

# HARRIS MUTUAL IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION



## CHAIRMAN'S REPORT – 2018/19

### Tarbert Community Centre - A Work in Progress

This has been another very busy year for the centre both in terms of hall lets for a wide variety of public and private events and in terms of our ongoing refurbishment programme, which is gradually transforming a drab, slightly run-down building into an attractive, comfortable and multi-functional community space fit for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Key improvements delivered during the current year have included.....

- resurfacing of the centre driveway
- construction of a timber boundary fence and waste bin enclosure
- provision of a concrete access ramp to facilitate collection of waste bins
- refurbishment of the original garden bench seating
- installation of a new 'instant' hot water system for the kitchen
- re-painting of all internal walls and woodwork
- provision of new vinyl flooring in the foyer and toilet areas

Although the hall continues to generate enough revenue from lets and fundraising activities to cover basic operational costs - repairs, utility bills and administrative support (bookings, billing and accounts) as required - and sustain a modest programme of improvements, it is important to acknowledge that major refurbishment projects, such as the replacement of the deteriorating roof tiles, require special measures of support. Having said that, there are grounds for optimism that this can be achieved within the next 12-18 months, with targeted support for funding applications being provided by HDL Development Officer, Grant Fulton and CnES Economic Regeneration Officer, Kenny Macleod.

While we work towards securing funding for this major project, 'basic' refurbishment will continue as resources permit. Some of the key priorities for the next 12 months include.....

- acquiring more comfortable seating for concert and drama performances
- creating a disabled parking area adjacent to front entrance
- improving internal and external lighting
- enhancing garden area by affixing trellis to south boundary wall and planting climbers

- reviewing and updating HMIA's constitution and operational procedures
- recruiting additional committee members/helpers

The final bullet point in particular has occupied considerable discussion time at HMIA committee meetings and will be a familiar challenge to many community groups within sparsely populated areas like Harris, where a relatively small percentage of the population attempts to sustain a growing number of community groups pursuing an increasingly diverse agenda. Notwithstanding the positive benefits of community engagement, it is an open question whether the current arrangement is sustainable in the long term.

In recent years HMIA has been fortunate to have a small, but hardworking and committed team which has overseen a raft of major improvements to the Community Centre. However, with at least one member of the committee signalling their intention to resign in the coming year, the need to actively recruit new members has become more pressing. This has led to a wider discussion about the future of HMIA itself and an emerging consensus that additional changes are needed to ensure operational efficiency in the short-term and, in the long term, survival of HMIA as a viable independent organisation within the community. The exact nature of these changes will need further consideration by the committee, some level of public consultation with stakeholders and formal approval by OSCR (Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator) before being enacted, so it is likely to remain a live issue over the next 12 months.

As the issue of Community Centre letting rates and hire charges has once again been the subject of the occasional query, particularly in relation to the question of discounts for specific groups, it may be worth restating some of the points made in previous reports.

*'Although tariffs are set at very reasonable levels and take account of the local economic context, the board is often faced with requests for discounts, particularly if events involve children and/or charitable organisations. While the board understands and appreciates the need for fundraising organisations to try to reduce overheads whenever possible, it is important to emphasise that Tarbert Community Centre is also a charity with marginal finances working hard to maintain and improve a valued community facility. It is therefore unrealistic to expect the Board to subsidise other charities. Charges are reviewed annually and take account of queries raised in the course of the year.'*

In conclusion, I think it is fair to say that the Board has made remarkable progress within the constraints of available resources and members have given generously of their own time to ensure that the Community Centre is an asset of which the community can be proud. I am grateful to them for their commitment, resilience and good humour throughout a very busy year.

*Gordon Macdonald*

HMIA Chairman

18/11/19