

CHAIR REPORT FOR 2018 AGM

I'd like to begin this report with a tribute to a founder member of Culter in Bloom who sadly passed away last year. Anne Watson was a dedicated member who seldom missed attending a meeting and, as long as she was able, was always willing to help on our various action days, litter picking or planting. It's typically thoughtful of Anne that she left a sum of money to us in her will, and we are working on a way to remember her for the long term. Another much valued and long-standing member, who resigned from our committee last year due to failing health, was Donald Macdonald, although we are pleased to say that Françoise will continue to sit on our committee.

Turning to new members we welcomed Agneta Calderwod, Isabel Macintyre and Sean Hayes. . With a committee of 14 at present you can be sure that our discussions are lively and diverse – and in this report I'll try to summarise what we achieved.

2018 review

In 2018 in addition to our now-normal twice yearly planting projects we made some significant financial investments, using not only the funds provided annually by our generous donors, both private and business, but this year also drawing on our financial reserves.

The first was the replacement of the bed at the top of Pittengullies Brae – effectively the Eastern entrance to the village. This had been considered for a long time. In 2016 we asked for – and paid for – a plan from a professional garden designer but rejected it as too “modern” - we didn't think it reflected the image we wanted to project. Our new “home grown” design gives a more local impression with its simulated drystone walls, and has a more varied traditional planting scheme including bulbs, annuals, perennials and small shrubs.

The second investment was in new planters. We agreed with ACC to share the cost of three new black metal planters for the old station platform, and in early summer we paid the full cost of ten new oval planters for the north side of North Deeside Road, and six wall-mounted planters for the south side. These last are all “self-watering”, meaning that they have a reservoir from which water is drawn up by a “wicking” action to feed the roots from below. They don't avoid the need for watering completely but reduce the need for frequent top ups and should reduce the stress on our plants in summer. They also needed new soil of course and last year we made one of our largest investments in compost to fill them and top up the remainder – 120 bags! This year we also added five long wooden planters on the ground in front of three shop windows and a wall planter outside the Co-op . We also repainted the wee train (in the original Deeside Railway colours) and replanted the bed in front.

We continued to develop the community orchard which is now approaching its fourth season. We've learned that the stone bench at the top of the orchard which was created by our designer isn't too popular for sitting on, and so ACC offered to assist us by donating a striking WW1 commemorative bench with a peace symbol – more comfortable. Residents have learned and now expect to “pick their own” fruit and so we added two strawberry beds to extend the harvest season. Another small investment at the orchard, first made at the end of 2017, created a cheerful and festive impression on passing drivers and pedestrians when Sandy and Jean Cook came up with the idea of decorating the trees with battery-powered Christmas lights. This was repeated last December and looks set to become an annual event – no competition with the Christmas Lights group intended!

Talking of local groups, in April 2018 we were approached by local teacher Karen Cochlan, who leads the school Eco-Group. In a national competition they had won some vegetables for planting out but had nowhere to put them as the raised beds originally installed at the school were rotten and unusable. We arranged to have three small raised beds built by our local trusty joiner Sean Malone, We paid for the materials and Sean gave his (and his family's) labour completely free.

May was the time for two hardy annual events – our Spring litter pick, where we got welcome help from some local residents and – as always - the Cults Rotary Club, and our stand at the Culter Gala, where we were grateful for plants donated by local nurseries to sell on the day.

June is lifting and planting time for the summer displays and baskets. We have ongoing agreements with the City Council for the bedding plants which are ordered at the start of the year. We discuss the planting plan each time but we are grateful to Sandy and Jean who are the mathematicians who work out the exact planting needs for each type. This year it was mainly begonia and argyranthemum. You may be interested to learn that the total number of containers of all sorts which we are now responsible for is 146 plus over 60 hanging baskets,

In early October we removed the summer bedding and replaced it, mainly with pansies, polyanthus and daffodils. In autumn alone we planted over 800 polyanthus, 550 pansies, 280 miniature daffodils and over 35 kg larger daffodils

I won't go into any more detail as there will be a slide show to remind you of last year's display but I hope you agree that it was one of our best. Knowing this was the reason why we decided to enter the Beautiful Scotland Awards scheme. There's a lot of preparation work for this - compiling a photo display and portfolio of our work throughout the year, mostly done by Catherine, and organising a two hour minute-by-minute tour of the village, meeting up to 20 people with three judges in early August. You can imagine that organising this takes up a lot of our committee's time. We were awarded a Silver Gilt, for the third time in the history of our entries to this competition. However there were no Gold winners in our category of Urban Communities this year, so I suppose you could say we were first equal!

Catherine, my wife Liz and I went to Haddington to the award ceremony and to meet the judges and listen to their comments. This award includes three criteria – horticultural achievement, environmental responsibility and community participation, and while the judges appreciated our planting ideas they were looking for more evidence of projects in the eco- and community categories, which are worth half the points they award. They wanted to see more recycling and environmental projects involving nursery and school children of different ages, young people, pensioners, special interest, business or local resident groups, all aiming to meet their objectives. Rather surprisingly they also felt that we were over-reliant on the city council and implied that we should perhaps be doing more for ourselves! We didn't agree with this – from the funds we raise we pay for the plants and for the watering service we get from them on a commercial basis, and the other support is usually response to requests for advice or requests to help tidy particular areas, some of which they are responsible for in any case. We even take areas of responsibility from them – the Kennety community corner, the St Peter statue and the nearby embankment at the Malcolm Road corner for example. Co-operation brings benefits for the community at large and I can't see why we shouldn't continue to work closely with the council – as it is they often tell us what they won't or can't do!

The future

We've decided to take a year out from the Beautiful Scotland competition this year. We can use the judges' ideas as pointers and try to encourage and delegate the kind of work they are looking for, but we don't want to take on all the additional burdens that they are suggesting – we think we have enough to do, and prefer to proceed at our own pace. However we will continue to consider other projects at our regular meetings, including work with other groups such as those the Beautiful Scotland assessors suggested, but only if our role is to assist and advise rather than to do all the work ourselves!

This year our main focus will be

- continuing our container replacements as the wooden barrels and mangers wear out
- reviewing our planting scheme to include some evergreen perennial shrubs and trailing plants in our new containers
- looking at options to “spread the load” of looking after them.

Whether for existing or new projects we always welcome offers to help, just tell any of our members. Our secretary has a list of volunteers, and we promise not to call on you too often. Equally it will be clear to you that every year we need funds to buy new plants, and the leaflet which we issue with the Courier at this time is the main way we have of requesting support from the public, who have always responded generously.

Finally, I think we should thank our committee members who take part in our planning discussions, are always among the first to turn out for our regular planting, litter picking and clearing work, and keep us refreshed with a flow of new ideas. Here's to a busy and colourful 2019!

Erik Stien

Chair

(Sandy Cook, vice chair, Catherine Lacy treasurer, Carol Page secretary, Agneta Calderwood, Jean Cook, Gibby Cannon, Bill Cooper, Dick Gagel, Sean Hayes, Francoise MacDonald, Isabel McIntyre, Christine Mackie, Malcolm Sharp)