the end product, I can assure you, will be well worth waiting for.

The building currently known as "Wildside" – and I use that phrase deliberately – has generally proven extremely popular, particularly given the vastly increased usage of Stratherrick Hall, a consequence not least caused by the latter's free availability to Community Groups as a result of SFCT funding of operational costs.

I would like to make a couple of comments concerning the Whitebridge property. The acquisition of the property, despite overwhelming support expressed at our last AGM, has been questioned and surprisingly, criticised by some. I am disappointed by these comments and in response to those who wonder why SFCT made this acquisition I would point out that it is, or has, or will, be used by The Wellbeing Group, The Broth and Blether Group (who wish to make it a regular venue), The Health Support Group, The Baby and Toddler Group, SFCT for its meetings and an office, The Loch Ness Luvvies, The Spin and Chatter Group, a Music Group, a Craft Group, a new Youth Group and recently by FIRA for a meeting, not to mention Community Consultations. There are also other ideas that have been put forward and will hopefully germinate. That, in my mind is, is full and justifiable evidence to support the acquisition – and let's not forget, the Trust now owns a valuable asset – the funds haven't gone away – they are now represented by a splendid building and surrounding land, securely invested and held for the Community's long term benefit

Whilst discussing this building, I would like to make mention of a use I would never wish to have seen at the property, that as the venue for a reception following the passing and funeral of a wonderful, young, local man, Mark Kelly. I take this opportunity to offer the sincere sympathies of the Members and Board of SFCT to all his family.

And now – to the million-dollar question! What on earth to call the property? Now, that's a poison chalice, if ever there was one, so your Directors deliberated and ultimately chose - to abdicate responsibility entirely! Instead, a suggestion board was available at the Open Day for attendees to make proposals, the most popular choices were listed and then the responsibility was given back to the Community, via an online poll. So, the Board have not chosen a name – you have! One hundred and eighty-four people responded, which must represent a very fair view from the Community as a whole. The choices were The Thain Centre, The Wade Bridge Centre, The Fechlin Centre, or to retain the existing name. And the winner was..... by a huge majority, to retain the existing name! The breakdown of the voting is shown on the screen, so on behalf of the Board of SFCT, our thanks to all those who voted and took this onerous responsibility away from us. The property will therefore continue to be known as "The Wildside Centre", its original name when constructed in 1989.

The Stratherrick & Foyers News continues to be a popular and well-read journal of events in our Community. Given its continued success, a new Editorial Team has been formed and we are grateful to Sian for offering her editorial skills. Of course, an Editor must have material to work with, so I make the annual plea to you all to submit letters, articles and photographs you may feel will be of interest.

There is of course the less glamorous side of our work that is often unseen. Projects and grants are high profile and visible, but none of them could happen without much background work that ensures we have the structure, documentation and guidance to ensure we meet our objectives, act within our Articles, remain within the parameters of our funders agreements and don't break the law!! This year has seen the final completion of a lengthy review of our Grants System, the implementation of a GDPR policy, the conclusion of the Stronelairg Funding Agreement with our friends from SSE, the negotiation of complex leases and the analysis of other legal documentation. One Director deserves all our thanks for undertaking this, at times less than exciting work, so my thanks to Zoe Iliffe.

And so, to the future. You will hopefully have read my messages to you concerning the need for new folk to step up to the mark and assume responsibility for the investment of our Community Benefits. Someone suggested that I had used a little “theatrical irritation” to try and stir up interest. Well, maybe I did, but I can assure you I meant every word. Fortunately for us all, seven good folks have offered their services. Five will be elected and very sadly, two won’t. I would like to thank you all very much for offering to stand. If you’re not successful tonight – fear not, further opportunities will arise.

This leads me to an important point. You will have gathered just how much work the Directors have done – and frankly it has now become unfair and unsustainable to expect them to continue. Therefore, the Board has formulated a new strategy to implement an employment structure, firstly to relieve the pressure on volunteers and secondly, just as importantly, to take the Trust and our Community forward, with the ability to implement plans and projects that will make Stratherrick and Foyers one of the finest places to live in the country.

The basic outline of the structure is as follows. A Trust Manager will be employed to assume responsibility for the overall day to day running of the organisation. A Project Co-ordinator will be employed to implement specific projects and drive them to completion. A Community Liaison Officer will be in place to assist and guide the Community with grants and the functions of the Trust and finally, we will retain the role of Administrator to “pull it all together” and support these staff.

This exercise has not been undertaken lightly, with many hours spent refining job and people specifications, as well as establishing a sustainable and economic model in which they will fit. Professional advice has been taken where appropriate and it is hoped that advertising for the vacant posts will occur in the very near future. Once implemented, this will allow Directors to revert to “Directing”, with professionals in place to execute those directions. Initially the posts will be part-time, but flexibility has been incorporated in the model, should increased commitment be required.

This leads me to a polite plea to all our Community. If you want to know anything about the operation of the Trust, our procedures, our rules or our methods – please just ask! I do seem to spend an awful lot of time explaining misconceptions and at times, huge inaccuracies. So, if in doubt, just ask us.

Finally – some thanks. Firstly, to our stalwart staff Steven and Laura for all their hard work over the past year. To our Funders for making such opportunities available to our Community. To the Community Council for their ongoing support and in particular to their erstwhile and current Chairs, Mrs Catriona Fraser and Mrs Paula Page, both staunch supporters and tireless workers for this Community. The very exciting news is that not only will we have an election this evening, but the CC will also now hold an election. This is great news for the Community and my best wishes to all the candidates. Also, as last year, my thanks to all the volunteers from all the groups that make this Community what it is and what it will be – their efforts are unstinting and amazing.

I also offer to my colleagues on the Board of SFCT a huge thanks for all their tremendous hard work. They have been an example to us all.

Three Directors will leave the Board this evening.

Garry (Page) has engineered some employment, just about as far from Stratherrick as is possible. He heads for the Falklands imminently and we wish him luck. Next time you say “I haven’t got the time for that”- think about Garry who has a very demanding job and a family to look after – he gave of

whatever productive time he could, it was most useful, and he will be missed for his often very incisive comments.

Sharon (Ferguson), who cannot be with us tonight as she plays nurse to her ailing child. Sharon has been with the newly constituted Trust for six years and has worked extremely hard to get the Broadband project up and running. It looks as though it will be one of the most significant projects the Trust has undertaken to date, and we have Sharon to thank for that, with many hours spent trailing the hills mapping out suitable routes and not least, being "the face" of the scheme – which sometimes has not been easy.

Oh – and the other one to go is me! So that just goes to prove every cloud has a silver lining!

Lastly, my thanks to you the Members for being here this evening and for your support throughout the year, or should I now say "years". Your kind words are hugely appreciated and encouraging. Our Community has some wonderful times ahead if we all work together, so I hope we will all grasp this opportunity and really make the most of it.

Please support the new Directors in whatever way you can. My very best wishes to you all and do your best to make us all proud of what can be the best Community in Scotland. All that leaves to say is "Thank you and goodnight!"

Peter J Faye. Chair