

SGOIL AN IOCHDAIR AGUS A CHOIMHEARSNACHD

This is the second AGM of Sgoil an Iochdair agus a'Choimhearsnachd. It has been a year of a lot of work behind the scenes, addressing the issues raised in the previous year.

Just to recap, the association exists

1. To promote interest and participation in sport, and related recreation in the Iochdar area, especially in the interests of education, social welfare and health.
2. To assist in the coordination of various sports clubs and recreational organisations operating in the Iochdar area, both generally and in relation to specific projects.
3. To examine the available sports and recreation facilities in the Iochdar area as against current and anticipated need and to make applications to the local council, local enterprise company and any other appropriate body in this connection.
4. To liaise with the councils sports development staff in furtherance of these objects.
5. To raise funds for such charitable purposes as the association may deem appropriate.

At the start of last year, we had completed a community consultation exercise, in which we had asked the community linked to Iochdar School about outdoor recreational facilities in the area. The report identified the following needs:

1. Support for a footpath/cycle path with trees.
2. Upgrade of football pitch at Iochdar Hall, perhaps increasing the range of sports it is used for, depending on the existence of clubs forming.
3. Facilities for children at Iochdar School, chiefly athletics and football.
4. Increasing access for sports such as basketball, tennis, and netball at Lionacleit.
5. Investigating further the interest in table tennis.
6. Increasing awareness of existing club activities such as canoeing and diving, and climbing facilities in Lochmaddy
7. Investigating the possibility of starting a windsurfing club.
8. Investigating further the suggestions about starting a swimming club and a junior athletics club.

The feasibility study

With the help of Helen MacDonald, of the Southern Isles Amenity Trust, we put together a brief for consultancy work by a landscape architect, and awarded RPS Cairns in Edinburgh the contract for the feasibility study. This draft asked for plans for provision of facilities in 4 main areas:

1. School playing fields

This area needs to include a football pitch, facilities for athletics, windbreak tree planting, and an area for smaller children. Changing facilities need to be upgraded, with better access. The council has agreed the 75-year lease of the site.

2. Footpath and tree planting

The access to the old road needs to be improved. Plans for a more ambitious route across the grazings were shelved because they were not compatible with crofting use.

3. The hall football pitch

The pitch has been badly damaged in previous years due to parking. A new local team has formed and is experiencing difficulty with fixtures at Lionacleit School because of the number of clubs using the facilities there.

4. Parking for the SUBAS show.

The show will need alternative parking if the other aspects of the scheme are to be a success. Stock control, and the need to keep land in crofting tenure are also important considerations.

Other projects for possible integration in the feasibility study:

Although the bowling club was not included in the original brief for the feasibility study, we recognised that they had some unmet needs that could be addressed as part of the study.

We also agreed that we would include a 2% budget for artistic elements associated with the project. This might take the form of a sculpture, or signs.

Funding the feasibility study:

Shell Better Britain campaign gave us £1500 towards the cost of the study. We also received £300 from the housing association, £50 each from the community council and the PTA. With funds already in the account, we had enough to be awarded matching funding of 50% from Western Isles enterprise.

The feasibility study report

With the funding in place, RPS Cairns undertook the physical survey work and consultancy over the summer. A consultation exercise followed, with a draft of the text of the study available at the SUBAS show in the main exhibition hall. Our comments have been incorporated into the text, and this was released in November. There are some outstanding issues still to be sorted out with the feasibility study before it is finalised. A number of other technical queries were raised and put to R J MacLeod. Alasdair and Mairi took a copy of the study so that members of the technical services department in the council offices could be asked for their views. A revised report was released in March. **We now have a feasibility study with costings on which to base our future activities.**

The next steps

We have been able to identify several smaller elements within the plans that are amenable to being undertaken separately. The council has grants available for community environmental improvement projects over the next 3 years. The funds are accessed through the community council, and are called ACE grants.

We agreed to ask ACE for £1000 for the design stage of the signposts, including artistic elements. We agreed to seek option ACE funding of £5000 for the footpath across the grass keeper's area by the old road and at the school. Mairi Bremner informed us that the footpath providing access from Carnan to the old road was already being funded elsewhere. We agreed to seek challenge ACE funding for a board walk area this financial year (planning to complete this pending funding by the end of March). Alasdair advised us that the challenge funding could still be applied for, although the final date has passed. He advised the committee to speak to WIE concerning matching funding. There may be issues concerning land ownership to be settled, and all money would need to be spent this financial year. **To date we have been awarded money to develop the walk leaflet and signs, to**

create a safe shortcut onto the old road, and to develop the treeplanting area and board walk.

The area in front of the school could also be developed as a small project in its own right, with space for any artistic elements. We are waiting for details of the 75 yr lease from the council. The board walk and the improvements around the school would each cost around £20,000.

Forming and supporting clubs

We discussed the possibility of forming a junior athletics club. We joined the Sports Council, who will be able to help us with this project. **This has since started up with the help of the PTA, and has 20 children attending regularly. We are thinking of expanding the club in the new academic year.**

Other clubs with whom we have maintained links during the year include the Bowling Club and the North End Football Club.

The year ahead

Once the feasibility study is complete, we need to clarify all the land ownership details before we start raising the money for the playing fields, football pitch and parking areas. This is going to be a formidable task, but we know that the community wants and needs the facilities that will be provided.

We also need to support any clubs in our area; we have made a start in this area, but there is scope for being more focussed, and more proactive. Our membership of the Sports Council will stand us in good stead when we seek to tackle these issues.

Conclusion

Through the year we have achieved a lot. The feasibility study is now complete, and it has shown us how we should address the need for facilities in the area, and will show us where to look for money. Already, the work of the study has helped us to secure funding for some of the smaller elements of the overall project, including the footpath, boardwalk, walk leaflet and formation of the junior athletics club. With physical evidence of our success, and with future plans and projects clearly outlined, we are now on the way to achieving our objectives. In the year ahead, we need to decide which areas of the project to tackle next, to maintain the progress on those areas already underway, and to look at gaining charitable status.