



Chairs Annual Statement: Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust Ltd AGM. 28th November 2018

It is now my task to give a brief overview of your Trust's activities over the past twelve months, our thoughts for the future and to ask you to think about some points I will raise. I will endeavour to give you some detail, but should 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. We have received a record number of Grant Applications, 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 the principles of good governance and efficiency.

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

I will deal with Grants first of all. 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 sixty-six Grant Applications over the past year – another year on year increase. The total sums involved in grants and projects are in excess of £316,000 pounds. This represents a 500% 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.

Highlights for me are not always the large grants. Our Heritage Group have undertaken, with the support of the Trust, the most magnificent restoration of the War Memorial. They are to be congratulated on superb work, to provide a truly fitting memorial to those who made it possible for us all to sit here tonight, to think what we will and to say what we want. Those who attended the Remembrance Service or have recently visited the Memorial will surely agree with me.

The Wellbeing Group are also proving hugely successful and offer something new to all. The Inverfarigaig Residents Group are also a great example of folk getting together to improve their environment and generate a real sense of Community. Of course, the parents and schools continue giving their time and energy toward organising wonderful additional experiences like ski-ing for our children. The older children continue to receive support with Tuition and horrendously priced school trips through FIRA. The Trustees of this Hall have had the foresight and consideration for others to work toward making this facility available to all with the support of the Trust. In addition, and hopefully with an eye to the future, we are proud to have been involved in facilitating three new apprenticeships this year, in the fields of Estate Management, Hospitality and Agriculture – these are very important "industries" for our Community! And of course, I could not miss out our friends at BCC. What an important year this has been for them! A new Development Officer and new premises. I can safely say that the Board of SFCT take great pride in being able to assist such a dedicated, hardworking group of people.

There is something in common amongst all the groups I have mentioned. They are all unpaid volunteers, giving much time from their busy lives to come up with worthwhile ideas – and then following them through. They see the opportunities that are available as a consequence of our very fortunate circumstance - and make things happen! They are all an example to the whole Community that I hope will lead others to do the same.

We have also tried to provide some events where the Community can come together in a friendly, social atmosphere and get to know each other better – or for the first time! The Christmas Ceilidh (to be repeated this year), the Fireworks display (now a regular fixture) and our first attempt at a “Summer Fun Day” all seem to have been well received. Of course, they also require a good deal of effort and time, so please don’t hesitate to offer help if you wish!

The Board of the Trust also have several ongoing projects managed by the Directors and staff. The Riverside Field progresses, with the new entrance being installed recently. I believe the children of Foyers School enjoyed sowing wildflower seeds along the edge of the field and I look forward to spring time to see the results of their efforts. Following some difficulties with our original Architect, an alternative practise has been appointed. They will shortly have a “draft” plan that incorporates a number of ideas put forward by the Community. Our intention is then to hold an exhibition of these ideas and ask questions such as “Do you like it?”, “Don’t you like it?” “What else would you like to see?” “What don’t you want to see?”, and so on. It really will be the decision of the Community!

Our Broadband Scheme continues to grow and recently we authorised the commencement of the expansion of the coverage offered. Currently over fifty premises are covered and a further fifty are scheduled with the expansion. This will include areas such as Errogie, Torness and Inverfarigaig. Admittedly, there have been some delays in acquiring suitable sites, but negotiations are now virtually complete with owners of appropriately located property and land.

Work has finally commenced at Foyers Bay. You may have noticed that the old fish farm concrete slab has been crushed and the site cleared. Tenders are in for a new fence and gates, and engineers are in the process of designing a new slipway with a view to installation in the spring-time. We have also acquired a number of pontoons, very kindly donated to us, and these will be refurbished and installed to provide safe access to boats in the bay.

We also completed the acquisition of leased property at Lower Foyers. This has now been re-let to BCC at nil rent and the Trust has almost completed a full refurbishment of the property, to include a range of new facilities. This will enable BCC to take forward their plans to offer more services and activities in appropriate surroundings. I wish them well.

Other work continues in producing the Stratherrick & Foyers News. I hope you all enjoy reading the latest news and events. If there is one change I would like to see with the publication, it would be to see more contributions from our readership! Feel free to submit a letter, an article, a snippet of news, a photograph – anything you think would be of interest.

There is of course the less glamorous side of our work – this year a full review of all our Grants documentation has occurred. This commenced with a survey of grant recipients and then involved looking at all of the documents and amending and revising them. No mean feat for those involved. We also had the new GDPR procedures to implement – again not glamorous, but essential work.

This leaves the future! Firstly, our friends and funders at SSE have announced that Stronelairg Benefit Funds will shortly be with us. This will impact enormously on the scope of projects we can

consider. We have to think about what legacies we can leave our Community and the Trust needs groups with sound ideas to come forward, with a will to implement them. Lots of help is available, so please don't hesitate to put your proposal forward. Don't stand at a barbecue or a bar and say, "Why don't they do that?". Say instead, "Why don't I/we do that?".

I would like you to consider a proposal that has been discussed by the Board for the past couple of months. As our funds increase, our grants increase, our projects increase, our responsibilities increase and the demands on our time hugely increase. The Board are all volunteers. The time has perhaps come to consider appointing a General Manager to relieve volunteers of this growing burden. There is a danger that we will not recruit volunteers if the demands on their time are too great. I would be very interested to hear the Member's thoughts on this proposal, either here tonight or at your convenience.

Now I would like to put to rest some rumour and speculation I have heard over the past weeks. You may be familiar with the Wildside property at Whitebridge. I can confirm that it is SFCT that have made an offer on this property. The offer was accepted by the owner. However, there is a right of pre-emption, meaning that a specific third party has an option to match exactly the terms of our offer if they wish. Notice has been served on this party and we must wait, for a specified period of time, to see if they exercise their right. If they do not, then we will proceed with the purchase. If they do exercise the right, there is little we can do. I had hoped to be a little more positive tonight but remain optimistic we can acquire a very strategic piece of property for our Community.

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 work, the unsocial hours we demand of them and the constant disruption of their private lives. To our Funders for making such opportunities available to our Community. To the Community Council for their ongoing support and in particular to their Chair, Mrs Catriona Fraser, a true stalwart of this Community. Also, my thanks to all the volunteers from all the groups that make this Community what it is and will be – their efforts are unstinting and amazing.

I offer to my colleagues on the Board of SFCT a huge thanks. These folk work tremendously hard for no reward, other than seeing their Community grow and thrive. They deserve all our gratitude – if only for putting up with me as Chair! Sadly, we will say good-bye to three Directors this evening. I would like to thank Caroline for her incisive and well-chosen comments, to Stewart for his equally incisive and often passionate comments, but also for the enormous amount of hard, practical work he has put in – without Stewart there wouldn't have been a Summer Event, and he is of course chief pyro-technician at the Fireworks display. Then there is Hugh, who has been a calm, immensely thoughtful presence and voice on the Board, which has at times been very useful! I hope to see them all on the Board again at some time.

Lastly, my thanks to you the Members for being here this evening and for your support throughout the year. You often speak some very kind words and they 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.

Peter J Faye. Chair