

HARRIS MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION



CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 2013/14

The pattern of activity at the Community Centre in 2013-14 was quite similar to that of recent years. The centre hosted a wide variety of major public events including formal wedding receptions, community consultations, touring shows, concerts, craft markets and even a circus! It was used extensively by local community groups for meetings, fundraisers and a range of other activities such as Zumba, army cadets and choir practice, all of which underlines the continuing importance of this key community asset.

Finances remained on a stable footing with a slight surplus on a substantially increased turnover of just over £40k. The increased income this year came from two main sources – grants from the Community Energy Fund relating to improving the energy efficiency of the building and a generous donation from the **Highland Reserve Forces and Cadets Association** to mark the opening of the new portakabin facility.

In the course of the year, the management committee progressed several initiatives, some of which will be carried forward during the current year and beyond. Prominent among these were the following:-

- **Improving the Hall's Energy Efficiency.**

Using the energy 'audit' report completed in 2013 by **On Site Generation Ltd**, it was possible to obtain financial assistance from OHCEF and LEADER to implement some of the report's recommendations, which included the replacement of windows and doors and improved levels of insulation. **Muaitheabhal Windfarm Trust** extended a significant interest-free loan to HMIA to provide the cash-flow required for this project.

- **Providing Improved Facilities for the HRFCA.**

A new portakabin was installed at the front of the building, which will provide dedicated classroom, office and storage space for the army cadets. Although the army owns the

portakabin, the ground on which it sits is leased from HMIA through an agreement which ensures that HMIA retains the right to develop the area at some point in the future.

- **Investing in a Cinema-Style Projection System**

In the recent community consultation, 'film nights' emerged from the questionnaire returns as one of the most popular suggestions for 'new activities or events'. Encouraged by the success of BBC Alba's preview showing of *Chi mi'n Tir* at the Community Centre using a 'rear projection' system, the committee took the decision to purchase one. This was made possible with the help of financial assistance from the Cooperative Community Fund, The North Harris Trust, Councillor Ward Funding and HRFCA.

- **Recruitment of New Manager**

Following Kate Langley's resignation from the manager's post earlier in the year, the recruitment of a new manager became an urgent priority. Following interviews in June, Ann Ferguson was appointed to the position. Ann has extensive experience in businesses and organisations with a strong customer focus and is a familiar face behind the counter in the local Bank of Scotland. On behalf of the Board I would like to take the opportunity to thank Kate for her excellent contribution during her time in post – three years which were characterised by unwavering commitment and tireless enthusiasm.

- **Planning for the Future**

As well as trying to follow through in 2013/14 on practical issues and suggestions which emerged from the community consultation, the committee continued to reflect on the long-term future of the Centre. The committee is now unanimously of the view that without a radical overhaul of the building itself (refurbishment, internal re-modelling, extension) and a radical change of approach to the way income is generated, the centre will not function to its full potential as a dynamic community hub. It is also clear to the committee that this can only be achieved with substantial funding, which in turn will require specialist expertise and advice. An important step forward has been our success in persuading HIE that the redevelopment of the Community Centre is a project of social and economic importance for the area, a fact formally recognised in the remit of the part-time Local Development Officer whose appointment is imminent.

Over the coming year therefore, one of the Board's key tasks will be to work with the Local Development Officer to develop a detailed 'blueprint' for the centre's future, so that there is a solid basis for funding applications. A number of short-term objectives for 2014/15 are either already in hand or under consideration:

- **Community Centre Garden**

With the help of volunteers, ensure that the garden (a neglected 'asset') is regularly maintained and improved.

- **Local Craft Market**

Establish interest among 'craft' producers in Harris in the development of a local craft market to complement the venture currently operated by Mike and Di Reed and raise the profile of Harris produce.

- **Hall Refurbishment**

As resources permit, continue to effect improvements to the interior décor – the hall floor and walls and the entrance foyer are the current priority areas.

- **Big Screen Events**

The new projection system was purchased with a view to developing a programme of events in which the system itself was the key attraction (e.g. a film show) or a means of enhancing other public events aimed at locals and visitors e.g. multi-media presentations on local history culture featuring archive film, presentations and live music. Discussions are still at an early stage, but it is hoped to have a programme in place for summer 2015.

In closing, I would like to thank the rest of the Board members for their continued commitment and support during the last twelve months. In particular I would like to highlight the quality input of HMIA Treasurer David Wake whose meticulous approach to the Centre's financial affairs has helped to ensure the Board makes informed and prudent decisions on expenditure and fundraising. I would also like to commend the important contribution of our secretary Duncan Mackay and the ongoing commitment of John Angus Macleod, Centre Cleaner, who ensures that the venue is maintained to the highest standards at all times.

Gordon Macdonald

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HMIA Chairman

22/09/13