

Rosemarkie and Fortrose Trust

Trustees' report 2020/21 (1 November 2020 to 31 October 2021)

First major project nearing completion

Rosemarkie and Fortrose Trust was established by the trustees of Groam House Museum in 2019 as a charitable trust whose objectives were to identify projects of benefit to the communities of Rosemarkie and Fortrose and to seek out funding to resource them. The first major project, and indeed the key driver behind the creation of the trust, was the proposal by The Highland Council to close the public toilets in both Rosemarkie and Fortrose. None of the local voluntary groups showed interest in taking action, so it fell to us, supported by the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council, to create the Trust, following two public meetings.

At last year's AGM we reported on the progress made in taking over the running of the toilets in identifying a programme of work to renovate them and to bring them into full operational use. This year we can report that by the end of October (the end of our financial year), the renovation work has been nearly completed, and was fully completed just a few weeks into the current year. The work took considerably longer to complete than expected, largely on account of Covid impacting on the availability of building materials and tradespeople. We also found that the roof of the Fortrose toilets was rotten and required a full stripping out and replacement.

As reported previously, funding for the renovation work was provided by The Highland Council, both directly and from the Scottish Government's Town Centre Fund. On-going financial support is provided through The Highland Council's Comfort Scheme – which pays operators towards the costs of maintaining public toilet facilities. The Trust succeeded in attracting over £70,000 towards the refurbishment of the toilets. As a result, both sets of toilets have accessible access and baby change facilities, low-power lighting, frost-protection, and water heating, and are kept open all year round.

The Highland Council also helped us to install an electricity supply to the Fortrose toilets – the supply had previously been taken from the street lighting circuit, for lighting only. The cost quoted by the electricity network provider was going to be around £8,000, but the Council stepped in and offered their own contractors to excavate Station Road for the cable to be laid, which enabled us to install the power for around £3,000.

We also benefited from a donation of £5,000 from a small charitable foundation, which had seen the work we were doing to provide amenities for the community.

Despite the Covid-19 restrictions, we succeeded in keeping the toilets open throughout most of the year, apart from a short period following a severe frost, which resulted in burst pipes at both sites.

In Rosemarkie, we continue to have a broken electricity meter, which means that the electricity supply company (EDF) continues to charge us on the basis of estimated readings, and regularly threatens us with legal action for non-payment. At the time of writing (March 2022) we still await a working meter (30 months after reporting the problem).

Local residents and visitors clearly appreciate the facility we provide; donations in our "honesty boxes" totalled nearly £2,500, though this combined with the Comfort Scheme contributions still falls short of the running costs. So for future years we need to seek ways of raising more money for operational running costs.

The Board of Trustees comprises five members - Doug Maclean, Barbara Cohen, Sarah Atkin, Helen Robinson and Paul Pritchard.

With the completion of the Trust's first project, attention now turns to what other projects of benefit to the community can be addressed. Already, we have received funding to support an artwork project in the villages, and we will be engaging with the communities of Rosemarkie and Fortrose to identify other potential initiatives.

Prepared by A D Maclean, Chair, on behalf of the Board of Trustees
6 March 2022

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'AD Maclean', with a long, sweeping horizontal line underneath.