

AGM of the Tarland Development Group 25 August 2009

Chairman's Report

Introduction

Since the last AGM held on 26 May 2008, the group has held seven meetings. Progress has been made with several of our existing projects and proposals are being examined for some major new ones. Group members have been particularly heavily involved in liaising with and supporting other local groups and organizations during the past year. Active membership of the group remains at a relatively low level with most of the group's achievements arising from the efforts of a small core of committed members.

TDG Projects

Unlike all other local community development groups (MDL, Birse, Ballater Royal Deeside etc), the Tarland Development Group is run entirely by the voluntary effort of local community members. We have virtually no running costs and no regular source of income. We try to achieve our aims by identifying particular needs and setting up projects and recruiting project leaders to carry them forward. Over the years, we have completed a number of projects, we have several in progress, and we also have a number that we would like to pursue when funding and people to run them are identified.

Completed Projects:

The following can be added to the list included in last year's chairman's report:

- establishing a twice yearly Craft and Produce Fair held in the MacRobert Hall; Gillian Masson has been the project leader and has succeeded in setting up a regular event which has attracted a good uptake of stall-holders and an excellent turn-out of local support; the last Fair in May attracted very favourable comment from a wide range of community members
- the Tarland website is now well established and has recently been re-designed to cope with the growing demand for space from community groups and to make it look even more attractive and efficient to access; a blogging section has also been added to encourage community members to express opinions and raise issues of local concern; Jan Healey has led this project which was set up jointly with the Cromar Community Council; although it now joins the list of our completed projects, it will of course still require ongoing supervision and maintenance
- a set of five Christmas cards was produced to raise funds for defraying TDG running costs; in the end, with nearly all of the 500 cards sold, the income generated just exceeded the costs involved; although the cards were expensive, they were generally well received and a market for such items clearly exists; Peter Craig led this project
- liaising with Tarland Welfare Trust, Cromar Community Council and the MacRobert Trust in planning and mounting the *Your Tarland* event; this community consultation exercise was highly successful and involved time-consuming input from several TDG members
- liaising with COAT and the MacRobert Trust in planning the now installed all-abilities trail in Alastrean Woods

Current Projects:

The following projects are those that are currently being actively pursued:

- improving access to the pedestrian bridge; the wall on the south side of the main road between the Old Manse entrance and the bridge is now seriously weakened along much of its length and the matter has been referred through Cromar Community Council to Aberdeenshire Council; improved access to the footbridge will depend on what work is done to repair this wall

- a second edition of the community Newsletter was produced and distributed; Fiona Brown led this project and succeeded creating an attractive format complete with photos; future issues will be produced whenever there is sufficient information to communicate
- the UDAT plan for a cycling trail to Ballater ran out of funding when UDAT expanded its area of responsibility and became the Cairngorm Outdoor Access Trust; however, Mark Hagger, formerly of COAT and now operating independently, has offered to work with TDG to pursue funding for the project and to lead the project should funding become available; publication of a *Tarland – a great place for cycling* booklet is also proposed to complement the very successful walking booklet; this is a major project that will require much planning and consultation before it progresses beyond the current aspirational stage
- achieving Charitable Status for TDG; this project has progressed to the stage of making a formal application to the Office of the Scottish Charity Regulator thanks to significant input from Alan Young of CVS Aberdeenshire and Lindsay Stewart, the project leader; a new constitution has been drawn up and will be considered in detail at tonight's meeting; it will be made available on our page of the Tarland website when it has been formally adopted; the aim of this project is to enable TDG to tap into sources of funding currently inaccessible to us
- significant input was made to a COAT bid to fund the construction of a new cycle route between Tarland and Aboyne; this route is intended to make it easier and safer for community members to make the journey by bicycle, thereby reducing the number of car journeys with a healthier and more sustainable alternative; ironically, the proposal was well received by the funding body approached but rejected because it was linked to other COAT proposals that were less favourably viewed; plans are now in hand for TDG to resubmit an independent bid with COAT acting as the project leaders on behalf of TDG
- establishing a permanent orienteering course in Drummy Woods; this is intended to be another visitor attraction as well as a useful facility for school or youth club outdoor activities; approval in principle has been given by MacRobert Trust and initial contacts with Mar Orienteering Club have been positive; it seems likely that Marroc will support the project both with funding and advice for implementation; Marjory and Peter Craig are acting as project leaders
- a community composting scheme is to be set up to serve the Aboyne and Tarland communities; Tony Archer of Aberdeen Forward is the overall project manager and has sought support from TDG among other local organisations; if TDG supplies volunteer drivers and takes on other duties, a potential; source of regular income may be obtained through distributing and selling processed compost; a TDG project leader has yet to be identified

Possible Future Projects:

The following are simply some of the projects that TDG hopes to support in the future and is keen to see progress to fruition. As a community group, we are open to suggestions from all members of the local community and wish to encourage people to come forward with ideas that they think might be of benefit to those who live in the Tarland area and that TDG might be capable of supporting.

- working with the MacRobert Trust to develop a mountain-bike trail in Alastrean Woods
- liaising with Historic Scotland, MacRobert Trust, and the Cromar History Group to develop an archaeological trail within Drummy Wood
- improving visitor facilities by proposing and supporting the establishment of a multi-function centre with a restaurant, a retail outlet for local produce and artworks, and a history museum

Ongoing maintenance and other commitments include:

- keeping the path network free of encroaching vegetation, grass-cutting and way-marker maintenance; this is largely carried out by Albert Calder with minor support from Peter Craig; this summer has required extra effort because of the prolific growth of both grass and broom; litter pickers have also been purchased and can be made available to interested volunteers
- Viewfield wetland is deliberately being maintained with minimal input of labour; the original plantings have matured significantly and may require some thinning in the near future; MacRobert Trust has assisted with pond dredging which is required on an annual basis to maintain the intended flood water reservoir capacity; Kate Redpath is the project leader and has helped Tarland School to make use of the wetland for outdoor studies
- regular meetings are held with COAT and MacRobert Trust to address access and path network development and maintenance issues; Albert Calder and Peter Craig attend these meetings

Other TDG activities:

Over the past year, the issue of the proposed Cushnie Windfarm was drawn to our attention on several occasions by the would-be developers who were very anxious to recruit the TDG as supporters of their planning application. None of their invitations were accepted. TDG membership opinions on the issue were divided and it was decided that members should be encouraged to make individual representations to Aberdeenshire Council if they so wished. Since planning permission has now been firmly denied, this particular development is most unlikely to proceed. Opinions have been expressed within the group, however, that any new opportunities for environmentally acceptable renewable energy schemes should actively supported.

Frequent liaison continues between TDG, Cromar Community Council, Tarland Welfare Trust and the Marr Area Partnership over issues of common interest. TDG is also regularly represented at meetings of the Deeside Access Forum organised by Aberdeenshire Council. Topics of mutual interest relating to public access for walking, cycling and riding are discussed and explored amongst representatives of many Upper Deeside community groups, estates and other organisations.

A notice board displaying information about the Howe o' Cromar originally commissioned by Kincardine & Deeside Council has been erected by TDG members on the wall opposite the Queen's View indicator, its original intended location.

Membership:

Tom Veitch resigned his membership of the group earlier this year after several years of active support. Mary Levie has also resigned from active membership although she has offered to carry out any role that the group identifies for her in the future. Their contribution to the group's work is hereby publicly gratefully acknowledged.

Mark Colley-Davies has expressed a desire to become involved in TDG activities. Denise & John Hansford and Lizzie Bacon are recent recruits to the group. They are a most welcome boost to our membership and will no doubt soon identify particular projects that they will wish to become engaged in.

Conclusion

Although the rate of progress with project implementation is sometimes frustratingly slow for a variety of reasons, it is rewarding to take stock and recognise that TDG has justified its existence over the past fifteen months since the last AGM was held by making progress on several fronts. I would like to express my gratitude to all the Group members for the effort and time that they put into these voluntary activities, and also to the many sponsors and supporters of the Group mentioned above. Without their commitment and support, the Group could not achieve its aims.

**Peter Craig
Chairman**