

MCHA CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

AGM – Thursday 10 Feb 2022

Chairman's report for the period covering December 2020 to this evening.

Minginish Community Hall

COVID restrictions and concerns have for a 2nd year curtailed activities at the hall. In November the hall hosted its first event in over 18-months, one of the SEALL Festival of Small Halls concerts. Local group activities like the children's dance group, yoga group, badminton, carpet bowls and the Minginish Craft Group and Fayres have now started up again. And of course, in Spring and Summer 2021 the hall hosted its most important and hotly anticipated events of all time when it was used by Carbst Medical Practice as the venue for the roll out of the COVID 1st and 2nd vaccinations. I have never been so happy to enter the doors, not even for indoor football, and I know that I wasn't alone in that. I am sure I speak on behalf of everyone present and the wider community when I thank the Carbst Medical Practice staff and volunteers for the work they have done in the roll out and in looking after our community.

In the coming year, hopefully restrictions will continue to be lifted, and confidence will improve to allow more activity here at the hall to return. We have work to do in promoting the hall as a venue and that will become more of a priority as restrictions ease, and we have some consistency in what we can do.

We have a small group of volunteers who assist with the day to day running of the hall, setting up for events, etc and we need to extend our thanks to them for their work, particularly, I would like to name-check hall neighbours Nick and Jenny Duffill, who do a lot of the work. If you or anyone you know would like to add their name to the pool of volunteers, please let one of the directors know.

PROJECT OFFICER

During the year we had a change in our Project Officer when Henrik Micski left the post to take up a new full-time job. We would like to thank Henrik for all his sterling work for MCHA and for agreeing to 'keep things ticking over' while we were recruiting his

replacement and in helping induct our new Project Officer, Dawn Campbell, into the role. We are delighted to have recruited Dawn and in her short time with us, she has settled in well and we are already benefitting from her approach and organisational skills.

FAIRY POOLS

Despite the disruption from COVID, when restrictions have allowed, the Fairy Pools Car Park has been busy with visitors. We work in partnership with Outdoor Access Trust for Scotland (OATS) at the carpark; we have relied on their expertise, their resources and financial backing to develop the site and they manage it day-to-day, with MCHA receiving regular and significant income from turnover at the site. The much-needed toilet block was completed in Autumn 2020 and was officially opened in June 2021 by our MSP Kate Forbes, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank her for her interest and backing with the project. Unfortunately, due to COVID restrictions, the guest list for the opening was very limited but this was offset by good media coverage of the event including in the Scottish press, on STV news, on BBC Reporting Scotland, and on Radio Skye.

From the outset the priority for MCHA in relation to Fairy Pools has been to help manage the impact of visitor activity and numbers at the site for local residents, and the construction of the car park and the toilets has undoubtedly been a success in this regard, but there remain challenges at peak periods. Along with OATS we will continue to monitor this, but both organisations agree that the community will need support from statutory bodies as they have responsibility for policing road access.

Staying with the Fairy Pools, as part of the wider Skye Iconic Sites project that includes the Storr and Quiraing, work is underway on developing interpretative information, building bridges and improving footpaths and access for visitors. MCHA have been involved in this project and have provided funding.

COMMUNITY HOUSING

Our Project Officer will provide the meeting with further information on the work done so far on our community housing project. The need to tackle the lack of affordable housing in the area was identified as a priority in the community consultation conducted by MCHA in 2019, and during the last year we engaged the services of the Communities Housing Trust to begin

developing the project. It is early days yet, but our discussions with Communities Housing Trust have given us confidence that it is realistic for us to take this significant project on, and hopefully during the coming year we can take a few more steps towards it.

FAIRY POOLS GRANT FUND

We will go in to more detail on the Fairy Pools Grant Fund later in the meeting, but just to say that since the last AGM we have awarded funding to: Minginish Community Council for the path to the War Memorial; Carbost Primary School Parent Council for a polytunnel and equipment; Carbost Community Shop for their EPOS system (Electronic Point of Sale system) and more recently funding to help them get through their first winter; and finally North West Skye Football Club for the purchase of a mower.

OTHER PROJECTS

In addition to the activities already mentioned: (1) we are in the final stages of adopting the phone kiosk situated at Taigh Ailean and next we will begin gathering costs and drawing up plans associated with renovating it and converting it in to a unique and small visitor attraction; (2) we have agreed to push on with creating a replica of the Fiscavaig Stone, a project identified 3 or 4 years ago that we had postponed due to COVID. The original Fiscavaig Stone is a Pictish symbol stone found in the 1920s and located at the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. The replica stone will be displayed here at the hall alongside the real Eynort Stone, a stone that we saved from a similar resting place in Edinburgh or Inverness.

THANKS

I have thanked a few people already in this report. I also need to thank my fellow directors for their time, commitment and energy and that includes former directors Peter Meister and Paul Rees who both stepped down recently. I also want to thank Cheryl MacIntyre and pupils at Carbost Primary School for the tree planting they have completed here at the hall.

CONCLUSION

This community, like many communities, has faced challenges over the last few months. In preparing this report, as I looked over the activities of MCHA the last year, it reminded me

that we have much to be thankful for here in Minginish that other rural communities lack. We are fortunate to have a modern community hall, we have a Primary School in our area, a modern medical practice on our doorstep and we have our community-owned shop – some of the foundations for a thriving community. Young families are essential to sustain these facilities, so understandably affordable community housing is our next priority.

Graham Campbell

10 February 2022