

Progress Report on the Community Hub



Those of you wondering about progress on the Community Hub project may not have seen much activity on the surface but like the proverbial duck, there has been a lot of furious paddling going on beneath. Here's a quack summary

After our old hall was condemned, a replacement became top priority. We also urgently need a permanent home for our community shop. The shop is a service to the community and is not intended to make a profit, and although the hall and sports area will generate some income through hire fees, not enough to cover its running costs. Our wind farm money will not last for ever, so we plan to cover the shortfall in two ways : we will invest in quality materials and an energy-efficient design to create a low-maintenance building with minimum running costs; and we will incorporate a gift/craft & cafe area alongside the shop to cater for tourists and even small distillery coach parties and thus generate an income from visitors. Millennium Hall will be converted to house the shop and cafe, conveniently close to the new hall to provide opportunities to save on staff, heating, security, etc.

It's not going to be cheap - £2.4 million! - but we believe we are getting good value for money which compares well with buildings of similar size and quality. The new hall will have a floor area of 795 m² - increased from 550 m² in response to consultation with user groups on their space and storage requirements. It will incorporate toilets/changing rooms which will enable us to better market the sports facility, an upstairs youth area, and its own kitchen for weddings and functions. The building will also function as a resilience centre in times of extended power cuts or extreme weather. The figure includes the cost of converting and extending Millennium Hall to 240 m².

We applied to the Big Lottery for a grant towards the cost. When we began the process more than a year ago, we were one of several hundred applications. We survived the first culling, then made it to a second shortlist of a few dozen who were interviewed by a BL panel, and now finally we are one of just a handful of projects still being considered for funding. We are asking for £1million when the average award is £750K so we are taking nothing for granted. A huge thanks to Charles Morgan for foregoing his summer holiday in favour of guiding the application through its final crucial stage.

Naturally enough Big Lottery had a list of stringent conditions, all of which took time to fulfil.

They required that our plans were scrutinised by a quantity surveyor, and that we conducted a preliminary survey of the site including some test pits. We applied for and received grants from BL to cover these development costs.

We also had to prove that we had the funding in place to complete the project at its estimated cost. Charles arranged a loan facility with Social Investment Scotland Bank which required a lengthy process of due diligence which I'm pleased to report that all the directors passed!

The next two SCD meetings are July 27 and Aug 24, and our AGM will be 27th Sep, all in Strathdearn Hall at 7.30pm.

SCD Membership forms are available from the Company Secretary, Strathdearn Hall, IV13 7YN, or you can apply online through the community website : www.strathdearn.org. Membership entitles you to attend our meetings, stand for election as a company director, vote in elections, and receive news updates.



At the core of our application is a 48-page strategic review detailing the background, needs and aspirations behind our funding request, including sections on finance, alternate fund-raising, our other projects, community consultation, fact-finding visits, and more. If our application is successful, it will be due in no small measure to the tremendous work and professionalism of our admin team - Victoria, Tricia, Joan, and Ed who compiled and wrote this document. It will be made available on our website when the application process is over.

Our completed application will be considered by the Big Lottery panel when they meet in September and we hope to hear the result in October. Our admin team will then finalise applications to other possible grant sources - our chances of winning them may be enhanced by Big Lottery endorsement. This will be done as quickly as possible so that work can begin with a minimum of delay.



Fingers crossed, everybody!

Bits 'n' Pieces

A massive thanks to Steve MacLennan for organising our very first Strathdearn Fun day, raising £218.20 funds for the new hall. It was a huge success and it was great to see so many residents supporting the event – the sun even managed to make an appearance.

SCD are planning holding a car boot morning in August, with a £10 a table fee, all proceeds going to the New Community Hub. If anyone would be interested in having a table, please get in contact with scdassist@hotmail.com for more information.

The SCD Board spent the hottest day of the year, 26th May, in a minibus on a fact-finding trip to the West Coast, learning how similar communities manage their affairs. They visited Loch Torridon Community Centre and the GALE centre in Gairloch and picked up many useful ideas. DTAS paid for the bus and a pub lunch.

Our Annual General Meeting will be held on 27th September, 2017 at 7.30pm in Strathdearn Hall. You need to be an SCD member to attend but there will be enrolment forms at the door.

SCD has been negotiating a contract with Eneco to release the monies owed from Moy wind farm. After several months of wrangling Eneco solicitors have now agreed to most of the alterations we requested and the contract has been signed. Happily all legal fees, including ours, were paid by Eneco. We recently received the first payment.

SCD Admin team would like send a huge thank you to Strathdearn primary school children for their contribution to the Lottery application where they let us know what the community hall means to them. The comments were collated and made into a wordart picture which we plan to display in the new hall when it opens. It was fantastic to see such excitement and enthusiasm.



Broadband

In November last year, Moy voted almost unanimously to support an SCD project to bring fibre cabinets to the area. However before engineers had finished surveying the job, a new cheaper method of installing fibre cable became available. Consequently Open Reach has come back to SCD with a much better offer for the same price - fibre cable direct to every premise and speeds of up to 330 Mbps for EVERY home!! After a two week consultation period with Moy folk in which we received nothing but enthusiastic feedback, SCD gave Open Reach the formal go ahead to proceed with the scheme. Work will begin in late August/early September and is scheduled to finish by Christmas.

Open Reach engineers will soon begin a survey up to and beyond Glenmazeran to explore whether SCD's broadband project can be extended to this area. Due to the greater distances involved, we are encouraging local landowners and householders to consider how they can contribute. The scheme's viability will probably depend on locals undertaking to do some of the work on a DIY basis and/or contributing a proportion of the cost.

Because we have demonstrated that we are serious about improving broadband throughout Strathdearn, Open Reach is willing to invest some of its time and resources surveying an area which they normally wouldn't consider viable. Soon they will get back to us with some costed options and SCD may only have a short time window to assess whether it can responsibly back any of them.

This is an opportunity : fast broadband can change people's lives, improve business, education, and leisure opportunities, raise property prices. SCD would love to make this happen but it will require the commitment of locals too. Please give it your serious consideration and contact thelordmacpherson@googlemail.com or steve@highland-games.co.uk if you have any questions or comments.



Paths Project

SCD Board is pondering the cost of additional requirements demanded by the roads department to meet new planning conditions. A cost revision carried out by McGowan's indicates a price tag several times the original quote. Engineers acting on behalf of SCD have been in contact with Planning to see if a solution can be found to relax the conditions and allow the project to complete in an affordable manner. Lead director Duncan Bryden is consulting with local councillors in an effort to find a way to progress.

There is a feeling that this stage of the path project is unviable unless a compromise can be found. Barring a breakthrough, a decision on whether to proceed with the project will be put to company members at the AGM on 27th Sep.

Website

Don't forget to check Strathdearn Community Website for bin days, bus timetables, school holidays, library van visiting hours, local news, SCD and Community Council documents, photo gallery, and much, much more.

The Medical Group & Strathearn Carers

The next two SCD meetings are July 27 and Aug 24, and our AGM will be 5th Oct, all in Strathearn Hall at 7.30pm.

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Highland Home Care now have a new manager, Angela MacDonald who will be SCD's main contact. We are delighted to say that Highland Home Care will be providing further training to the staff covering our area. Currently six Strathearn residents are registered with numbers looking to rise in the future. This is a great service within the community which offers both a lifeline to our residents as well as providing local

Communications

The community website has several new features. The online booking system is ready to use you can now check availability, book a room or sports facility, and pay for it by cheque, BACS or credit card. (You do not have to use the new system, you can continue to book and pay the same way you have always done). To attract more bookings from outside our area, we are working on an enhanced website description of the hall facilities together with a promotional leaflet. Take a stroll down memory lane - the redesigned photo gallery features pictures of Strathearn people and places spanning over a century (more contributions welcome).

SCD Membership

SCD membership entitles you to attend SCD meetings, stand for election as a company director, vote in elections, and receive special updates. You can find an online membership form in the SCD section of the website, or you can request a printed form from the Company Secretary, Strathearn Hall, IV13 7YN.

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