

AN TUIREANN ARTS CENTRE, PORTREE, ISLE OF SKYE IV51 9EG

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CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUSTAINABLE CULTURAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC VIBRANCY OF SKYE AND WEST HIGHLAND COMMUNITIES: DEVELOPING CREATIVE SKILLS AND EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES, AND PROMOTING AN INTERNATIONAL PROFILE FOR THE WEST HIGHLANDS.

A VENUE DEVELOPMENT AND PARTNERSHIP PROPOSAL

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to inform the process of discussion and agreement between key potential partners in a proposal to further develop and deliver services to communities and residents within the Highland Council area. The key partners are Highland Council, HIE-Skye and Wester Ross, The Scottish Arts Council (SAC), and An Tuireann Arts Centre. The services concerned are cultural, educational, social, economic, regenerative, and developmental in nature. The proposal directly contributes to delivery of each of the key partners goals and priorities in a ‘best value’ context.

The proposal is for a capital development and ‘value for money’ revenue partnership delivering positive outcomes to people’s lives across the area, enabling sustainable income generation for community development, and triggering significant inward investment to a continuing regeneration programme from a range of other sources.

This paper provides the first summary of the proposal and background information to support the partnership discussion.

1. The Black Memorial Hall

An Tuireann has been offered the opportunity, at reasonable cost, to purchase and refurbish the Black Memorial Hall, a landmark building in the very heart of Portree, as a community owned showcase venue for public access to contemporary arts and culture.

In brief, An Tuireann proposes to locate its international quality exhibition space and visitor services within this significant and historic building in a prime position in Portree. This will be a valuable step in the regeneration of Portree’s historic centre, and fully supports the Steering Group of the newly formed Portree Area Community Company (PACC), as it progresses ambitious proposals for the re-development of the harbour, quayside, and other amenities.

An Tuireann will bring the Black Memorial Hall (at present privately owned and unused) into community ownership and ensure its future as a community resource.

It will create a vibrant hub for public access to a diverse programme of creative arts and entertainment. An Tuireann envisages equipping the space fully with the means to make and show 21st century work that is digitally generated and interactive, as well as showing new work in more conventional media such as painting, drawing, music, sculpture, film, and textiles.

An Tuireann has a strong interest in the creative use of digital technology and sees new media arts as a positive influence on the development of the creative industries on Skye.

This regenerative initiative and the relocation of An Tuireann's exhibition space, the only 4 star visitor attraction in Portree, to its centre will benefit local traders, tourism concerns, ancillary businesses, residents of Portree and visitors, alike.

The Black Memorial Hall was built in 1820 and is a simple, spacious, and aesthetically pleasing listed building with a finely proportioned interior and a superb quality of natural light. It is prominent in approaches into Portree from the sea and by road, and at the core of the conservation/regeneration area of the town and is presently empty and in a neglected though wind and watertight condition. It currently presents a run down impression of Portree centre to visitors and residents, and has been a subject of regeneration aspirations for several years.

An Tuireann will conserve the important features of the exterior and commission an imaginative and sympathetic architectural intervention for the interior that effectively expresses the continuum from the building's cultural origins to its contemporary cultural use. It may also be possible, in collaboration with Dualchas, (Skye and Lochalsh Area Museums Service,) to dedicate a digital facility within the building that will guide visitors seeking local history and genealogy information to appropriate sources. It is proposed to launch the new building in 2009 'The Year of the Homecoming' with specially commissioned work from artists and musicians, and a programme that will engage the Skye and West Highland Diaspora, and local and international audiences with a confident expression of contemporary West coast culture in the modern world.



The Black Memorial Hall - at the end of the rainbow.

2. The Fever Hospital



An Tuireann Arts Centre 2007

Highland Council owns An Tuireann's current site at the old fever hospital, called the Ross Memorial Hall on the Struan Road, which has long been bursting at the seams. The small hospital building, semi-derelict in 1988, was taken on and renovated entirely by the voluntary effort of An Tuireann. Maintenance and repair has been entirely the responsibility of An Tuireann since 1988. As a newly constituted community group the members created an informal space supporting local artists and hosting workshops and social events. The building was again transformed and extended in 1997, with the help of over £500k capital lottery and other funding (raised entirely by An Tuireann and its community membership), creating a showcase exhibition venue for the contemporary visual arts. Space restrictions meant that it no longer provided any dedicated messy creative space and workshops.

It should be noted that the value of the £522k improvements made to the building belong to An Tuireann as a fixed asset, but in line with accounting practice this depreciates annually. This means that while the increasing market value of the improved and maintained property accrues to Highland Council at a steady pace, An Tuireann's assets are diminishing at the rate of around £30k per annum. When the current lease arrangement ends in March 2026 the value of the improvements will long since have depreciated to zero.

Highland Council charge An Tuireann almost £8000 per annum for rent & buildings insurance but provide for it as 'in-kind' support. The value of this arrangement is exceeded by the annual value of maintenance and repair to the property provided by An Tuireann.

There was always a question mark over the viability of this peripheral location for an initiative that requires a significant footfall to reach its audience targets. However An Tuireann has built a reputation for its professionalism and the quality and engaging nature of its programme. This has attracted local and wider audiences and offset the disadvantage of its location to some extent.

Moving the exhibition space and visitor services to the centre of Portree will create far greater access for residents and the wider public to these experiences. It will also free the space within the arts centre for the participatory workshops, skills training, and development work with artists and community groups that, by demand, An Tuireann juggles to accommodate alongside the exhibition programme.

Facilities such as the state of the art new media equipment, cross-generational events, arts and creative industries skills training, and project work with adults with learning disabilities, schools groups, and others all have to be fitted around the exhibition programme in the galleries. Recent developments have added contemporary music and literature events into the same space.

This part of the proposal is therefore to retain and adapt the fever hospital site to properly accommodate participatory activities and provide workshop facilities for professional development in the arts and creative industries. It would also continue to house the offices of An Tuireann's Core Team of seven personnel who develop and manage all the creative services delivered.

Both buildings will encompass ecological design principles and energy conservation as part of their ethos.

An Tuireann is making an immediate approach to the Big Lottery: "Growing Community Assets" fund for substantial support toward the capital costs of acquisition, development, refurbishment and equipping of the two sites to meet the community's aspirations, and we are talking with the Scottish Arts Council Visual Arts and Lottery Capital Departments.

The support of Highland Council and HIE-Skye and Wester Ross will be crucial factors in securing the necessary inward investment for this proposal to succeed.

One possibility that has previously been discussed is that Highland Council might consider transferring ownership of the fever hospital site to the community via An Tuireann as part of its contribution to the capital costs of this development.



An Tuireann Arts Centre 2007

3. Core Funding

A key factor in this capital development proposal must be a realistic re-assessment of An Tuireann's core revenue requirements, for 2007/8 and over the next 3 years, for sustainable delivery of services, and recognition of the value for money this represents to Highland Council residents.

An Tuireann, unlike many other nationally recognised Foundation Organisations that serve defined local authority areas, receives no core revenue funding from Highland Council or the local enterprise company, HIE-Skye and Wester Ross. Our ability to develop and deliver cultural services, to secure project funding as inward investment, and deliver economic benefits to the community at the level we currently achieve is unsustainable without sufficient revenue support. This paper argues for a partnership approach between Highland Council, HIE-Skye and Wester Ross, and the Scottish Arts Council (SAC) to meet this need.

We are aware of Highland Council's statement that it "currently seeks to cement its principle relationships with voluntary sector organisations through three-year service agreements thus removing the requirement to submit annual grant applications with the service agreement detailing its own performance reporting procedures."

Meetings have taken place to bring Highland Council officers, HIE-Skye and Wester Ross representatives, and the Scottish Arts Council, to the table with representatives of An Tuireann, and the Land Unit (as managers of the appropriate Big Lottery Fund) to discuss the challenges and opportunities presented here.

ABOUT AN TUIREANN

An Tuireann (the 'spark') is a community membership not-for-profit company with an elected voluntary board and is a registered charity. It is the only publicly funded community-owned contemporary arts centre on the West Coast of Highland Region and the only 4 star visitor attraction in Portree. Despite its problematic location on the outskirts of Portree and lack of physical space for participation An Tuireann has grown steadily in local and international reputation over the 19 years of its work as a centre for public access to excellence in the arts and creative industries. It has proved itself as a generator and provider of inspirational creative participation across generations of the resident communities and for visitors to the area.

In 2006 the professional quality of An Tuireann's work was assessed by the Scottish Arts Council and given status as a Foundation Funded organisation. It is the only visual arts organisation in Highland Region to achieve this new status as part of the SAC funded arts infrastructure of Scotland. This recognition and funding carries requirements for regular monitoring and evidence of artistic quality, audience development, good governance, public benefit, and value for money.

THE CULTURAL, EDUCATIONAL, AND SOCIAL BENEFITS DELIVERED BY AN TUIREANN

Over the last 3 years more than 65,000 people have come into the arts centre to explore the work of contemporary artists, musicians, filmmakers, craft makers, and designers. The work of the best practitioners in the Highlands has found a place here to be shown alongside some of the best in the rest of the world.

An Tuireann researches, curates and presents 16 contemporary visual arts exhibitions in its 2 main galleries every year, bringing leading edge work to Skye. There is a programme of exhibitions of contemporary crafts in the crafts gallery, and regular opportunities for locally based artists and craft makers to present their work to the public. An Tuireann is also the only UK gallery to be part of the JIPB CUBE project creating opportunities each year for Scottish artists to have new work commissioned and shown here and in Japan, France, and Denmark.

An Tuireann works with all the schools in Skye and Lochalsh, raising project funding from many sources, developing and delivering major projects to engage and develop the creativity and skills of the young people of the area. In 2006/7 there were more than 2000 participants in creative outreach and education sessions delivered by An Tuireann in community and schools settings in Skye and Lochalsh. Projects such as the award winning ‘An Dealbh Mor’ with Sleat Primary (filmed for BBC and recently presented at the Scottish Parliament), and the current ‘Thar Chriochan/Crossing Boundaries’ project, which spans upper primary and lower secondary years across Skye and Lochalsh schools (linking visual arts, music composition, dance, and animation through new media technology), have broken new ground for students and teachers and demonstrated the exciting potential of creative approaches to effective learning across the curriculum.

An Tuireann is undoubtedly a key contributor to the delivery of Highland Council’s “Highland Promise”, and a skilled ‘best value’ service provider in the context of future development of the ‘cultural entitlements’ concept in the proposed Culture Bill, in whatever form the Scottish Executive decides to take that forward.

‘Skye Through Our Eyes’ is an example of a major 2year project working with adults with learning disabilities in Skye and Lochalsh. It has engaged participants in learning new skills through visual arts, creative writing, video production, drama, and graphic design, and has achieved outcomes of increased confidence, employability, self-expression and decision making for the group, and positively changed public perceptions of the abilities and talents of the people who took part.

A spin off from this project is the establishment of ‘OR’ under the auspices of An Tuireann. ‘OR’ is an independently constituted fledgling organisation aspiring to become a community enterprise company in due course. Its aim is to establish a ‘not for profit’ graphic design company that is a social enterprise, providing training and real quality supported employment for young adults and school leavers with learning disabilities who have creative talent. ‘OR’ has been selected as one of 19 projects from 200 outline applications to the SCF Community Investment Fund to go forward to a full application for 2 years development funding.

An Tuireann's contemporary arts practice is rooted in the Gaelic language. A Gaelic speaking artist is at present working in a cross generation An Tuireann hosted residency within Staf-fin community exploring the significance of language in visual expression. An Tuireann has secured academic partnerships with Sabhal Mor Ostaig and Dundee University to support this exploration and to help take its outcomes to an international audience.

An Tuireann has a key role to play in crafts development across Skye and Wester Ross, helping craft makers to develop the quality of their practice and product, and providing master classes and a showcase for the best of locally produced work. The recently established role for An Tuireann as administrators of the Craft Makers Award Scheme is a partnership with the Scottish Arts Council and HIE-Skye and Wester Ross to distribute a fund of £10,000 in 2007/8 directly to local makers who can apply for grants of up to £1000 each for support to develop their practice.

In recent months An Tuireann has built on its rare status as an outpost of the Scottish Poetry Library to deliver a popular programme of inventive poetry and literary events at the centre and by taking writers into schools in the area. It also hosts the Ceilidh Spot, a monthly community generated celebration of word and song, and surgeries for aspiring writers to meet with established writers. An Tuireann is working with island communities across Europe to link and celebrate island writing, and to advise on the development of the Quessant festival in Brittany for its theme of Scottish Islands in 2007. This will offer profile to Skye based writers in an international event. An Tuireann's staff member currently developing literature has been invited to join the Scottish Parliamentary Cross Party Group on Culture and Media.

A programme is being developed to present new contemporary music genres. This is for a gap in current provision and new potential audiences identified by the Audience Development Officer through a period of research with local communities and across age groups.

The An Tuireann Board and core team works closely with the wider community to identify and provide a range of creative opportunities to meet a growing demand for access to the arts, creative industries, learning, and cultural entertainment. One such response to local demand is to be the launch in October 2007 of a continuing education programme of learning opportunities through a range of evening classes in creative skills. This programme will include substantial fee concessions and transport facilities to remove barriers to access for older people in the area. There is strong evidence from older people here that what they want most is not always specially devised programmes that underline their age but help to access the same learning and social opportunities as younger participants.

The voluntary elected board employs a specialist professional staff team of Director, Curator, Education Officer, Craft Development Officer, Literature Development Officer, and Audience Development Officer. The venue also boasts a café with an EatScotland award for excellence, staffed by a team of 4 part timers, a front of house reception/admin post, and a part time Finance Officer.

Some of the public outcomes of this work are:

Enjoyable and informative access to the contemporary arts and cultural entertainment for West Highland residents and visitors.

An increased sense of social inclusion and community cohesion for diverse and scattered populations.

Greater appreciation of the place of local language and culture in an international context.

A sense of voice and place in the modern world.

More creative attitudes to learning and a raising of confidence, aspirations and creative skills.

New creative technology competences to contribute to the future economy of the area.



An Dealbh Mor at An Tuireann

THE ECONOMIC BENEFITS

An Tuireann is an active contributor to healthy and creative local cultures, access to the arts, cultural entertainment, creative industries, and international connections. These are proven key factors in the social and economic regeneration and sustainability of communities.

These factors attract skilled and economically active people and families to the area.

Bring visitors and money.

Create confidence and encourage inward investment.

Provide momentum for the establishment of new businesses.

Retain and encourage the return of young people.

Create employment and develop skills.

Some specifics:

An Tuireann brings approximately £400k each year into the local economy from outside funding sources and earned income, and translates this into the multiplier effects of creative and business activity in the community.

An Tuireann in partnership with the Scottish Arts Council and HIE-Skye & Wester Ross distributes grants to craft makers of £10k each year to develop their practice and products.

An Tuireann is a 4* Visitor attraction with an EatScotland Excellence Award, and has extremely positive press in national and international publications for travellers and tourists from around the world. It provides a welcome to Portree and high quality customer services for more than 25000 visitors a year to its current peripheral site. This number would substantially increase in a centrally sited venue and contribute to holding visitors for longer and increasing their spend in the town centre.

An Tuireann provides opportunities for locally based artists, makers, and writers to sell quality selected work in the galleries and through international connections. It undertakes promotion and marketing on their behalf, provides advice, contacts, and facilities for professional presentation to markets.

In the last year An Tuireann created opportunities for more than 50 artists, writers, musicians, film/video makers, dance artists, drama specialists, and designers to earn income from their creative interactions with West Highland communities and schools.

An Tuireann provides training and support, and access to industry standard hardware and software for digital imaging, video making and editing, graphic design, and digital sound production for creative professionals and community groups, underpinning the development of creative industry businesses in the area.

An Tuireann operates a website, regular e-mailing and postal information, and marketing service, including the promotion of events and opportunities from other Highland providers, to an extensive and growing contact list of interested individuals and organisations locally, nationally and around the world.

An Tuireann works extensively with young people, informally and in schools, to develop interests in transferable creative skills and knowledge of their application to employment opportunities.

An Tuireann is, by local measures, a significant small business employer with a year round staff of 12 employees. It has a high regard for staff training and development and provides career advancement opportunities for its talented team.

An Tuireann's business-to-business transactions are at a local level whenever possible, supporting locally based trades people, suppliers, and entrepreneurs. The café is an enthusiastic member of the local food initiative, reducing food miles and promoting local produce throughout its award-winning menu.



VALUE FOR MONEY

An Tuireann believes that its close involvement with local communities and responsive programme delivers extremely valuable and effective services that clearly meet a range of the stated objectives and obligations of Highland Council in its published programme for the next four years.

An Tuireann's work addresses many of the goals of Highland Council's Education Culture and Sport Service Plan. e.g.:

Promotes lifelong learning for individuals and provides a focus for community development. Fosters the social and cultural values of the Highlands and promotes the Gaelic language. Participates fully in the Council's strategies for economic, environmental, social, political and cultural development.

Works in partnership with individuals, groups, services and organizations and ensures quality service provision for all.

It is also relevant to Tourism Development, Regeneration, and Social Work and Mental Health service objectives.

An Tuireann's activities contribute effectively to the HIE-Skye and Wester Ross mission to develop the economy, skills and community strengths of Skye and Wester Ross and to consider the environment, culture and unique attributes of the area.

They contribute to the development of skills and networks for the creative industries as a high quality employment option that, with the application of technology, is very appropriate to a relatively remote location.

This level of service development and delivery from An Tuireann requires a sustainable level of core revenue for the organisational, programming, staff, venue, maintenance, training, and administrative costs, to support it and to enable the additional benefits of specific project funding to be secured and effectively managed for public benefit.

Neither Highland Council nor HIE-Skye & Wester Ross could directly deliver these services and achieve the outcomes described without a financial commitment far in excess of the revenue support required by An Tuireann.

2007/8 REVENUE SUPPORT

The annual cost to An Tuireann of these core functions in 2007/8 is budgeted at approximately £340k. None of this core revenue requirement is currently provided for from Highland Council or local enterprise company sources.

The core cost is partially underwritten by core funding of £140k per year from the Scottish Arts Council, and projected earned income from An Tuireann's café and other sales of £44k. In addition we have fixed term support for two of the staff posts from the Scottish Arts Council. Some one-off grants towards capital equipment replacement, and other small unrestricted funds bring the core income to £234k.

In 2005/6 and 2006/7 An Tuireann was particularly successful in attracting substantial project funding from lottery funds and trusts/foundations for education, and arts and disability projects. Some management costs written in to project budgets mitigated the effects of core funding shortfall in the short term. However, without core support from the local authority or the local enterprise company, An Tuireann has been building a reputation for excellence and professionalism while scraping along in a fundamentally unsustainable financial position for many years. The services delivered to the area were until recently heavily subsidised by the unacceptably low wages paid to the highly qualified and talented staff team. This has been redressed to a more realistic level over the last 2 years, and though still modest, better recognises their skill and performance.

In the first month of 2007/8 An Tuireann was again successful in achieving about £60k in project funding for this year but subsequent responses from a number of trusts and foundations in June and July have been less successful though one foundation has asked for a re-submission later in the year. The feedback indicates that the growing volume of applications for limited funds rather than the quality of submissions determines these responses. An Tuireann is now at a disadvantage for a while in that a number of the trusts and foundations most likely to support the work have already given substantial funds to An Tuireann projects in recent years. An Tuireann still has bids to trusts and foundations awaiting decisions for project funding in 2007/8 but it is not realistic to rely on these for meeting a shortfall in core revenue.

Given such an exciting opportunity to move the gallery and visitor services to a far more viable location for income generation, access, profile, and audience development, and An Tuireann's exceptional track record of delivering key cultural services, it is timely to address the threats and opportunities realistically at the same time, and to underpin this exciting capital development opportunity with a recognition of the realistic revenue requirements for sustainability of the organisation and its services to the communities of the West Highlands.

2008/9 and 2009/10 REVENUE REQUIREMENTS

The projected additional core revenue requirement of £106k for 2007/8 is expected to stay steady over 3 financial years. The opening of the second venue, in summer 2009 will not require any increase in core staff numbers and while venue running costs will increase there will be a substantial increase in capacity for income generation from café, other sales, and events, to balance this. The freeing of space at the Fever Hospital venue for creative production facilities and workshops and courses will also enable income generation. We would expect to see significant economies in costs resulting from the installation of energy conscious systems and insulation in both buildings.

CONCLUSION

This is an initial information and discussion document to enable a partnership approach to the urgent challenges and opportunities it presents.

Jane Jeffrey

Director

An Tuireann

August 1 2007

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