

## Celtic Fringe AGM Report / Minutes, March 2006\*\*

\*\* Apologies at the late delivery of these. A combination of hospital visits, and other ongoing works have delayed these a bit. Forgiveness and sympathy required!

**Present:** 18

**Apologies:** Francine Brook, Ian & Samantha French, Robert Hamilton

### **Welcome & Chairman's report:**

**Fran Cree** welcomed everybody to the meeting. A good turn out was evident, and a range of interests were represented – Hotels, NTS, B&B, Activity providers, and Guest Houses. Fran reported to the group on a number of items, including the demise of HOST – now replaced by Visit Scotland – the setting up of “Local Tourism Forums”, and the role of SNH and HIE in Highland Tourism matters generally. Mention was also made of the fact that 2007 is the “Year of Highland Culture”, and the Celtic Fringe would be willing to act as lead organisation should any members have ideas that they felt would fit the criteria. (An example of a current festival that we could perhaps adopt was suggested as the wildlife festival on Arran this year – Information at <http://www.arranwildlife.co.uk/> Criteria for the Year of Highland Culture is available at <http://www.highland2007.com/> ) Other items mentioned were the branding exercise currently being carried out by North Highland Tourism Operators Group, which apparently includes our own area (despite the fact that nobody knew little or anything about this). Since we are *also* currently doing this for our own area, there were concerns raised about duplication and lack of consultation on the part of the NHTOG. More news later!

Fran was keen to source suggestions from members about projects that CF could undertake for their area, and several suggestions were subsequently put forward:

- A steamer on Loch Maree
- Mountain bike trail / path development
- Making more use of the forests in Wester Ross
- A major PR event to coincide with the opening of the new road down Glen Docherty to Kinlochewe.
- Year of Culture events, as above

Fran then handed over to Jim Mould, treasurer.

### **Treasurers Report:**

Total bank balance at present is £7400, with a section of this (£1500) in a separate account for building up a fund for reprinting the Activities Guide. James reported that 80% of members are now on bankers order payments, which greatly streamlines administration costs. (This figure was 20% up on last year). 88 members were fully paid up at the time of the AGM, with the balance to be “chased” up for payment by cheque or inclusion in the B/O system. It is worth mentioning that income from membership fees has again matched the work / any expenses going out on the part of CF itself, the co-ordinator and the committee, so CF is essentially self maintaining, as indeed it should be.

**Our hope is that the remaining members not yet on Bankers Order will agree to pay that way in the future, as this has been a major contributory factor in the improvement to Celtic Fringe's finances this last year.**

### **Project Co-Ordinators report:**

I do not propose to go into great detail about this, as a complete report on the years activities is available on the following link: <http://www.celticfringe.org.uk/annualreport2005.pdf>

Basically, work is progressing at present on “bedroom packs” of information on a wide variety of activities, sights, and attractions across the whole of Wester Ross, ongoing development of a brand image for Wester Ross with other organisations in the area (Lead organisation –

Gairloch and Loch Ewe Action Forum), the "Tourism @ Wester Ross" project, and at least two other proposals which are in their infancy. The first of these will be looking at placing coin operated telescopes or binoculars at various key locations in the area, and perhaps matching this with an initiative surrounding webcams in similar situations. The original "Slow Down in North West Scotland" may also be reprinted.

**Robert Muir, Chief Executive, Sky and Lochalsh Enterprise:**

We had asked Robert Muir to come along to the AGM due to the fact that our existing LEC (Local Enterprise Company) is to cease operations, handing over this area to SALE. As such, Mr Muir is liable to become an important influence in the areas future development.

RM started with an overview of HIE's strategic thinking behind the changes, commenting that there were many different options looked at before the changes took place – in fact, anything from replacing the entire network with ONE superLEC, or up to 15 smaller ones!

In any event, it was decided that Wester Ross had many similarities to Skye and Lochalsh in terms of geography, culture, population etc, and that this was the most effective way towards future development. The timing of the move? "*As soon as possible*".

The location of an area office has yet to be decided, but it could be Dingwall, Garve, Achnasheen or other places (recognising that though some places are at the periphery of W Ross, they are on main transport link routes, and therefore easier for access than some nearer locations.). RM commented further on population / economic / employment statistics, and also on budgets that may be available for development – however at the time of speaking these were still under discussion.

Clearly, although these were early days for the new LEC, there is potential here for future benefits and opportunities. Those present welcomed the chance to meet with RM and were generally impressed with his comments.

**Committee for 2006 - 2007**

Having successfully stood down as chair, Fran was promptly re-elected! Val Nash has sold on the business at Kinlochewe, and has stood down. Jim Mould will continue as treasurer, and other existing committee members will remain unchanged. New to the committee is Chris Field from the Tigh an Eilean Hotel in Shieldaig.

**Meeting closed at approx 4.00pm**

**Thanks to Ledgowan Lodge Hotel for hosting the event, and to Robert Muir for attending at such short notice.**

***And of course, thanks to the committee and members!***