

## Chairman's Annual Report 2015

The past year and more has been a period of considerable change and growth for the Evanton Community Trust.

At the 2014 AGM several members of the Board who had served the Trust loyally for a number of years stood down. Hugh Campbell, Fiona Dendy, Iain Livesley and Ronald Munro Ferguson had served as Directors of the Trust for several years and I would like to acknowledge the work of these and all the Trust's former Directors not the least for setting up the Trust, but for bringing to fruition its first project, acquiring the old Hangar site in the centre of the village and turning this into a Green space and an attractive amenity for the local community and visitors alike..

Following these departures, there was a good deal of discussion as to whether or not the Trust should continue or not. The remaining Directors along with the Kiltearn Community Council did not want the Community Trust to fold, and felt there remained an important role for a charitable company which could undertake and raise funds for major capital projects for the benefit of the village and its wider community.

Insufficient nominations to fill all the vacancies at the last AGM led the remaining Directors (Hector Munro and John McHardy) to approach a number of local residents to see who might be interested in getting involved. As a result, a group of new Directors were appointed last year. Michael Macleod, Iain Clark, Leslie Logan and Graeme Macmillan all joined the Board last June, followed by Maureen Cusick and Mandy Macleman who were appointed last October. Alpin Macdonald, another long-standing Director resigned in January this year.

This influx of new people re-energised the Board and has led to several significant new developments over the past year.

### **Completing the Village Green**

The Trust was originally established to acquire and develop the former Hangar site in the village and convert it into a village Green. The final task in this project was to produce and mount display panels on the three stone plinths that had been erected for this purpose.

The panels highlighting the prominent features, points of interest and history of the village were unveiled last month by Rob Gibson MSP at an event which was extremely well-attended by members, former Directors and the wider village. The information boards, one featuring Evanton North, the second highlighting Evanton South and the third Historical

Evanton, now serve as a useful point of information for both residents and visitors to the village alike.

The Trust as the owner and manager of the Green wants to extend particular thanks to Lilian Lockhart and her group of gardeners for their dedicated work in maintaining the flower beds. Thanks also to for Grahame McHardy for grass-cutting.

This year we also introduced procedures and guidelines for local groups wishing to book the Green for open-air events.

### **Kiltearn Old Parish Church**

The ruins of the Kiltearn Old Parish Church are without doubt one of the most important historical sites in the village. Set in the tranquil burial ground that many in the village will know so well, the ruins date back to the at least the 16<sup>th</sup> Century and are probably much older. Discussions on the buildings future have been on going with various bodies almost since the roof was removed in the 1950's and since then the building has deteriorated considerably.

The Trust was approached by the Local Parish Church of Scotland earlier this 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. An on-site meeting between the Evanton Community Trust, the local Church Congregational Board and Highland Council officers together with Church Commissioners from Edinburgh discussed how the future of this historic site could an be safeguarded.

The immediate task was to ensure the existing structure was safe and last month specialists began a examination of the building, carrying out urgent repairs to any masonry and stonework considered potentially hazardous. Having completed this, work started on clearing the enormous amount of vegetation growing inside the walls, and thanks need to be extended to John and Graeme McHardy for this work.

Widespread community consultation on ideas for the future of the site is now planned and the first of a number of consultation exercises will begin next Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October at an open air Gathering at the site. The event will enable folk to look around inside the old Kirk, the first time for several years, and will hopefully include guided tours of the burial grounds, highlighting some of the most interesting stones to be found there. It will also be the first steps in getting people's initial thoughts and ideas on the future of this important site.

This is clearly a major long-term project that will require substantial funding and the Board is committed to taking this forward. One suggestion is that the Old Church can become the hub for local footpaths in the area, many of which are now in urgent need of repair. The idea is

that the development of the Church site and the shore paths should form the basis of an integrated approach to this important part of the village.

### **Web Site and Facebook Page**

Finally, the Trust launched both a Web site and a Facebook page this year to provide information on its work and progress reports on its various projects. These have been well supported and initial response has been extremely encouraging. Using social networking, as well as posters around the village has led to a substantial increase in the Trust's membership.

One of the Trust's on-line initiatives has been to feature the work of local artists living in the village. These now include the stunning photography of Alister Kemp, Heather Leslie and Fyon Macleod and the superb landscape and wild life paintings of Esther Armstrong. It is hoped to expand on this in the months to come.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion we believe the Trust has an exciting and challenging future. We also believe it is important to build bridges with other groups and organisations in the village. To further this inclusive approach we are establishing a Group Membership category to formally strengthen links with other organisations who share common aims. It is important to remember that the Trust depends upon the support of a strong membership and we are delighted to say that following the recent membership drive almost 40 new members have joined,

In closing, the Board would like to thank its long-standing members as well as those who have recently joined us. Your continued support of the Trust is the bedrock of our work going forward in creating new assets like the Village Green or securing existing ones like the Old Parish Kirk, for the benefit of the village and all its community for years to come.