



Annual Report for 2024 AGM of Urras an Taobh Sear ~ Staffin Community Trust

Church of Scotland, Staffin, Isle of Skye

Tuesday, January 28 2025

7.30pm

IT HAS been a hugely encouraging and productive 12 months for the community trust, which marked its 30th anniversary in October by announcing the purchase of Staffin Harbour.

With a small workforce there is a limit to what can be achieved, with the driving force of Staffin Community Trust the support and commitment and effort put in by a raft of local people behind the scenes.

The large construction works naturally attract the most attention but there is a lot of work carried out by unassuming volunteers who are involved every step of the way. It could be meeting politicians or funders in person or online; checking accounts and cashflows, painstakingly going through the design of a project, representing SCT in a Skye-wide event or answering staff email queries and phone calls. It can be a long list but one with plenty of colour and variety.

The board of directors and harbour steering group are crucial and do it because they want to see the Staffin community prosper. Anybody interested in becoming a member, a board director or join the harbour group is warmly encouraged.

SCT finds strength in the support of organisations such as Staffin Community Hall, Columba 1400 Centre, Sgoil Stafainn and Staffin Community Council and progress is also made with the backing of our key funders, such as Highlands and Islands Enterprise. HIE has provided support for the development officer post for some time, which has been integral to project delivery.

HIE's staff are always on hand to provide advice or wise counsel to SCT, and we don't take that for granted. Similarly, Highland Council's elected members and staff, particularly in the Community Regeneration Fund department, have been a great help, as have our national politicians including MSPs Kate Forbes and Rhoda Grant.

The same goes for the Kilmuir Estate factor Ewen MacPherson and his team at SGRPID in Portree, whose commitment to community-led development is always positive. Bòrd na Gàidhlig, which support SCT's efforts to strengthen Gaelic, the Scottish Land Fund, the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund and the Islands Programme, are also key funders.

SCT has also been supported in our project work and the management of Taighean a' Chaiseil by the efforts put in by various contractors, both from Staffin, Skye and further afield. In no particular order G.F. Job Ltd, Eyre Plant Hire, MH Steel, Ian Vass, Malcolm Henry, DL MacKenzie, Charlie Elder, Mickey MacLeod, Rob Gillies, Ally MacDonald, Brian Irving, Donald MacLeod, Jordan Murchison and local SSE staff have all played a



Staffin Harbour Angling Competition July 2025.

part.

Board & Staff: Long-serving SCT director Ian MacDonald stepped down from the board last summer after 14 years. Ian was instrumental in helping develop and deliver projects for the community and was always on the end of the phone for staff wrestling with a technical query or needing some common sense.

In November, another long-serving SCT director, Dugie Ross, was awarded a doctorate in for his achievements in palaeontology, further details on p5. Dugie is another person who has put a huge amount of time serving his community and passing on his vast knowledge to our children – and adults - over the years about Staffin's rich heritage and its people. We all send our very best wishes to Dugie and look forward to seeing him home very soon.

And in June, programme manager Angus Murray left SCT to join The National Trust for Scotland. Angus managed the delivery of the interpretation and the events programme for the Skye Ecomuseum: Druim nan Linntean, and he worked closely with a range of organisations during his seven years. The National Heritage Lottery Fund highlighted the Staffin ecomuseum as an example from which others in the UK could learn from.

PROJECTS: (i) Staffin Harbour Development

Cidhe Stafainn looks radically different from just 12 months ago...

Construction Works - Spring 2024 saw the start of HGVs hauling daily - what would eventually total 20,000 tonnes of rock - from Lealt Quarry, after blasting was carried out. The new onshore hardstanding area quickly took shape.

It is vital for the new harbour operation and provides space for boats to be lifted ashore for on-shore storage and maintenance, the seven new business units and the base for the new harbour building, showers and toilets.

The community-owned harbour is very fortunate to have Lachie Gillies as its very first manager and he has done a power of work in 2024, supported by harbour steering group members including Charlie Elder, Jock Gordon and Ally Young. A harbour office was opened and Lachie started work on the new water supply and concreting ahead of the new harbour units arriving. Regular pressure washing of the slipway, hauling boats out of the water and ensuring the harbour is managed correctly and safety are all part of the harbour manager's work, as well as dealing with the public. Lachie and Charlie even played a key part in a dramatic sea rescue in June.



The new business units at the community-owned Staffin Harbour, January 2025.

The harbour units were delivered by our Welsh supplier Shufflebottom Ltd in October and the following month the Ross-shire-based MH Steel team arrived. Marc Holden and his men worked long hours in tough weather conditions to erect the units, which have added a dash of colour at the harbour.

SCT receives excellent help and support from Organic Sea Harvest at the harbour with Euan MacArthur, Robaidh Holiday and their team who are all very obliging, as is local scallop diver James Cameron with our community moorings.

Ownership & community events – July 24 saw SCT finally conclude the historic deal to purchase the harbour from Highland Council and the Scottish Ministers for the sum of £30,000. The original slipway was built in the early 1900s by the Congested Districts Board to allow boats which sailed between Glasgow and island communities to deliver food and supplies. The slip came into being after major fishing and agriculture improvements were delivered in embattled rural communities like Staffin, which were at the heart of the crofter uprisings against oppressive landlords in the 1880s.

Lachie and his band of committed helpers organised two very enjoyable community angling events in the summer with the proceeds going to the parent council at Sgoil Stafainn and Fèis Thròndairnis.

Project Funding - SCT secured grants from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (harbour safety equipment and water supply); Community Regeneration Fund (leases for harbour units) and the Islands Programme (construction of new harbour facilities building and civil works).



The harbour onshore area taking shape in spring 2024.

Units - SCT advertised the new building units for rent in November and we were delighted to have a number of applications come in just before Christmas.

2025 - In the spring the harbour units will be completed by MH Steel, and the services and groundworks get underway including the drainage and water etc, when Eyre Plant Hire start on site. It is hoped SCT's new business tenants will move in from late April / early May with offers being made to them last week.

Construction of the new harbour facilities building will also get underway with the work being carried out by Ewen MacColl, Flodigarry.

The major challenge and responsibility for SCT is to ensure it generates revenue from the harbour to support the management and maintenance of the facility for the community.

(ii) The Nurse's Cottage: this is effectively the proposed Taighean a' Chaiseil phase II project which SCT is eager to progress in 2025, with the local housing need and demand never more apparent.

The delay in SCT purchasing the cottage, after the new health centre opened in 2022 and the cottage was vacated by NHS Highland, will hopefully be resolved in the coming



weeks. The good news is that all the parties who are involved, SCT, NHS Highland and the Scottish Government, want to see the cottage site in community ownership and there is a collective will to get this finally over the line.

At Taighean a' Chaiseil itself SCT is still very much committed, as is the Stenscholl township and SGRPID, to resolving the issue of cattle being at the front and side of the

development. It is a priority and we hope to be able to relocate the cattle grid and put in new fencing later this year. SCT is maintaining the communal grounds and the native tree shelter belt planted at the rear of the development which is growing well although some additional planting will be carried out in April. SCT's letting agents, the Communities Housing Trust, manage tenant issues, and were due to visit last week for their annual visit but it was postponed owing to the weather. SCT takes its responsibilities to its residential and commercial tenants seriously and want to ensure any issues are resolved quickly and to everybody's satisfaction.

Business Units - SCT is delighted that OSH have completed the internal fit out work and staff will be moving into the leased premises very soon, watch this space. The income from the rent of the units and health centre helps SCT manage the whole development. For example, it is vital that SCT sets aside a percentage of that income so it can carry out one off repairs, but also plan for major improvements to the buildings in the long term, but also to cover our insurance, account and other statutory costs.

Tobair na Slàinte (Health Centre): the GP clinic is held every Thursday by the Portree Medical Centre. Alzheimer Scotland has been running drop-in sessions for people with the condition and families. It is hosted by Portree-based Lesley Hellon, who is the dementia advisor. You can contact Lesley via email lhellon@alzscot.org or phone her on 07825975557 for further information or if you have any questions. If any other health-related organisation, charity or practitioner is looking to book the centre, please email nhsh.Portreehospitaladmin@nhs.scot

(iii) Druim nan Linntean - The Skye Ecomuseum

Ceum air cheum, tha cùisean a' gluasad air adhart a dh' ionnsaigh Sùil nam Brà a bhith deiseil aig Creag an Fhèilidh.

The Urras (SCT) was fortunate in securing the services of Skye's Ecomuseum programme manager, Angus Murray, for seven years. The retention of the post proved more challenging during the last couple of years. Angus, on behalf of the Urras, was developing work on interpretation development at three iconic sites in North Skye for the estate owner, SGRPID. In October we took delivery of the new panels for Beararaig Bay, Rubha Hùnais and Baile nan Cnoc (Fairy Glen). These are soon to be installed. We



have also been fortunate that since 2022 Bòrd na Gàidhlig supported a percentage of Angus' post through their Gaelic Officers' Scheme (Sgeama nan Oifigearan Ghàidhlig).

In early summer of 2024, Angus had cause for celebration when he and Janet got married. But we were sorry to lose him when he moved to The National Trust for Scotland. Angus has an interesting skillset and has grown to know our landscape better than ourselves. It's been fortunate that we had Angus and that he and Janet still live locally. Though Angus left there was still work to be done with regard to the projects he was developing and we have been fortunate in drawing help from local people. Through Sgeama nan Oifigearan Ghàidhlig (The Gaelic Officers' Scheme) Sine Gilliespie has been tasked with driving forward the projects that were still in the pipeline.

(iv) Sùil nam Brà - The Crofters' Memorial

This long-awaited project's opening was delayed due to slippage in with the quern castings with the very final site works are planned for the spring. This includes the installation of attractive and informative new interpretation detailing the story of the crofters fighting for their rights against oppressive landowners, including key figures like Norman 'Parnell' Stewart, of Valtos.

There will be 17 quernstone casts which have been erected



by the Breakish-based Skye Studios, DL Mackenzie and Ian MacDonald. Lachie Gillies

will install our Gaelic and English interpretation panels at the Kilt Rock and the access path.

Community Land Scotland is assisting SCT under the Linn an Fhearainn (Land Centenary - Simon Fraser Legacy) project. Once all is in place, we look forward to marking the occasion with a community opening celebration in the summer.

(v) Seanchas na Fairge/ Farraige

This project was developed to chime with Sgeama nan Oifigearan Ghàidhlig and Sìne's work for Comunn na Gàidhlig in Trotternish. The project is wider than Skye, and the Urras has been in partnership with University College Dublin and The Hutton Institute.



We focussed on Sgoil Stafainn and have been working with the upper Gaelic-medium class. We presented the children, *pictured*, with a choice of stories from the sea. They selected a few topics - the

dinosaurs; the Vikings and the shipwrecks.

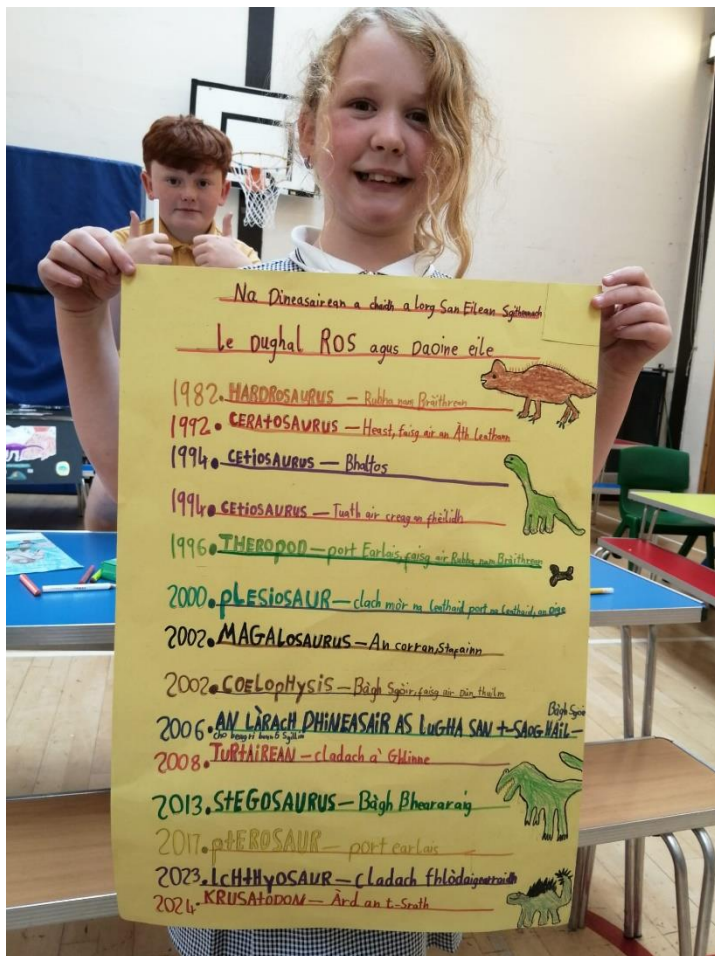
From August to December, we met every week and created artwork. We were wondering whether to create an exhibition of our work when it dawned on us that we would create a Gaelic film for the national competition, Film G. This we did in December.

The children were delighted to learn that Sgoil Stafainn has now made it onto a short list for the category of Cumhachd na Gàidhlig (The Power of Gaelic) in films. We are very proud to be featured in that category.

You can watch our film and please vote if you like it:

www.filmg.co.uk/filmichean/a0066/

We were very fortunate that Dr Dugald Ross took the time to make a list of his fossil finds, *pictured*, from the 40 years and we featured this in our film of stories about seas and skerries. Everybody was thrilled with the news that the University of Edinburgh had awarded a Doctorate in Palaeontology to him. This honour is very well deserved, and everybody at Urras An Taobh Sear was delighted to congratulate Dugie and his family.



Iona Young and Brody Ferguson of Sgoil Stafainn with Dugie's list.

OTHER EVENTS & NEWS

February: BBC Scotland's rural programme Landward interviewed SCT's Lachie Gillies and Donald MacDonald about community-led projects and ownership of land and assets.

March: Hugh Ross and Lachie Gillies travelled to Tobermory and Lochaline harbours – both community owned - on a research trip ahead of SCT buying Staffin Harbour, and picked up a lot of advice in good practice and made very helpful contacts with our counterparts.

September: Representatives from 11 development trusts from across Skye, Wester Ross and Lochaber visited Staffin in mid-September for the Development Trusts Association of Scotland's regional gathering. SCT also hosted a visit by a Welsh group from the Llŷn Peninsula who came to research community development and visited our ecomuseum sites, Taighean a' Chaiseil and the harbour, with a view to replicating some of the work back home.

November: a team of Rabbie's coach tour drivers and office staff spent two days with us working at Staffin Hall, *pictured below*, the War Memorial and the harbour in the seventh year of SCT's partnership with the company.



Anybody requiring additional information about SCT projects please get in touch with either Hugh Ross or Lachie Gillies regarding the harbour development. E-mail: staffin.ido@gmail.com or staffinharbourmanager@gmail.com T 01470 562 464.

www.skyeecomuseum.co.uk/why-staffin