

# Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council



## Fortrose Town Hall Public Meeting

Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February 2018, Fortrose Town Hall.

Chair: Sarah Atkin (SA)

Speakers: Ian Goode (Highlife Highland), Douglas Stuart (Architectural Consultant & CC Member), Hannah MacSween & Alan Paterson (Muir Hub, Muir of Ord)

Attendance: 53 members of the public.

**Background:** Fortrose Town Hall is a Common Good asset that is currently managed by Highlife Highland on behalf of Common Good Trustees (Highland Council.) Highlife Highland pay rental to the Common Good Fund. They are responsible for managing the asset and administering the bookings.

**Purpose:** to propose/discuss whether or not Fortrose Town Hall should become a **community run** asset. The meeting was advertised in the Fortrose community on notice boards, in the library, at the leisure centre and on the Community Council Facebook page.

## Record of key points raised

### Ian Goode

- Highlife Highland currently administer all bookings for Fortrose Town Hall and are the 'named person' for the entertainment licence for the hall, which is renewed every 3 years.
- They employ a caretaker to work 11 hours per week to open, close and clean the hall as necessary.
- Main expenditure for the hall are energy costs, electric and overall maintenance.
- Approximate costs in 2016 which left the town hall running a deficit were:

Staff	£6,300
Cleaning	£2,000
Music licence	£400
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£8,700</b>
<b>Income</b>	<b>£6,100</b>

- In 2017 staff costs were less and income slightly more which left a deficit of approximately £850. There are hidden administration costs which have not be included above, but work out at 2 hours per week, over a 50-week year totalling £4,000.
- The main uses for the hall are for: badminton, Brownies & Girl Guides, aerobics, Beavers, Cubs & Scouts, singing groups, coffee mornings, parent/carer & toddler groups, churches for Sunday service as well as some one-off dances, sales and community events throughout the year. The venue is hardly used during the school holidays.

- As a venue the hall has very poor acoustics and falls behind other more modern buildings for the quality of toilets (inc. disabled facilities); storage space and quality of kitchen. It's expensive to heat and maintain (relative to other buildings.)
- Key point: Highlife Highland has no budget to invest in the hall infrastructure to improve the asset. They don't have the capacity to promote any of the venues under their management. Their remit/role is to manage and administer bookings.

#### Questions put to Ian Goode

- What are the heating costs? : these were requested from Highland Council but not provided in time for the meeting (*they have subsequently been made available.*)
- Art Works on the walls of the hall – Sarah Atkin clarified that these are a separate asset from the Town Hall and are insured separately. This was not a point of discussion relevant for this meeting (although the art work is a point of interest more widely in the community.)
- SA asked what the % capacity use was for the space. That information wasn't available. Mr Goode did comment, however that during the holidays it was barely used.
- A hall user present asked why they were not contacted directly about the meeting taking place. (*SA had requested that they be mailed well in advance. Subsequent to the meeting SA chased up this point and the communique **had** been issued by Highlife Highland staff to the booking contacts on their records.*)

#### Douglas Stuart

- Douglas is a semi-retired architect, having run an architectural practice for 32 years in Avoch and latterly in Inverness. He has a wealth of experience in designing and renovating public buildings, including community halls.
- The main problems which he has come across before include: acoustics, energy saving, installing modern standards of insulation, hall decoration and overcoming inadequate toilets, kitchens & car parks.
- There can be substantial costs involved. Previous halls have been able to gain funding from organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- Fortrose Town Hall is a B listed building which would mean restrictions to any renovation works, e.g. any extensions would have to match the style of the current building. This is not impossible to achieve but a point worth raising.
- An ambitious plan to renovate could include possibly adding a mezzanine floor, better toilets & kitchen and disabled facilities. This would be in the region of £100k- £200k.

#### Questions put to Douglas Stuart

- Would a mezzanine floor positively affect the acoustics of the building – No; not on its own.
- SA mentioned that the upgrade of Victoria Hall, Cromarty cost around £80k. Other Black Isle villages have upgraded their halls in a relatively modest way to improve their appeal and increase use.

## Speakers from the Muir Hub

### Background

Muir of Ord was once a vibrant village with thriving shops, hotels and artisan businesses. Forbes bakery and café providing an anchor to it. In more recent years, despite a significant amount of new housebuilding the village lost much of its social and commercial infrastructure. Despite a community of more than 3,000 residents in the area (defined by the catchment for both Tarradale and Milbuie Primary schools), provision had fallen below that of other Ross-shire towns and villages.

A group of community councillors and members of the Hall and facilities company (set up in 2011 to take over responsibility for the Village Hall and other facilities for the benefit of the community) decided to address these issues.

- Muir Hub has been a 6-year project from start to finish which begun with a community “concept group” of 9-12 members.
- In 2011 they sent out a questionnaire to all residents in Muir of Ord asking what they wanted in the village. 20% responded by post. Main responses were around socialising: lack of café, lack of small meeting spaces for groups.
- The concept group included people with a range of practical and commercial skills (inc. a graphic artist, a writer, an accountant and organisers. ‘Can do’ people.)
- A site for re-development was identified; the old Tarradale School building. Highland Council were willing to sell this to the concept group for a fee of £1. However, this process took months and the legal fees in conjunction with the sale were approximately £3,000 for the group (for a £1.00 transaction.)
- £40,000 (stage 1 funding) was secured from the Big Lottery Fund which allowed the group to appoint an architect and a lottery consultant.
- By 2014, with slow progress on the business plan, members of the group visited the National Lottery building in Glasgow who made recommendations on how to strengthen their application for lottery funding such as firming their financial projections and focusing on the **groups** who would use the finished building rather than overly fixating on the building itself.
- Lottery funding of £1.41 million was awarded for the refurbishment and running of The Hub for 5 years; this includes a paid member of staff for 5 years.
- The Big Lottery Funding represents 83% of total project costs and 91% of capital costs. An additional £70k was secured from Highlands and Islands Enterprise. The remaining revenue funding has to come from earned income.
- In 2015 the Company formed 2 sub-groups to focus on different aspects of the project. They opened for business in January 2017.
- The Muir Hub has a café built into the design (run by the Calman Trust), and this allows rental income to be earned. The venue has a hall and meeting room which can both be hired out commercially.
- They run local interest groups, community cinema, parents & young children groups and craft groups as well as more commercial clients.
- The Hub Development Group has now become the Hub Management Group.
- The Muir of Ord Hall and Facilities Company has now secured funding to refurbish the Village Hall.

General point made by Alan Paterson: It's been 6 years of hard slog to get to this stage and the biggest challenge lies ahead. Making it work? His advice is - THINK BIG!

### Questions put to Muir of Ord Hub

- Questionnaire response rate – postal response rate was 20%, however opportunities were made for people to answer the survey in person during an open day which increased responses. Also, door to door canvassing was deployed.
- Number of members on the Management Group – there are 7 active members who meet monthly, and around 30 people who are involved throughout the year.
- Income from the café – The café is a separate organisation to the hub and so rental income is received rather than profit from the enterprise.
- What is the view for the Hub after the 5 years of funding has ended? – The plan is for the building itself to be self-sustaining, funded by the income of the Hub after 4 years of operation. If need be they will source further funding for the running of activities etc.

### Other Public Comments

- The current hire priced for Fortrose Town Hall is significantly higher than that of Rosemarkie Hall which makes it less attractive. High Life Highland's pricing structure is set centrally by Highland Council. Ian Goode noted that the Muir Hub prices are comparable with High Life Highland. The Chair made the point that with Rosemarkie Hall charging less the inflexibility of the current 'model' acted against the Town Hall as a venue. Being able to be flexible would perhaps increase use. (N.B. This is not High Life Highland's fault. It's the current system)
- Insurance and rates would have to be paid by whoever took over responsibility of the hall.
- Sustainability is key as any groups would be financially liable and any individual would be unless a limited company or proper legal operating structures to protect against that.
- Storage facilities would need to be taken into account of any renovations as many hall users have equipment they would ideally like to store at the hall.

The Chair thanked everybody for coming along and summarised, making the point that this hall was the ONLY one of its kind in Fortrose. It's also located in the heart of the village.

### **Meeting closed – 8.25pm.**

Additional information required: energy costs; number of hall users; % capacity used.

Next steps: The Community Council want to hear from a self-formed community group or an individual willing to lead/set up a group willing to explore the possibility of doing things differently either for the short term or towards a longer term ambition/vision.

Deadline for declarations of interest: end of March 2018.