



St Ernan's by the Loch

Trustees' Annual Report

Period From 1 January 2023 to Period
End 31 December 2023

Charity contact information

St Ernan's by the Loch

Scottish Charity Number: SC051441

Red Bay Cottage, Deargphort, Fionnphort, Isle of Mull, PA66 6BP

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Charity Trustees

1. Mrs Diana Linda Cameron (chair)
2. Dr Eleanor Barbara Wagstaff (secretary)
3. Mrs Rhona Lindsay (treasurer)
4. Mr John Edward Cameron
5. Maj. (retd) John Macdonald Wagstaff
6. Mr John George Noddings
7. Dr Andrew Todd (co-opted)

Objectives and activities

St Ernan's by the Loch (StEL) became a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SC051441) on 8 December 2021. Its purpose was – and still is – to acquire St Ernan's Church, which is being sold by the Church of Scotland, and to develop it as a spiritual and cultural centre for members of the local community (that is, for anyone living within the postcode areas PA76, PA66, PA67, PA69 and PA70). We have since agreed a price for St Ernan's with the Church of Scotland and look forward to acquiring the building.

As Trustees, we want St Ernan's to retain its essential character – the building is held in high regard locally, and any development should respect its age, history and heritage, and the beauty and tranquillity of its setting. At the same time, we want it to become a modern, safe and attractive place, welcoming people of all ages, faiths and backgrounds, and available for a wide range of cultural, spiritual and social activities. These might include all kinds of worship, meditation and spiritual reflection; small social gatherings; weddings, funerals and other ceremonies; practical support and conversation; hospitality; learning and cultural development; and programmes for health and well-being.

With the support of Scottish Land Fund (SLF) Stage 1 funding (which we were granted in December 2022), we have spent much of this year exploring options for the development of St Ernan's. As part of this process, an architect-led team of designers has drawn up a Feasibility Study, Options Appraisal and Business Plan for the project. This included a community consultation, which gave local people and others the opportunity to contribute their ideas. In addition, we have continued to engage directly with members of the community through fund-raising

and social events; at our Annual General Meeting (AGM); through our membership scheme, which is open to anyone living within the area defined above (associate membership is open to non-residents); and also by means of the local press. We have also continued to apply for grants – through the Architectural Heritage Fund (AHF), we have gained advisory support for our Community Ownership Fund (COF) application, and in December 2023, we were awarded SLF Stage 2 funding.

Throughout these activities, we have sought to follow the principles set out in our governing document, these being the advancement of citizenship and community development; encouragement of the arts, heritage, culture and science; and the provision and/or organisation of social and recreational facilities for local people and others. We are especially concerned to bring people together after the restrictions of the coronavirus pandemic, and through the current cost of living crisis.

Structure, governance and management

Type of governing document

St Ernan's by the Loch is a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO) and our governing document is a constitution. The Charity began as an informal committee called 'The Way Forward for St Ernan's' before changing its legal form to a SCIO on 8th December 2021. The fundraising cash held by The Way Forward for St Ernan's was donated to the SCIO at the same time. Additional funds raised by the original committee were lodged with the Trustees of The Church of Scotland (Parish of Kilfinichen and Kilvickeon and the Ross of Mull) and were transferred to St Ernan's by the Loch in 2023. Further fund-raising activities have continued throughout the year.

Trustee recruitment and appointment

Our first Board of Trustees was formed by the five founding members of the charity, these being Linda Cameron, Eleanor Wagstaff, John Cameron, John Noddings and John Wagstaff. Shortly afterwards, we were joined by two Co-opted Trustees, Andrew Todd and Rhona Lindsay. In accordance with our governing document, all the Trustees stood down at the following AGM, which was held on 13 March 2023. All stood for election and were unanimously re-appointed, with Linda continuing as chairperson, Eleanor as secretary and Rhona as treasurer. Towards the end of 2023, we invited two further Trustees to join the Board – these were Jenny Earl and Gill Morley, both of whom have been involved with the St Ernan's project since its inception. We look forward to working with them in the year ahead.

All our Trustees share a strong affection for St Ernan's and believe it has a vital part to play in community life both now and in the future.

No external organisations are permitted to appoint charity trustees.

Achievements and performance

Following our successful bid for SLF Stage 1 funding, we engaged an architect-led design team AGL (Architects) Ltd who have since worked with us on a Feasibility Study, Options Appraisal and Business Plan for the St Ernan's project. This process included a site analysis and topographical survey, a community consultation exercise and the commissioning of two reports – a structural report, carried out by DRGCS, and a damp and rot survey, conducted by Richardson and Starling. In addition, we arranged an independent valuation and building condition survey of St Ernan's, this being carried out by Morham & Brotchie, Oban.

On 8 June 2023, we met with the Kirk Session and Congregational Board of the Parish of Kilfinichen, Kilvickeon and Ross of Mull to negotiate a selling price for St Ernan's. Following further discussion by email, a price of £50,000 was formally agreed with the Church of Scotland in September. This allowed us to go ahead with our application for SLF Stage 2 funding. We were delighted to receive the news in early December that our application had been successful and we are now in a position to buy St Ernan's.

With AHF support, we have been assigned an advisor, Rob Robinson, Heritage Consultant, who is currently helping us with our COF application. This has included the preparation of supporting documents, a summary of local engagement, an evaluation plan and a sensitivity analysis. As part of the same application, we received a COF Small Support Grant, which allowed us to obtain a VAT review (conducted by CT Accountants, Edinburgh) and an update of capital costs (carried out by AGL Ltd).

Despite an emphasis on funding applications, we continued to fund-raise locally during the year. Activities included the sale of cards and merchandise, many items being based on a St Ernan's theme; the running of the popular second-hand book stall; a farewell lunch for the retiring Church of Scotland minister, Rev. Jenny Earl; and the annual Torchlight Procession, which this year included carol-singing round a bonfire, and a supper. All these events have been well-supported by both local people and visitors.

In the summer we launched our website www.sternansbytheloch.co.uk. This is a useful tool for sharing information about our work and we intend to promote it more heavily in 2024. We are also exploring ways of taking on-line donations.

Our membership scheme continues to expand – we currently have 100 full members and 33 associates. We were pleased to see many of our members (and others) at the AGM in March and to have an opportunity to share news and discuss ideas with them at a social gathering afterwards. We have shared information about the St Ernan's project more widely through the local press.

Financial review

Income

Our focus on funding applications in 2023 is reflected in our financial position.

In year to end December 2023 our total income was £34,435, more than double the total income in the previous year. Around 85% of this year's income stemmed from grant applications, with the Scottish Land Fund and Community Ownership Fund grants totalling over £30,000.

Sales from our second-hand book stall increased this year to £217 but funds raised at events and through the sale of merchandise decreased. Donations to St Ernan's by the Loch were down by £1,000 on the previous year but this year's figure was helped by the transfer of remaining funds from The Way Forward group (around £3,700).

The Trustees are extremely grateful to all donors for their support without which we would not be able to achieve our goals.

Expenditure

Expenditure in 2023 was similarly influenced by our grant applications. Our total expenditure for the year was £33,940, significantly more than the £148 in 2022. The majority of this expenditure (£30,000) was a direct spend of the Scottish Land Fund and Community Ownership Fund grants. Other notable expenses included a structural inspection report and a topographic survey as well as the development of our website.

All of the expenditure in 2023 was from our restricted funds and by the end of the year we had £1,736 remaining in our grant from Rural & Islands Communities grant and £2,201 from the Faith in Community Scotland grant.

At the end of December our cash and bank balance was £14,271, an increase of £495 on the previous year. Of this total, £3,936 was restricted funds and £10,334 was unrestricted.

Statement of the charity's policy on reserves

The Trustees' policy will be to hold reserves equivalent to 6 months of normal running costs. Until such time as we acquire St Ernan's, our costs will be restricted to planned expenditure which will only be approved when we have the funds in place. Our reserves policy will be reviewed annually to ensure that sufficient reserves are in place to honour all our financial commitments.

Donated facilities and services

Our charity bookstall is located within St Ernan's Church and we are grateful to the Trustees of The Church of Scotland Parish of Kilfinichen and Kilvickeon and the Ross of Mull for the use of this space.

Future plans

At present, we are working hard on our COF application which we aim to submit in March 2024. We also look forward to activating our SLF Stage 2 grant – this is 'on hold' for a spell so that it can be used as match funding for the COF application. Our biggest step, however, will be the purchase of St Ernan's – we await word on the matter from the Church of Scotland – and the commencement of work on the building.

Plans for further fund-raising include a guided walk, a film show, a 'Drawing Day', community meals, the book stall and the continuing sale of merchandise.

Hinda Cameron
23-5-24

Norman J Haynes
23/5/24.