

ACLI 2020/2021-Chairs Report

Introduction

This year was thrown upside down by the covid pandemic. We envisaged food supply chain problems, a need to contribute to fruit and vegetable supplies for people in most need and to offer an outdoor area for people to use safely when so many activities were being curtailed.

We are indebted to a small group of volunteers who came three times per week to propagate, transplant, weed and pick fruit and vegetables. In particular Kathy Sayer was the brains behind the horticultural improvements.

We are also indebted to the National lottery and Corra foundation for the provision of covid related grants totalling £14,100

Annual general meeting- In normal times we hold an agm in November, elect trustees and provide reports to members. These are not normal times and the Scottish charity regulator has made allowances for how charities conduct their agm business.

In accordance with the emergency regulations the trustees propose that the 2020 agm is postponed until a date in 2021 when members are able to meet safely again. In place of the normal agm I am providing members and the charity regulator with this report. Jo Godwin is also providing members with a financial report for 2019/20.

We would be pleased if members have any questions regarding these reports that they submit them to the acli contact email. We will reply to all questions posed.

Our current trustees will therefore remain in place:

Nick Burgess-Chair

Jo Godwin-Treasurer

Rob Cowieson-Secretary

Jim Park-Trustee

Jill Wilkinson - Trustee

Veg boxes- From June 2020 we supplied around 8 boxes per week to individuals and families. From mid-September this reduces to fortnightly until Christmas 2020.

Crofters Larder- During the lockdown Crofters Larder-a local business-approached us to offer voluntary assistance while they were not fully operating. Acli benefited from Crofters Larder staff assisting with tasks around the site and crofter's larder benefited by picking excess produce at a 'pick your own' price. Acli hopes that this relationship can continue long after covid is, hopefully, vanquished.

The Shore- Acli also made links with another local business -the Shore and again produce not needed for veg boxes or by volunteers was sold to the Shore. Acli was heartened by the Shore publicising soups made using acli produce to customers.

The sale of produce to local businesses is not the main purpose of acli, it is, however, a natural supplement of our educational and recreational activities and contributes in a small way to improving our sustainability.

Infrastructure work- Emergency grant aid enabled a variety of tasks to be done, some of which were long overdue. This included fencing, erecting field gates, drainage work and obtaining materials and supplies to sustain further infrastructure work over the autumn/winter of 2020 and 2021.

Deer Management policy- Earlier this year the trustees consulted members and others on a Deer management policy for the community land. The trustees have a legal duty under the Deer Act 1996 to have a policy. We had a number of constructive comments which assisted the final version of the policy which is available on our website.

Strategy 2015-20- Previous trustees set out a 5-year strategy which should be reviewed in 2020. Given the pandemic trustees believe that the main aims of the 2015-20 strategy should be rolled forward until we can properly review them with members.

In summary they include-

1) Income generating projects and activities which benefit the local economy- To that end we have employed local tradesmen on a variety of tasks. We have also partnered with Green futures Arran to help supervise activities and facilitate its employment of apprentices. Two fields are currently leased for horse rentals and through drainage, track and fencing work we hope to bring two further fields into use for horse or stock leasing in the near future. Acli has also diversified the horticultural crops it is growing and piloted the sale of some produce.

A further possibility includes the availability of feasibility grants for assessing the possibility of solar power installation. If feasible and supported by members the potential for a regular income is attractive.

2) Educational, training and volunteering opportunities- Acli has extended Boardwalk to assist access to Glenashdale. Further work is needed to improve tracks. In particular we would like to bridge the burn at the top of the land. The two fields over the burn are currently almost inaccessible, are perhaps the best area for conservation and a bridge and linking track to the forest road would extend possible routes.

Acli is keen to encourage school children's outdoor learning possibilities. The curriculum for excellence recognises the contribution that such activities can foster. We know that transport is a problem and are keen to reduce this problem in partnership with local schools.

3) Environmental and health benefits-

We have also worked at improving social inclusion through working with health and social care and arrange cvs. Through growing things in a nice environment, it offers a chance to be sociable, share problems, take produce and learn together. We also hope to soon erect a polytunnel donated to us, which we want to fit out in a way conducive to people with mobility problems.

Improving access across the land encourages physical exercise. Planting woodland and improving habitats for native species helps biodiversity, carbon capture and our own wellbeing when outdoors.

We continue to support 12 allotment plots. It is wonderful to see the different styles and that people can benefit from allotment gardening in a peaceful place.

Farm Plan and rural payments- The trustees have been working with the Farm advisory service on a plan for the whole site. We need to maximise potential income for managing the land for potential horse/stock grazing and contribute to biodiversity and habitat improvement. It has been a torturous process but we hope to access a small amount of regular yearly payments and funding for environmental improvements at the end of 2020 and through 2021 into the future.

Grant applications- There is likely to be a gap between the resources we raise ourselves, whether Allotment and Horse rentals or sales of produce and what is required to manage the land, provide a well-maintained horticultural area, develop paths and provide further educational and recreational activities. Most applications we submit have crossovers with several parts of our strategy and we hope contribute to overall development of the site.

Volunteers- Prior to lockdown we had an increasing number of volunteers many of whom had never previously been to the site. This ended with the lockdown and we have relied on a smaller group of people since March 2020. We have risk assessment and safety on site procedures in place but recognise the enormous difficulties we all have living with the pandemic and volunteering at the community land may not be possible for some at the moment.

For those that are able to volunteer we have a range of activities over the next few months including fencing under the direction of Bert Ramage, boardwalk installation, raised bed construction, tree planting, and horticultural work under Darren Townsends supervision, to name just a few tasks!

Whether you have some knowledge of these activities or want to learn more about how to do them we can offer friendly and supportive supervision in a nice environment- the cakes are good too!

Conclusion- Acli is now much more aware of what is required to manage its operations, its recurring annual costs and the need to show funders that it is improving financial sustainability.

It is unlikely that acli will be fully self-funding for some time but if we can work with funders to promote health and social care, employability opportunities with our partner green

futures arran, work with local businesses, the Farm advisory service and explore renewable energy potential and most importantly work with members and the local community we can slowly begin to close the gap.