



## **Strathard Community Hydro Fund 2018-22 Review**

**November 2022**

### **Introduction**

Since May 2017, Strathard has received community benefit funds from the Bruach Caorainn Hydro Scheme each year. The amount is index linked, and has risen from under £7,000 in its first year to a value of just over £8,000 in 2022. Payments are received in May each year.

The funds are administered by Strathard Community Trust, and the Trust retains £300 pa towards associated administrative costs. Individual applications are considered by a steering group comprising all current Directors of the Trust, as well as two other community representatives from Strathard. To help ensure transparency and include wider perspectives, a representative of Callander Development Trust, and an observer from Stirling Council are also involved.

The fund was first opened to applications in early 2019, with two application rounds each year in February and August. In response to the disruption caused by the pandemic, however, the steering group changed the process from March 2020 to allow applications at any time.

To help make the most of the money available, individual grants were and continue to be capped at £1,500, and core funding for organisations is ineligible. Full conditions and application materials are available on the Strathard Community Trust website<sup>1</sup>.

In summary, the fund has supported a total of 16 locally-beneficial and wide-ranging projects, and the application and decision-making processes are working well. However, there is less demand for funding than might be hoped. This note covers:

- The overall financial position of the fund
- The projects to which grants which have been awarded
- Initial discussion on the future of the fund

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.strathardct.org.uk/>

## Financial Summary to November 2022

The total received by the fund to date is **£43,359** (six payments, May 2017 to May 2022)

The total disbursed to date in grants is **£20,272**

The total retained by SCT for administration is **£1,800**

Total remaining unallocated is therefore **£21,287**

Money in	Money Spent	Dates / Notes
£13,505		Payments received in May 2017 and May 2018 combined
	£7,922	Grants awarded 2019
£7,073		Incoming payment May 2019
	£3,500	Grants awarded 2020
£7,181		Incoming payment, May 2020
	£2,500	Grants awarded 2020
£7,389		Incoming payment, May 2021
	£2,150	Grants awarded 2021
£8,211		Incoming payment, May 2022
	£4,200	Grants awarded 2022
<b>£43,359</b>	<b>£20,272</b>	

## **Project Details**

### **Round 1 - February 2019**

All of the awards in the first round were for stand-alone projects

- Support to Trossachs Search and Rescue to provide equipment for volunteers across the Strathard area (£1216)
- Help fund Kinlochard Cottages residents group to improve common land for amenity and wildlife (£1500)
- Helping establish and promote, through a series of book and reading events, the Wee Trossachs Library, in various places in Aberfoyle including the Memorial Hall (£406)
- A guide book to walks in Strathard (£1,500) was also approved in the first round. However, its development was initially delayed initially for technical reasons and subsequently by the pandemic. On revisiting the project in 2022, the Trust Directors took the view that an additional guide book was no longer necessary given the range of websites and leaflets already available. £300 was paid out in respect of preparatory work carried out by the designer and illustrator, and £1,200 returned to the Hydro fund pot.

One further application was received to carry out early stage consultation and preparatory works to develop outdoor murals themed on faeries. The group felt that more evidence of demand was needed before this could be supported. The project was rejected on that basis.

### **Round 2 - August 2019**

All of these awards were part funding to much larger projects; our hope at the time was that awards of this type from the hydro scheme would help applicants demonstrate early local commitment and thereby bring in more funding from other sources, and to some extent this worked.

- Contribution to St Mary's Church heating upgrade - the previous heating system was both expensive and ineffective, and the Church was raising funds to replace it with a system which would cost less and also have lower environmental impact. £1,500 was awarded. The church successfully raised the balance, new heating was installed August 2020, and money disbursed at that time.
- Contribution to renovation of Strathard Playparks – all of the playparks in the area are in need of upgrading, by comparison with others in neighbouring communities. Public funds available for buying new equipment are very limited, although Stirling Council will help with installation costs and maintenance. (£1,500). The Trust Development Officer has held discussions with local parents to identify immediate

priorities and encourage ownership. There has been some limited progress in improving the playpark as a result, but this has been carried out with coop funds with a fixed deadline. The hydro grant money is still held by SCT, earmarked for the original purpose.

- Contribution to the Aberfoyle Community Life Plan, developed by Strathard Community Council (£1,500). The plans identify residents' core shared values, key assets and priorities for their community, and agree a vision for local development over the next 5-10 years. Their preparation involved the needs and views of all groups, including young people, business owners and residents. The Aberfoyle plan, for which this grant was awarded, was delayed by lockdown but was eventually delivered in the autumn / winter of 2020/21. Local funding was complemented by other sources from both the National Park and Scottish Government.

### **Round 3 - March 2020**

- Contribution towards the refreshed Trossachs Trail. The trail is a tourist route, initially designated in the 1990s, but which has subsequently not been promoted. Our contribution is tied to revisions to include attractions in Strathard. (£1,000). The project was delayed by the pandemic, but completed early in 2021. [The Trossachs Trail](#)
- Afternoon Teas for Older or Isolated Aberfoyle Residents – a series of monthly events which will take place over the autumn and winter of 2020/21 (£800). This project could not run as a result of the pandemic, and the funds were returned. The Trust is aware that discussions on a related project are ongoing, and remains open in principle to a hydro fund application should that progress.
- A third project in this round - support for an event to celebrate the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Aberfoyle Church and Primary School - was subsequently withdrawn as the event was cancelled due to covid-19 lockdown.
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### **Open Applications: March 2020 onwards**

Early in the spring 2020 lockdown, the advisory group discussed how best to provide support for projects. The option of providing direct grants to businesses directly affected by lockdown was considered but rejected on the basis that any assistance that could be provided would be minimal in comparison both to costs and to the money subsequently provided by Government.

However, it was felt reasonable to move to an open application process, with individual bids agreed by email if possible, and with a particular focus on projects aiming at economic and social recovery following the pandemic and associated lockdowns. Other conditions as originally set were retained as they were seen to be working well.

Projects which were subsequently approved in the autumn of 2020 were:

- £500 in support of the ongoing series of St Marys concerts, as they re-started after the enforced gap.
- £1,000 contribution to the Countryside Trust in support of some short online video content showcasing family friendly cycling in the area.
- £1,000 to a local IT company for equipment (with volunteer staff time) to allow the development of a bank of free to use video and photography covering the area

One further application was received for support from a business. After debate and extensive discussion with the business, the application was declined, on the basis that it demonstrated insufficient added value to the local community, beyond that provided by the ongoing activity of the business concerned.

**Projects approved in 2021 were:**

- £500 to help Aberfoyle Rainbows re-start their group after interruption during the pandemic
- £650 for planters and plants in Aberfoyle car park, complementing the larger scale environmental improvement works undertaken by Stirling Council; additional funds were identified to carry out the work in 2021, and the Hydro grant used for planting in 2022.
- £1000 to local traditional music group AbTrad, as a subsidy and for venue hire to fit with social distancing regulations in place at that time.

**Projects approved in 2022 were:**

- £1500 towards a Jubilee party at Aberfoyle Memorial Hall
- A further £700 to Aberfoyle Rainbows, as their re-start was slower than hoped and complicated by further lockdowns and disruption in late 2021
- £1,500 to Aberfoyle Brownies, largely to subsidise event costs
- £500 as a guarantee against loss for a rock / blues concert at Kinlochard Village Hall in December 2022

## **Conclusions**

This review shows the hydro fund has, since the first awards were made in early 2019, supported a wide range of projects which benefit Strathard in very different ways. In addition to fully funding some smaller scale activity, the fund has also provided evidence of early, local commitment to some larger and geographically wider projects. The cap of £1,500 per project has also worked well in delivering a spread of activity for the available funds. No projects have been turned down, or withdrawn before formal submission, as a result of restraints on the funding; indeed, our conditions of grant are if anything less stringent than comparable funds.

In addition, both the processes of application via the Trust and assessment by the advisory group have worked well. A number of projects have commented positively on the ease of application, and questions for clarification or suggestions of minor changes to projects have always been positively received, and some projects have accessed support in addition to those provided by the hydro fund. Decisions on projects over the last two years have all been reached by consensus. In short, it is clear the fund is helping deliver for Strathard.

## **Future Options**

Following from the above, it would be possible to continue with the current approach, and doing that is a viable option.

However, the overall financial picture at the start of this note shows that there is less local capacity to spend the funds productively at present than the advisory group might hope; fund income has exceeded demand consistently, and would have done so to a greater extent in the absence of three wider projects led from outside our area, approved on to basis of the local benefits. From a total of some £43,000 received to date, just under half - £21,000 - remains unspent.

At the same time, both the Community Action Plan (2017-22) which has to date formed the background against which projects have been set, and the more recent Life Plans prepared by Strathard Community Council demonstrate that there is no shortage of desire for project-level work to improve the area.

This situation seems not to be unusual; informal conversations, for example with staff of the Development Trusts Association Scotland, suggest that there are many other examples of other community benefit funds which are under-spending after initial priorities have been funded. Lack of local volunteer capacity among local groups seems to be a common issue in these circumstances.

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