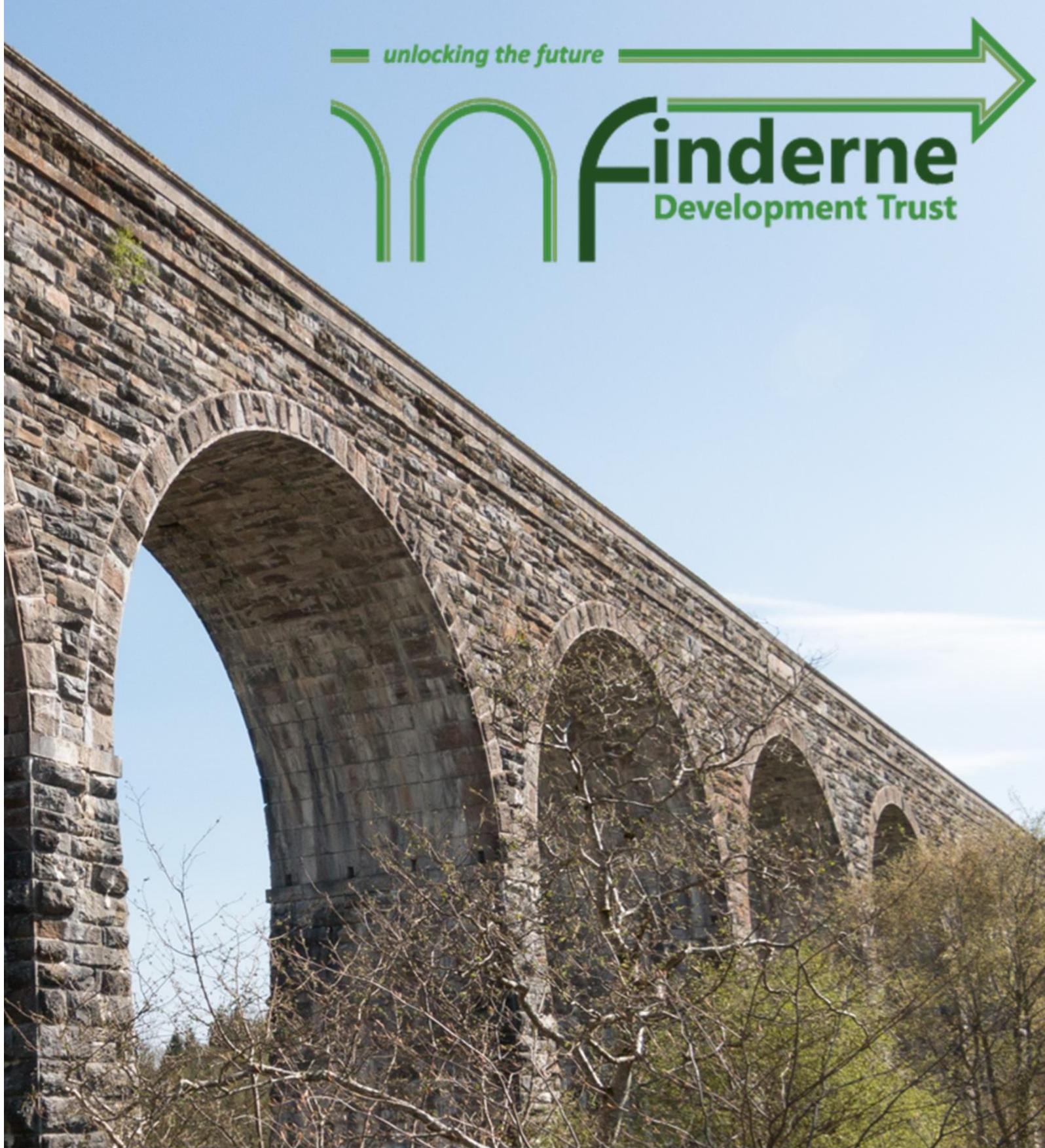


unlocking the future



ANNUAL REPORT

Year ending 31st May 2020





Chris Piper

Foreword

It is with great sadness that we publish our first annual report as a Charity with a foreword not written by our first Chairperson, Chris Piper. Chris passed away peacefully on Saturday 8th August 2020, surrounded by his family, after battling an illness for the previous twelve months.

Chris was one of the founding members of the Finderne Development Trust. His commitment and passion for the Trust stemmed from his love of the area and his enthusiasm to see the success of the Trust was second to none. Everyone involved in the Finderne Development Trust is committed to making a lasting legacy in Chris's memory.

You will see from this report that under Chris's stewardship we made good progress in defining a number of priority projects from our Strategic plan. There is no doubt that our efforts to move forward at pace on a number of the priorities has been severely impacted by the difficulties arising from the COVID-19 pandemic, but we are in good shape to progress quickly as the situation improves.

Introduction

Following the extensive community consultation that led to the creation of our first 5-year Strategic Plan the Trust identified 7 priority projects to initially progress. These being

1. Community Broadband
2. Rural Based Apprenticeships
3. Enhancing the Dava Way as Finderne's Key Recreational Route
4. Project "Brockloch"
5. Community Hub
6. Home Care & Well-being
7. Energy Efficient Living

Whilst the terms of reference for each of these projects has been outlined, the COVID-19 pandemic restrictions have severely curtailed work on a number of them, particularly those requiring significant face to face community engagement.

Each of the projects is discussed below.





Community Broadband

This issue was, by far, the topic raised by more members of the community than any other. Current broadband connectivity standards across the Finnerne area are very poor indeed and prospects of a short-term improvement from mainstream commercial providers are low.

Frustratingly, the Trust's entry into the arena to seek a community resolution coincided with significant changes in the government backed options. The Scottish Government's Rural Broadband initiative ceased to provide support and promises of improved infrastructure via the R100 scheme took its place.

Delayed by numerous policy and legal issues the R100 scheme, whilst looking to be the long term "next generation" solution, was clearly not going to provide any quick solutions for the households and businesses in Finnerne. The FDT, working with a small local company, looked at the possibility of introducing a line of sight wireless system that would be able to rapidly improve Broadband speeds from the average 2Mbps upload to around 30Mbps speed. Whilst this improvement did not meet the "next generation" standard, or cover all of Finnerne, it did offer significant improvements over existing capacity for around 275 homes in the Rafford area. It was a "stop gap" solution, but one which tactically seemed the right thing to do.

However, days before the proposal was due to be communicated to the Finnerne community the Scottish Government released news of its voucher scheme. This would provide additional financial support and compliment the UK Governments Rural Gigabit Voucher Scheme. Continuation of the "stop gap" solution would potentially have barred members of the community taking up these voucher schemes so the FDT has moved quickly to work with Open Reach on developing a "**Community Fibre Partnership**" solution.

Hopefully this approach will deliver Gigabyte speed broadband, to a much wider portion of Finnerne, within a 12-18 month timescale.



Rural Based Apprenticeship Scheme

Employment will be critical to success in our "rural regeneration" objective and helping to bring local companies together with potential employees is a powerful way of supporting the area. Apprentice schemes, for both new school leavers and more mature residents looking to change careers, are an invaluable route to skills development for individuals and business growth for companies. However, it is often difficult for small, rural based companies, to have the wherewithal to take on apprentices.

The FDT's Rural Based Apprenticeship scheme, released with the support of **Skills Development Scotland**, is a facilitation process that helps with both the cost and the training administration for local firms to take on new members of staff. Whilst the scheme was launched with significant interest from a number of Finnerne based companies the initiative has stalled due to the COVID-19 lockdown and employee furlough situation. The initiative remains live and the local firms that indicated initial interest have said that they will take up the scheme once the impact of the current pandemic is under control.

Enhancing the Dava Way as Finnerne's Key Recreational Route

The Dava Way path links the historic towns of Forres and Grantown-on-Spey and passes through the heart of Finnerne. This path, some 24 miles long, runs through stunningly beautiful countryside and is an important recreational route for both local community members and visitors alike.

With recreation and tourism both playing important roles in the FDT's charitable objectives, there appeared to be potential to develop some form of partnership working with the group of volunteers, **The Dava Way Association** (DWA), that maintain the path.

The synergy opportunity was also clear to the DWA and collectively we have worked up proposals for development of the route, beginning with the development of a new website with new videography and photography of the path and a marketing campaign to increase knowledge of this wonderful local asset. The FDT have agreed to fund around £9,500 worth of these media and marketing resources.

As the other tourism, health & wellbeing and recreational objectives for the FDT progress the relationship with the DWA will grow ever stronger.

Project "Brockloch"

Our charitable objectives include rural regeneration, environmental protection and the advancement of recreational opportunities for the community. Project "Brockloch" may, possibly, be a single route to contributing to all three of these.

Brockloch is an area of ground in Rafford, opposite the Village Hall, which has been zoned by the local authority for possible residential development. We are exploring the feasibility of whether a community led, affordable, housing development could be carried out on the site to increase the local housing stock within the economic



price range of young families. If feasible, this development could be the first to help a shift in the age demographic of the area which is significantly higher than the Scottish national average.

Any housing development the FDT become involved in would need to take due cognisance of our environmental protection objectives and low carbon heating would potentially play an important role with this. A concept we are looking into is a partnership of some form with the Village Hall to use their recreational field to install a “communal ground source heat collection matrix”. This might be sufficient to provide energy for heating both the affordable houses and the Village Hall itself. This concept, of “Park Power”, is growing in popularity around the country and offers up potential to develop a very low carbon heating solution.

Where the Brockloch situation offers a third possible benefit is in the area of recreational amenity. If the ground source heat collection is feasible the recreation field will need to be excavated to lay the matrix of pipes required. The field is currently a very poorly drained grassed area which requires a lot of volunteer effort to maintain. It is frequently waterlogged and, as a result, not used to any great extent by the local community. If this was replaced by some form of modern, all weather, surface and accompanied by a “pavilion” type extension to the Village Hall, the amenity value to the community could be significant.

All of the aspects of Project Brockloch currently lie firmly in the “concept” stage. We have received funding support from the Scottish Land Fund to carry out a stage 1 feasibility study into the affordable housing aspect. This study, which includes an important housing needs analysis, will help us determine the art of the possible for this project.

Community Hub

A key objective for the Trust is to improve the social, health and wellbeing amenity facilities for the whole Finnerne community. We believe, however, that there should be a priority given to the remoter rural areas around Edinkillie and Dunphail. The Edinkillie Community Hall is a well-used, and well loved, venue for community activities. Whilst the history and heritage of the place has strong emotional ties for some members of the community, it is old, tired and extremely difficult to maintain. The structure and format of the building is not flexible enough to meet the potential future needs of the community.

Discussions started with the idea that the village hall needed to be replaced with a building designed to provide a space for the community activities that was warm, welcoming and easy to maintain. Visits by a number of the Board members to



community “hubs” in Boat of Garten and Strathdearn (Tomatin) revealed that the opportunities were much greater than simply a village hall replacement.

Social recreation is an important factor in what binds a community together, but so is health & well-being. The community hubs we visited have carefully integrated facilities for health & well-being activities (e.g. therapy treatment rooms) alongside the more obvious “hall” type areas.

Boat of Garten and Strathdearn Community hubs have also recognised that the sustainability of these types of community facility is very difficult purely on the basis of social use. By very careful use of commercial opportunities they have developed a revenue stream that supports the maintenance and ongoing development of the buildings.

We are in the very early stages of the Community Hub development but we want to learn from the experiences of places such as Boat of Garten and Strathdearn that have already gone along this type of journey. It is absolutely critical, however, that our own community lead us along the exact route that they would like to see. Once again COVID-19 has stalled us to a degree on this journey, because we have been unable to start deep community consultations on the options and possibilities, but we are ready to move with this when the regulations allow.

We have had very preliminary discussions with Logie Estate, who own the land adjacent to the existing hall at Edinkillie, and they have indicated strong support for our ambitions around a community hub in the area.



Home Care & Well-being

If there was any doubt that communities can come together in the face of adversity it has been dispelled during the COVID-19 crisis. In the very early days of the pandemic our Development Manager, Pery, identified an opportunity to muster the energy and commitment of community volunteers to help those in need. The **Funderne Coronavirus Support Group** was quickly established and Pery has coordinated and led the group to support those in our community that needed help during this very difficult time.

A total of 49 volunteers came forward to support the community, responding to countless requests for food shopping and prescription collection and providing social support from telephone calls to delivering reading materials.

Financial support was given by HIE and SEN to allow food parcels to be provided to the most vulnerable in our community. This enabled us to support over 30 members of the community, from the ages of 10 months to 90 years, living in all corners of Funderne.

Notwithstanding the COVID situation we are also working on ways to support our community in areas such as home care and well-being. There are examples from other development trusts that have created partnerships with home care providers to improve the provision in rural situations and we are investigating if this might be feasible for Finderne.

We have also been involved in discussions with Altyre Estate, who are keen to support a local community well-being programme, to explore what opportunities are available to work together. A simple example being delivering community walks led by trained walk leaders using the Estate's paths and natural resources.

Energy Efficient Living

By the very nature of Finderne's history and geography we know that many of the residential buildings are of traditional design and materials of construction; and they are important to our heritage for that reason. We believe, however, that there are great opportunities to help people find solutions to energy efficiency improvements and indeed tackle the often unspoken of blight of fuel poverty.

We are investigating the possibility of engaging a suitably qualified person, or company, to offer free energy surveys to our community members and then to help with identifying funding support for energy efficiency improvements.

Review of the year

Our full first year as a Development Trust and Charity has been challenging at both personal and community levels. Factors completely out with our control have become hurdles that have slowed progress on some of the things we wanted to achieve. We have, however, been privileged to be part of a community that has stood together during difficult times.

We have made great progress and our enthusiasm to push on is undaunted.



Board of Trustees

2020

**Incorporated in Scotland as a company limited by guarantee SC595859
Finderne Development Trust is a charity registered in Scotland SC049191
Registered Office: 100 High Street, Forres, Moray, IV36 1PD**