

2016 AGM Chairman's Report

2016 has seen the Evanton Community Trust go through a period of consolidation, a period of change and more recently significant development.

The Trust sadly saw the departure of two of its longest standing Directors, Hector Munro and John McHardy this past year. Both were elected to the Kiltearn Community Council in November 2015 as Chairman and Secretary respectively and they felt it best to step down from the Board to avoid any conflict of interest. We thank them for their long-standing contribution over the years and whilst we were sorry to see them depart, it has resulted in new faces coming on board as Directors/Trustees.

Finnian Munro, Simon Hindson, and Deirdre James were co-opted onto the Board and they have brought valuable skills and experience to the Trust's work over the past few months..

The Trust's work in 2015/16 - Kiltearn Footpaths Project

This past year, one of the projects the Trust were first asked to look at back in February 2015 has finally come to fruition. The Kiltearn Footpaths Project was set up to raise money to carry out repairs and improvements to the path network at Kiltearn and Balconie. Concerns had been raised for some time about the state of the paths here, sections of which were in need of urgent attention.

Throughout the first half of 2016 we submitted several applications to various organisations and after some initial setbacks we finally succeeded in securing the funds needed from the Postcode Lottery Trust, the Kiltearn Community Council and the Highland Council. The Trust would like to extend its thanks to all these bodies for their support.

The Project started earlier this month with work beginning on re-establishing the footpath alongside the River Skiach after one section of the bank collapsed into the river and washed the path away. After obtaining a license from SEPA for river engineering and bank protection work the contractor, using an extraordinary walking digger, began to repair and reinforce the bank with armour rock. That work finished yesterday and we will now re-seed the bank and begin to plant trees and shrubs to help bind the soil.

Once this is finished we will be levelling and widening the full length of the footpath alongside the Skiach and carrying out a programme of tree planting to replace the dead trees we removed.

We will then move on to two further paths. The first involves re-routing the footpath from the old Parish Church car park to the footbridge over the Skiach which currently gets completely

washed out during storms and at high tides. Finally we will undertake repairs and improvements along the shore path, reinforcing the sea defences and upgrading sections of the footpath here.

Once we have completed the restoration work we will produce signboards and a booklet/guide to the path network, highlighting the wonderful bio-diversity of this area which is so popular amongst locals and visitors alike. Hopefully this project will secure this important community asset for many years to come.

The Trust's work in 2015/16 - Kiltearn Old Parish Church

Following an approach by the Local Parish Church of Scotland last year to see whether we would be interested in taking over responsibility for the ruins of the old Kirk and raising funds to preserve this historic site, various activities have continued this year.

The first of a number of community consultation exercises began last October with a well-attended Open Day down at the Church. Thanks to the work of John and Graeme McHardy, the inside of the ruined Church was cleared of a huge amount of vegetation that had grown unchecked over the years. Visitors to the Open Day were able to look around inside the structure and some of the ancient stones in the adjoining burial ground, many for the first time.

In July, an approach from the Highlands Historic Buildings Trust led to an initial meeting to discuss areas of co-operation. The follow-up meeting was also attended by the Kirkmichael Trust. The possibility of creating a tour of local Kirkyards was raised and to promote the idea an afternoon tour of the old Kirks in Alness and at Kiltearn was held in August. This was attended by 50 people who listened to one of the most eminent architectural historians in Scotland point out features of the structures, including additional evidence of a medieval structure that was incorporated into the existing Kiltearn Church when it was rebuilt in 1791.

Our application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a community-based research project led by ARCH (Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands) failed to secure funding. We were told by HLF that this was nothing to do with the quality of the project, which they said was good, but because we had applied to their larger funding programme which was heavily oversubscribed with much larger projects. We were advised to resubmit the proposal under a smaller programme which we have now done and await the outcome in November. If successful the project participants will undertake research to set the old Kirk in an historical context, carry out a graveyard survey, and will then be trained to undertake family history research into people associated with the Kirk. They will also learn how to do a standing building survey which will allow an assessment for any future activity.

This project would just be the first step of any future plans for the site and there will be continued consultation with the wider community before any further decisions were to be made. However, if the community *is* interested in seeing further developments this would clearly be a major, long-term project requiring substantial funding.

Web Site and Newsletter

The Trust continues to feature the work of local artists living in the village on its web site. . The stunning photography of Alister Kemp, Heather Leslie and Fyon Macleod are all on display as are the superb landscape and wild life paintings of Esther Armstrong. We will continue to feature this work and hope to include work of local musicians too. If you haven't visited yet you can find us at www.ect.scot

For those who don't have access to the web or email, this year saw the introduction of a Newsletter with updates on the Trust's activities. We plan to continue to distribute this on a quarterly basis.

New Constitution

The other major development this year has been a review of our constitution. Currently, as Company Limited by Guarantee with Charitable Status we are responsible to two separate bodies. We are accountable to Companies House as we were set up under the Companies Act 1985 and to OSCR (The Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) because we are a registered charity. The Trust is now a member of the Development Trusts Association of Scotland who have been helpful in advising us on the way forward. This has culminated in recommending to this AGM that the Trust becomes a SCIO (Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation) thus simplifying our legal status and adopting a set of Articles and Objects that is better suited to our needs in the future..

Conclusion

We believe the Trust has an exciting and challenging future ahead of it. We are here to serve the whole community and welcome people's ideas for projects that we might undertake.

In closing, I would like to thank to fellow Board members and to our long-standing members and those who have joined us more recently. Our current membership now stands at over 80 people. The Trust depends upon the support of a strong membership and our members' continued support is vital to our work going forward.