



Welcome to the Chair's Annual report.

I do hope you have taken the time to look at our Annual Accounts published on the website (and paper copies are also available on request from [admin@sfctrust.org.uk](mailto:admin@sfctrust.org.uk)) Our funds are in a very healthy state and extremely well managed by our Finance Officer (Fiona Mustarde) who has given a full financial report alongside the accounts to explain the figures in detail.

Our legacy fund made a slight loss in the Financial Year 2023-2024 due to disinvesting in shares which were underperforming. Clarendon who manage our diverse Investment portfolio have reinvested and their annual report to us on 31<sup>st</sup> October 2024 showed the return was 11.37% - well above the market rate. The Legacy Fund now stands at just over £1.4 million.

We are the "custodians" of our community benefit funds and only here for a short time. It is the role of SFCT to ensure that anything we do now is sustainable for future generations. So, while I understand the frustration of some who feel we should spend all the money now, I ask you to reflect - how would future generations regard us if they looked back and saw we spent all the money and left nothing to show for it? Or indeed left no money to maintain the grants system, projects, groups, activities, assets that we have.

The Legacy Fund is just that – our legacy to the future residents of this community.

Whatever we think of renewable energy companies, we should remember their commitment to communities. However, questioning the £5k per megawatt which has not changed in a decade is something that Stratherrick & Foyers Community Council are fighting for on the community's behalf. I would like to thank SFCC for continuing to be supportive of our work and championing our community. I would also like to thank our SSE Community Fund Manager, Carol Masheter, for her willingness to engage with SFCT and its work and look at creative ways to best support our community's needs and aspirations.

There have been some extremely positive news stories this year.

The first being the building of the new houses at Inverfarigaig. The Community Housing Trust has now allocated their four houses, and SFCT's two should be ready in the New Year. The demand for these houses is further evidence of the need in our area and is something that the new Board and the Housing Group will no doubt be discussing over the next few months.

The second good news story is that after several months, the Transport Group had a breakthrough in the on-going saga of community transport provision. In our CAP, transport to community events and shopping trips came out strongly in what people wanted to have.

Our minibus should be here in Jan/Feb 25. It has been purchased outright by Highland council with funding from the Community Bus fund. It will then be leased to SFCT at no cost but with rules on use etc. It means less of our budget being spent. The minibus will be a 16-seater with a disabled ramp. It will require a D1 licence and all drivers that have come forward so far have this. There will need to be community development to get younger volunteer drivers trained to obtain their D1 and funding may be available for this. HC have agreed that until our bus arrives, SFCT can use grant funds to hire a minibus from other groups or a school to start running some community transport and get feedback on this. Thanks to everyone who has volunteered to be a driver – much appreciated. And great to see another CAP priority coming to fruition.

And then there's the playpark completion at Wildside bringing a much needed area for families to meet and enjoy the outdoors. Thanks to all on the Wildside Steering group who progressed this and made it happen. Regarding Wildside, there are plans to up-grade the toilet facilities and replace the windows and doors which are getting to the end of their lives. Maintenance and up-keep of all our community buildings is important to make sure they are fit for purpose.

Two of our big projects have taken a bit of a pause during the last year for a variety of reasons, but it is hoped that the new Board will kick start these once more and move the projects forward.

Progress at Riverside Field was put on-hold while we waited to hear back from Highland Council about the purchase of the land necessary for the 4 parking spaces. Highland Council have just got back to us with a land valuation and the Board will consider this and next steps in January. Meanwhile the Steering Group and the Liaison Group will hopefully reconvene in the New Year with our new CEO in place. Directors met with the local residents in June and SFCT needs to reflect and consider their concerns. As I have said before, we should revisit the community mandate we had and see if there is still the desire for a Sports and Recreation Field and how that might look.

The reset on Errogie Church (The Gathering Place) has begun. With a proactive Steering Group in place, and the community comments received from the survey, the priorities will be reconsidered and a phased approach to development will be the next step. Already it has hosted several events and is proving to be a real hub for those who live at that end of the Strath.

Foyers Bay is a real success story with a vibrant steering group in place. Having created a proper slipway for access, the next steps here are to level the compound and make it ready for next season. Community involvement alongside Malcolm Stewart and Caroline Tucker has made this a flagship steering group for other projects to mirror.

Progress on the purchase of the Farigaig Forest School and land was paused for the Board to reassess the acquisition. Forestry Land Scotland have given SFCT until the end of January 2025 before they will put the property and land on the open market. Losing the asset and

the land to a commercial developer could have implications for our community so the new Board will be revisiting this at the December board meeting.

Over the past year we have had three wonderful community events – the Highland Gathering, Winter Wonderland (for 2024 the Winter Festival) and the Fireworks. Fabulous community events – ideas created and co-ordinated by our staff and community volunteers. These are opportunities for the whole community to come together and allow us to connect, re-connect, meet new members of our widespread community, and just enjoy what this area is all about and what it has to offer each and every one of us. And having seen how the community responded to the new Winter Festival idea, I am confident that these events will continue to grow and thrive.

We continue to fund the excellent work being done by Boleskine Community Care. Mention must be made of the sad loss of their Chair, Kit Cameron, in September. Kit was a real champion for BCC and her vision for its future. It is a credit to the Trustees and the two employees, Jo Mitchell and Olivia Grant, that BCC has continued to flourish to ensure that Kit's vision is not lost to our community. BCC has picked up the baton on one of the main desires to come out of our CAP – retaining the Foyers Shop. A steering group, consisting of SFCT and BCC representatives, has just submitted a Feasibility Study proposal and are awaiting quotes to come in. Once the feasibility study has been carried out, involving community consultation, BCC and the whole community will have a better understanding of the need for, and the viability of, a community shop.

Stratherrick Hall is supported by us too and I thank the volunteers on the Hall Committee as they look at what needs to be done to make sure this building is future proof. The repairs and upgrades have already made a huge difference, and I am sure there will be plenty more suggestions for improvements.

The work of Stratherrick & Foyers Community Council is vital to the community and the commitment of Mark Hindley, and his fellow volunteer councillors is to be applauded. In particular, I would like to thank Craig Lightbody who stepped up to the role of Community Liaison Director. The post had lain vacant for quite some time and having a regular link between SFCC and SFCT has been much appreciated by the Directors over the past year.

Grants to community groups have risen again over the past year and none of this would happen without you – the community. Your willingness to get involved, be engaged, contribute ideas, energy and most importantly time.

But equally none of this would happen without our staff. Directors are volunteers and many of us have full-time jobs and would find it difficult to commit the time to manage the wide range of work that you, our community, would like us to do. From grant applications to newsletters, community events, match funding, project management, cleaning, maintenance etc.

SFCT spends about 22% of its income on staff which may seem a high figure. With the help of Development Trust Association Scotland, I did some research to find out what other similar community trusts spend on staff - they fall in the range of 25-50% of income, so we

are at the lower end of that scale. More importantly we are providing local jobs for local people in a rural community.

But more pertinently for this AGM has been the willingness of our staff to take on extra workload over the last few months after the departure of 3 members of staff to ensure that our work did not grind to a halt. The SFCT Board are extremely grateful to them, and I hope when the new CEO starts, they will feel a sense of relief but also a new sense of purpose as they welcome their new boss. Jewels Lang will take up her new post in January and is moving to the area shortly. She brings a wealth of knowledge and expertise, and I am confident that she will be an asset to our community.

The three staff who left were Steven Watson (CLO) who retired in March after 10 years as an employee, Robbie Burns our first ever CAP Officer left in May and finally Tony Foster our CEO who moved to pastures new in September.

For those of you who don't know our current staff and what they do, I thought I'd just give a summary of the work they do for SFCT and the community.

**Finance Team** - Fiona Mustarde (Finance Officer) & Susan Lowe (Bookkeeper). Managing all the income from large SSE monies to the small everyday invoice payments is no easy task and their expertise and commitment is very much appreciated. I would like to mention two Directors Chris Gehrke and Susan Greer in the Finance section as they are our on-line bank signatories. Without their input no bills would be paid or indeed wages. Thanks to them for continuing to be diligent in their support of the Finance team.

**Administration** - Kirsteen Campbell who keeps everybody right and handles all enquiries, questions, bookings and taking and producing the Board meeting minutes. Without her we would all be at sixes and sevens.

**Cleaners** - Peter Leyden & Michelle Rhodes with their invaluable work at Foyers Toilets and the Trust buildings. Thank you on behalf of the community for your dedication and high standards.

**Facilities** - Matt Rhodes our facilities go to guy and community van driver. Matt is such a willing member of the team always ready to go the extra mile and extra load to help.

**Project Co-ordinator** - Caroline Tucker supporting and co-ordinating all the big projects and their relevant steering groups. Meeting with architects, planners, landowners etc to ensure project progress. Caroline is also involved in co-ordinating and managing SFCT events.

**Comms/Marketing** - Jillian Barclay & Calum Martin the gurus behind every post, article, newsletter, magazine and event. Their work is vital to ensure that we all know what is going on and more importantly where and when.

**Fundraisers** - Sharon Ferguson & Sarah Byrne, tirelessly looking at ways to maximise match funding for our projects and helping individuals and community groups to complete grant applications and access external funding. And in recent months taking on the work of the CAP officer in helping to move community projects and ideas forward.

Finally, I would like to give a huge thanks to my fellow directors for their commitment, time, advice, and board discussions over the past year. The wide range of skills, knowledge, and abilities is testament to the diverse community we live in, and I thank you for your input. As Chair it has not all been plain sailing, but the support of SFCT Directors has been immense.

To the new incumbents, Ken Sinclair(returning), Peter Faye, Stewart MacPherson and Michael White, I wish you well and hope you relish the role ahead of you as you navigate your way through board meetings and the decisions to come.

But most importantly, I would like to thank you, our members, and the whole community, for the trust you put in us to manage your money and assets, and I hope that you will continue to offer this support to future Boards of SFCT.

Catrina Fraser