

CO-CHOMUNN NA PAIRC

AGM: FRIDAY 18 SEPTEMBER 2009

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

1. This report focuses on calendar year 2008, although I shall also refer to the major changes which have taken place at Ravenspoint during 2009.
2. Trading during 2008 was at a similar level to the previous year and, as expected, had it not been for donations and fund-raising for the new Ravenspoint, another trading loss would have been reported. This reflected the relatively low level of business in the former shop, tea-room, and hostel, and the difficulties we were experiencing in keeping operations going in a building in need of renovation and largely based on volunteer effort.
3. These continuing problems were the background to the plans developed during 2008 for a major redevelopment of Ravenspoint, as outlined at the last AGM. Unfortunately, despite the large amount of work which went into preparing these plans, and the financial encouragement we were given by the Big Lottery Fund to develop them, we learnt in Autumn 2008 that we had been unsuccessful in our bid for Lottery funding. The decision was all the more disappointing in that most of the reasons given were already known to the Big Lottery Fund before they encouraged us to prepare the plans.
4. However, the basic reasoning behind the plans remains as valid as ever, and the Board has since embarked on a phased approach to implementing a less ambitious project for Ravenspoint. Without increased turnover at Ravenspoint, we will be unable to sustain operations and the community services provided; and our long-term strategy continues to be to provide better facilities in the shop, tea-room, and hostel, in order to attract more customers, so that we will be able to cover increased staff costs without having to rely on volunteers.
5. Stage 1 of these revised plans was implemented in May 2009 - outwith the period of the accounts to be presented to this AGM - with the help of a modest grant from Comhairle nan Eilean Siar. This involved a revamped community shop with a wider range of goods and longer opening hours, more staff, and increased visitor attractions such as the Comunn Eachdraidh museum; and enhanced efforts to market Ravenspoint and the hostel, including a pioneering Gaelic course held in March 2009. The response to these changes has been encouraging – turnover has increased significantly during Summer 2009 both through more use of the facilities by the local community and by visitors. In the light of these changes and advice on good practice, the Board is proposing to establish a subsidiary trading company from January 2010. This will protect Co-Chomunn na Pairc (a charitable body) from trading risks. It is too early to say whether the new level of business will be sufficient to cover our increased costs – the big challenge lies in the winter months now ahead when visitor numbers are bound to fall.
6. We have further plans for the next stages at Ravenspoint, involving a new porch, a renewable energy project to reduce our energy costs, and a single-storey extension of the building towards the loch to provide more space and take advantage of the potential of the views in this direction. Progress will depend on funding and other factors.

7. The key to the long-term sustainability of Ravenspoint remains the level of support we receive from the community. The Board always welcomes ideas and feedback, for example following newsletters and at the AGM. We have plans to introduce a local delivery service and to run more Gaelic courses, both of which have the potential to increased turnover and so safeguard the services and jobs we provide.

8. In closing, I should like to thank my fellow Directors, our staff and volunteers, for all their hard work on behalf of the community. The opening of the new Ravenspoint community shop since May 2009 has placed intense pressures on our limited resources, and I am very much aware of the sacrifices which several people are making. I should also like to thank our members and customers for your support over the year, through using the shop and through taking part in fund-raising events. We still face major challenges and uncertainties over the months and years ahead, but the experience since May is encouraging if we can sustain and build on the start that has been made.

John Randall

Chairman

September 2009