



Chair's Annual Statement: Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust Ltd AGM. 25th November 2020

Good evening. I must say, this is the strangest AGM I have ever attended. I am sitting alone in the rear room of The Wildside Centre looking at a sea of faces projected on a wall. Holding an AGM in Gorthleck Hall and standing in front of a healthy crowd was, I thought, a nerve-wracking experience, but I must admit, this is a lot worse.

I sincerely hope the meeting will proceed smoothly, but please bear with us if there are slight hiccups. It is however gratifying to see so many of you here tonight and even more so that I recognise so many of you who have taken the time to join us.

I thought last year, when spoke with you all, it would be my last as Chair and I have to admit, it was difficult to leave the Board, but I looked forward to tackling the list of domestic jobs that had been put off for so long. However, sadly for you lot, I was asked to help out for a short period and I have to say what a pleasure and privilege it has been to work with the current Board of Directors. They are an amazing cross section of young, old, boys and girls, technical, artistic, practical, professional and caring – but most of all, full of enthusiasm and utterly dedicated to making your Community, with the kind support of our generous funders, a better place to live. I said most of what I wanted to say last year, but I feel you should know just what they've been up to in what has been one of the strangest years any of us has known. I won't take long but thank you for your patience and most of all, your support.

I mentioned it being a strange year and would probably win a prize for understatement there! What truly impressed me, when we were all hit with the bombshell last March, was the reaction of this Community, and the integral part of it the Trust represents. The collaboration with our friends at the Community Council, BCC and the Knockie Trust, the great support of our funders at SSE and Greencoat, not to mention a whole host of unseen and unheard volunteers, was phenomenal. This was no grinding governmental machine or chattering committee – it was a group of folk who valued their neighbours, friends and Community getting cracking and swinging in to effective action with no delay whatsoever.

Be it some food (yes, it was that fundamental back then!), a prescription picked up, a few pounds to help ease the burden, a bit of shopping – they were all provided without question. But equally as importantly – it became so important just to see a friendly face (albeit 2 metres away!) and to have a blether for five minutes. A handsome sum was spent on what is blithely called "Covid Relief", but frankly, that doesn't really matter. No questions were asked by our funders – in fact they were positively encouraging us to "do the right thing", so well done them!

I think your Directors, with all their friends from the groups I mention, deserve a huge thank you – I know how many hours they all put in and know even more what a huge benefit they have been to our Community.

Well, they say that every cloud has a silver lining, so what was it? Because all meetings and gatherings were cancelled, a decision was made to undertake some practical works, for instance at Wildside. The building, whilst it was structurally first class, was in need of decoration, furniture, heating and a general facelift. This, as some of you may now have seen, is effectively complete and we have a property of an extremely high standard, ready and waiting for the day when the whole Community can enjoy it to the full. Some have said, why are they spending money on Wildside? The reason is very simple. Because we had to. Firstly, it is not sensible to ignore the need to maintain a property – it will simply deteriorate further. Secondly, it was necessary to provide a warm clean and safe environment, with some furniture, for the many diverse groups who have and will hopefully start again, to use the property. Thirdly, why should we not, as a Community, have an asset of which we can be proud? Those who have visited the property have without exception been hugely impressed – so my congratulations to the Directors who worked so hard to provide us all with this wonderful facility.

The Wildside Centre is of course a real asset. But what of the future and other sorts of assets? I have no doubt my colleague Mr Frank Ellam will appraise fully of our finances and how he, alongside our Advisors, have established a Legacy Fund that will support our Community for many years when our Community Benefit funds start to tail off. Despite turbulent, to say the least, times in financial markets, our fund has remained positive and even grown, thanks to their prudent and judicious investment strategy. I can say with confidence that our “Pension Scheme” is in very safe hands.

Things are progressing down at the Riverside Field, with I believe what was a sixth consultation having recently taken place, as part of the Planning Process. I was pleased to note a very positive interest and even more pleasing was the willingness of local folk to involve themselves and offer positive opinion in a helpful and constructive way. There is the possibility of having a world class facility here, with benefits for every range of ages and abilities.

Foyers Bay, we all admit, has not physically progressed as much as any of you would have liked. Directors have however, been busy in the background dealing with an increasing amount of administration and bureaucracy associated with such a major development. Good progress has been made and we sincerely hope to see some physical progress very soon. If you would like to help with such a major development, please feel free to get in touch, as I’m sure it would be much appreciated.

Gorthleck Hall is the subject of a very interesting question raised by a Member, so I will leave that until later in the meeting when we respond to questions that have been submitted.

Some other very exciting – and some would say long overdue developments – have also occurred! One of the difficulties Directors face is a lack of time – don’t forget they are all volunteers. I mentioned to you last year, that in an attempt to ease this problem we were looking to appoint a Trust manager, to take on some of the burden they carry and to take the Trust to its next stage of development. Well, the wonderful news is that we have found just the man, and he has accepted the post. He is actually amongst you this evening as our guest! I would have liked to ask him to perhaps stand up so that you could stare at him and hopefully smile, but I’m afraid you’ll have to wait for that opportunity, once we are actually allowed to meet again. Tony Foster has great experience of Development Trusts, Community Companies and working with diverse groups of folk, all with differing objectives and aspirations. I am convinced he is just the man for the job, so I hope that when it’s possible, you’ll all welcome him and work with him.

Of course, Tony needs a set of objectives and targets to aim at. So I hope you will be pleased that after a rigorous selection process, the Board of Directors have commissioned a full Community

Consultation, with a view to producing a Community Action Plan, that will then serve as a road map toward achieving what this Community wants. However, this all depends on you and your neighbours really entering into the spirit of the exercise. This isn't about what SFCT wants – it's all about what you want! You'll get an opportunity to join in very soon, as an important aspect of the exercise is having a group of people to help, to check and to "steer" the consultants in their work. We have the local knowledge – they have the expertise to pull it all together. So if you would like to have a part in that, why not get in touch and let us know? The independence of this group is vital, so we would like older people, younger people, long term residents, new arrivals, business representation, Council representation, Forestry representation, Estate representation – in fact every representation! The chance to speak up has arrived, so please take it.

I hope you will also be pleased to hear that very shortly a new, improved version of The Stratherrick and Foyers News will be issued. I have had a sneak preview and I was hugely impressed. The SFCT Communications Team have worked tirelessly to produce a magazine that is full of really interesting content, news and pictures – and it looks really good as well! They've done a grand job, but of course are greatly appreciative of all the content that has been supplied by the Community. Please keep up the great submissions and make "The News" a really good read!

Of course this year we haven't had our Summer Event, our Fireworks display, the Children's Christmas Party and the Christmas Ceilidh is a nonstarter! In fact, social life and a bit of fun have been in very short supply! However – fear not! A small group of Directors, in conjunction with their comrades in arms at the Brolly Group, BCC and the Community Council have devised a hugely ambitious and work intensive plan to "Save Christmas for the Community!" Well – I think they're going to pull it off! I won't go into detail here, but you must have seen the posters or the advertising on the web-site etc. It's something for everyone and should bring a smile to all our faces! And what's wrong with that? So book your slots and get in to the spirit. By the way – it'll be worth going along just to see some of the locals you all know and love, who've been persuaded (or something like that!) to play some interesting "festive" characters – in full costume! Sights for sore eyes, I think!

Finally, I come to the part of the evening where I say thank you. To Laura, our Administrator who has done technological wonders this year, on top of all the really hard work she quietly puts in anyway. She has become affectionately known as "Zoombot" – and deserves a medal for dealing with IT dinosaurs like me. To Steven, in his newfound role as our Community liaison Officer -it's great to see you back in the traces again, really getting stuck in - and enjoying helping out the wandering souls he refers to as "Directors". Thank you for your patience, understated perseverance and assistance - and when it's allowed again, it'll be good to see you back at Wildside!

To our Funders, SSE and Greencoat (and I'm delighted Morven and Marianne from SSE can be here tonight) 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 Paula Page and Mr Patrick Haston, both staunch supporters and tireless workers for this Community.

Some of the Board will leave this evening, but to those who will remain, my personal thanks to you for firstly, the huge amount of enthusiasm, care, time and sheer hard graft you have all put in. Secondly, for putting up with a nagging, miserly, nit-picking Chair who seems to feel the need to question everything! Well, don't worry, he's nearly gone. To the new Directors I wish the very best of luck and again my thanks for stepping up to the plate. Your opportunities are endless and I'm sure you'll grasp the nettle and do us all proud.

Of course, some Directors will leave. Last year, I said goodbye to Garry Page. But there he was – back again! Apparently, his attempted escape to the Falklands went awry (possibly something to do with penguins?) and he answered a call for assistance from the Board and had again put his shoulder to the wheel manfully. I'm sure all the Directors will offer their sincere thanks for his honest, frank and immensely constructive help. Garry can always be relied upon to provide a sensible alternative viewpoint and he has the knack of making people think through any proposal thoroughly – or it won't get past him! Well done Sir and enjoy at least a few months away from the key-board – although rumour has it that a certain Mrs Page has a rather long list of little tasks for you!

Finally, one lady is leaving the Board tonight after nearly seven years as a Director, some of them as one of the best Chairs SFCT has ever had. She has guided and mentored Director after Director. She has developed countless policies, written countless procedures for employment, finance, grants, the list goes on and on. She has become the “go to” Director with any question about what we can do, what we can't do, how do we do it? She has developed full Director Training and offered help and guidance on any aspect of Trust business. An unfortunate analogy I often use is that a previous Chair, Ed Ley-Wilson, built a sound skeleton – and thereafter this lady put on the flesh, organs, hair and character of what has become the Trust. She has never shirked a task or refused to help. Now that isn't bad for someone who was asked for “a bit of advice” nearly seven years ago. The rest is history, as they say. Zoe Iliffe will, I believe, be hugely missed by the Board of SFCT. But she doesn't like a fuss, so I'll just say, I am sure on behalf of many, many people, thank you very much and quite truthfully, we couldn't have done it without you.

Lastly, my thanks to you the Members for being here this evening and for your support throughout the year.

Please support your Board of Directors in whatever way you can. My very best wishes to you all, do your best and enjoy it! I really am going this time!

Thank you.

Peter J Faye. Chair