

Fochabers Public Institute Regeneration



Fochabers Village Association

January 2017

Images – front page

All January 2017

Main Hall Stage area

1st floor meeting room

Stage from Balcony

Openings to Christie Room

Balcony area, Main Hall

Fochabers Village Association.
Community Development Trust
Limited by Guarantee
52, High Street, Fochabers, Moray, IV32 7DU
Email – gordonchristie@ecosse.net
Company registration no. – SC0462557.
Scottish charity no. – SC044569.

Directors

Gordon Christie (Chairperson)

Roddy Munro (Vice Chair)

George Turnbull

Iain Rennie (Treasurer)

Sheila Gray

Stewart Harris

Jeremy Evans (Company Secretary)

Fochabers Public Hall Limited
52, High Street, Fochabers, Moray, IV32 7DU
Company registration no. – SC515527
Vat registration number – 225 1225 50

Directors

Gordon Christie (Chairperson)

Alan Brown (Vice Chair)

Iain Rennie (Treasurer)

Una Hamilton (Company Secretary)

Our purpose.

In January 2012, the new Fochabers bypass was officially opened. While it took the pressure of passing traffic away from our small North East of Scotland village, it has had a significant impact on the village economy with several local retail businesses closing. The High Street has yet to recover. Our only bank closed in December 2014, Post Office services have been reduced and our butcher closed his doors this month.

In addition, council services, including the library, have been reduced and moved away from the High Street to a location at the edge of the village, away from most of our elderly residents.

In 2014 Milne's High School, located in Fochabers, was earmarked for closure and only saved after a vigorous campaign by the local community.

The final straw was the proposed closure of the village institute due to an adverse report on the building's structure.

These events all impacted negatively on the community, but also served to strengthen its resolve to rebuild and fight back.

The institute was built, with funds raised by the community, in 1904 and after a spell of being under Moray Council's care is once again under community ownership. It will be at the heart of future community activity.

Over 300 households have signed up to volunteer their support and time. There is a commitment to make the venture sustainable for future generations.

Revitalised it will;

- Provide a focus for developing services to older residents. To entertain, interact and most importantly provide a social environment to counter loneliness and isolation. Existing activities will be increased and varied.
- Allow us to expand and confirm a permanent base for our Men's Sheds initiative. This has already had a huge positive impact on the wellbeing of our elderly male population.

- Maintain and expand services to young parents and toddlers. To provide a place for parents to talk and the very young to interact and begin to develop social skills.
- Build on youth service initiatives already established. Our Smoothie Bar project is ready to expand. At present, there is no other provision for teenagers in the village.
- Expand on the musical heritage of Fochabers. We are justly proud of Speyfest, an international traditional music festival held each summer, that celebrated its 20th anniversary this year. We are also home to the Fochabers Fiddlers which, under the care of James Alexander, has revitalised Scottish fiddle music. We hope to offer concerts all year and have already initiated this with the 'Arc Sessions'
- Bring back drama and performance to the large stage, accommodating both local amateur productions and touring companies.
- Allow us to build on the fitness activities already on offer. Pilates, contact sports and bowling are already fully subscribed. We plan to offer more in terms of both number and variety for all ages.
- Create a Hub that will bring the focus back to the High Street, the artery that runs through our village. This will be the Hub for the village in terms of activity, information and the place for all ages to meet and interact.

Our users

The latest figures available regarding the population demographic are from the 2011 census.

These indicate an older than average median age for men 42 (against 37) and for women 46 (against 39) and a significantly older population in terms of pensionable age of 24.88% (against 18.61%) and of 75 and older of 11.74% (against 7.09%). There was also a slightly higher percentage of young people aged 5 to 15 of 14.54% (against 13.73%), but a much lower percentage of young people aged 16 to 29 of 12.61% (against 17.46%).

There is no organised Council Service provision for either the very young (i.e. pre-nursery) or the elderly.

These figures reflect our current usage demographic and our target user groups will tend to be at either end of the age spectrum.

In addition to expanding and upgrading all services to both existing and expected user groups it is our intention to increase usage. We want the whole community to benefit.

The Institute's location on the High Street is ideal to support a general meeting place for the community (the Hub) and will have a cafe type facility where all ages can meet and interact as well as welcoming visitors to Fochabers.

Our project

With community support and the approval of the board of directors of FVAL a Business Case was submitted to Moray Council in November 2014 to initiate a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) of the Fochabers Public Institute.

This was approved by Council in June 2015 and a full CAT with grant funding of £150,000.00 completed.

After public consultation, a building specification was prepared and used to draw up architect plans for the proposed changes. These were revised and approved by the community. The relevant planning permission and building warrants have been obtained.

The installation of solar panels and a biomass plant for heating has been completed ahead of the main works for environmental reasons as well as assisting towards future financial sustainability.

A standalone maintenance fund has been established, again to ensure sustainability.

With £675,000.00 in funding already secured towards the cost of works Phase One of the regeneration works is in progress, with G&A Construction carrying out the major building works. For Phase Two of the project a further £90,000.00 is being sought, to install new stage sound and lighting, replace flooring, windows and blinds and to complete the upgrade of non-public areas. In addition to national funding bodies we are actively fund raising and talking to local providers and seeking private donations.

Regular publicity and consultation is taking place within Fochabers via social media, our website and the local press.

The building is now closed to the public to allow the extensive building works to take place with a grand re-opening weekend planned for April 2017. Many Institute user groups have continued to meet at an empty shop in Fochabers High Street.

The building will continue to be managed and run by volunteers, but we hope to create employment opportunities as demand for use increases.

Why do we think our efforts are worthwhile?

With the construction of the Fochabers bypass still in progress a public meeting was called in November 2011 to identify the impact and benefits to the community of this new road.

It was agreed that the importance of the High Street should be recognised as the focal point of the village.

A follow up meeting held in February 2012 with the assistance of the business arm of the Fochabers Village Association highlighted the need for an umbrella group to be established to undertake larger projects.

In April 2012 Moray Council in reviewing the state of the Fochabers Institute decided to carry out a public consultation exercise to decide on its future.

A survey was distributed to all households within the village identifying three possible outcomes.

1. Closure and Disposal
2. Partial replacement
3. To undertake a Community Asset Transfer of the property from council ownership to local community ownership

As reported to the Moray Council Policy and Resources Committee on 4th September 2012 an overwhelming majority of the 365 responses were in favour of the third option.

Disposal and closure: In favour 29 (8%)
Partial replacement: In favour 84 (23%)

Community Asset transfer: In favour 248 (68%)
No indication of preference: 4 (1%)

In October 2012, a questionnaire was circulated to all households in the village and from the respondents a resounding 85% were in favour of keeping the hall and applying for the asset transfer.

A further meeting was called for by all interested parties and following discussion it was agreed to investigate the possibility of setting up a development trust for the village.

In November 2012, a public meeting was called and all active groups and organisations in the village were invited to send a representative. Over 40 groups attended (95% of the total). In addition, representatives of the local churches, politicians, schools, nursery groups, and the fire and police services were present.

They unanimously agreed to form a community development Trust and identified that the first action should be to protect the facilities offered to many of the groups with the retention of the village institute through an application for a Community Asset Transfer.

The trust was established (with a current membership of 307) and began to explore the challenges facing the hall. This involved consulting with the existing users and identifying future uses and potential users. Since then we have established an effective booking and invoicing system and reduced costs. We have almost doubled the number of user groups and are now operating at a modest profit, if maintenance is excluded from the current cash flow. Existing users were greatly relieved that they could continue to meet and interact, and in many cases, increase membership, whilst the future of the building was under consideration.

Since then we have consulted with hall user groups to establish a plan for the future direction of the building and more importantly produce a plan that ensures the sustainability of the building.

We have held public exhibitions for the whole village and continue to receive enthusiastic community support.

Opinion on design issues is sought via Facebook and local media.

Our team

The village association was established in 1944 to 'provide within Fochabers and the surrounding district recreational facilities, or organise recreational activities, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the persons for whom the facilities or activities are primarily intended'

In recent times this has included improvements to the village square by securing funding of £100,000.00 and upgrades to the playing fields and tennis courts.

Since formation over £1 million has been raised through fund raising that has been distributed to community projects

The Fochabers Village Association Limited (FVAL) was formed as a community development trust in 2013 to handle larger capital projects. The Fochabers Public Institute is the first such project.

The FVAL has a board of 7 directors whose collective business and creative background provides the necessary skill set to pursue fund raising and oversee the Institute project.

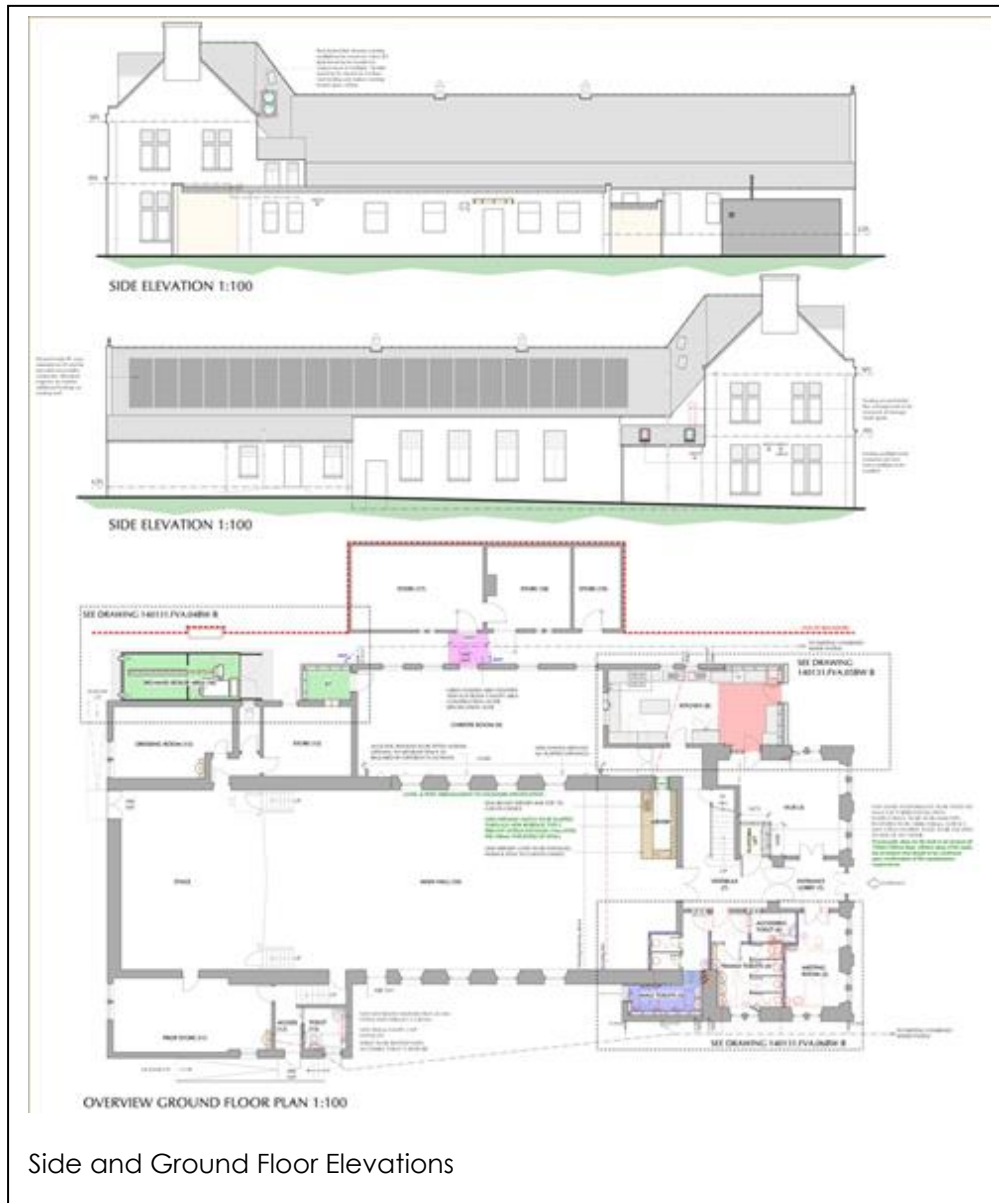
Skills such as; business planning and case assessment, accountancy and financial planning, statistical appraisal and option surveys and drawing up building specifications have all been used in appraising and taking the project to its current state. Liaison with local government officers, architects, contractors, building consultants and potential funders are moving the project forward. With approval and funding in place, we have been able to move forward to the implementation of works with two highly experienced construction project managers to oversee building works.

The Fochabers Public Hall Limited (FPHL) has been set up to handle the building project and future management of the Institute. It reports regularly to the board of the FVAL

The FPHL is assisted by a committee of 10, plus representatives of current users, who take responsibility for the day to day running of the Institute. Within this group is a pool of experience of events management and organisation, financial control and fund raising.

Outside of these groups is a pool of 300 volunteers who are willing to help at village events. This represents 25% of the households of the village at present.

What are we doing – Phase One?



The exterior of the building is to remain largely unchanged, although all roof areas, including lead work and guttering will be inspected and repaired as necessary. Considerable re-pointing of the stonework is necessary, but the stonework itself is in good condition. Visual changes will be seen with the installation of double glazing and an extension at the front to accommodate a larger kitchen. Solar panels and the biomass boiler have been installed since September 2015 to take advantage of favourable energy tariffs.



Main Hall, viewed from the balcony

The main hall is currently the third largest in Moray and can cope with a wide range of events. We are extending its flexibility further by opening access to the small hall and installing a flexible sound proof barrier, improving access to the extended kitchen and building a permanent bar area to the rear of the main hall.

Planned upgrades to the existing stage, including both sound and lighting, will facilitate a wider range of concerts and theatrical performances.

It is our plan to turn the small meeting room at the front of the Institute into 'The Hub', a cafe, a meeting place and a point for information



Main Hall, side arches open



The Hub, our multipurpose room

What is Phase One of the regeneration project costing?

Our lofty ambitions do not come cheap.

Expenditure

Works completed to date

Biomass boiler £102,000.00

Solar panels £ 24,600.00

Fees £ 20,000.00

Works committed as of 1st August 2016 £528,000.00

Total £674,600.00

Funding in place

Moray Council £150,000.00

Abbeyfield Trust £249,000.00

Robertson Trust £ 20,000.00

Entrust £ 30,000.00

Money for Moray £ 5,000.00

Gordon and Ena Baxter Foundation £ 60,000.00

Fund raising £ 28,500.00

Reserves £ 20,000.00

Vat reclaim £112,433.33

Total £674,933.33

Balance £ 333.33

What is still to be done – Phase Two

Phase two – planned works	
Stage Lighting	£ 9,500.00
Stage Sound	£12,750.00
Stage Curtains	£15,750.00
Stage Area Redecoration	£ 7,000.00
Hall Acoustic Curtains and Blinds	£ 5,000.00
Soft furnishing and furniture	£20,000.00
Lettable flat refurbishment	£10,000.00
Flooring	£ 7,000.00
Stair lift to 1st Floor	£ 5,000.00
Projects cost of works	£92,000.00
Funding	
Grants (Obtained)	£25,000.00
Grants (in process)	£62,000.00
Community funding	£ 5,000.00
Funding requirement to complete works	£92,000.00

Phase two – planned works
The existing stage lighting and sound systems have been condemned as unsafe and require replacing, as do all the stage curtains and screens. This has a priority area to allow performance to resume in the hall.
The redecoration of non-public areas was not included in Phase One, but has been costed for completion as funding becomes available.
Completing the upgrading of the top floor flat will provide a potential income stream, although it could also be used for caretaker/hall keeper accommodation.
Curtains, blinds and furniture will all require to be replaced within the next two years in order of priority.
One of our priorities with the renovation was to make the whole building accessible. We had planned for a lift to the first floor, but this was removed for cost reasons. A more cost effective solution will be to install a chairlift to the first floor

And looking forward - Any project of this type must assess whether it is worthwhile in terms of future use and viability. After all, the building got into its present state through neglect and a lack of funding. Our commitment has been to ensure that the building will continue to be used and will not be a liability to our community. Setting up a standalone maintenance fund will ensure that funding is always available for this purpose.

The current project and management teams will work to ensure that as they move on new members from the community will become involved to encourage continuity.

In addition to looking backward to reintroduce the village panto, flower and produce shows, quizzes and concerts we are already planning for future events. Our existing user groups are looking to expand on their usage and we are getting enquiries from potential new users.

Surplus income will be used for future community projects