

CULTER IN BLOOM

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2011

This year I'd like to approach my report differently. In the past I've listed our activities in the previous year then given another list of the proposals for the coming year. Many of our plans emerge so to speak "organically" through discussion as continuous improvement from previous projects and so it may be better to review our work in 2011 and add the new proposals immediately. This will also save a little time.

I'll start with the area owned by ACC behind the health centre which we are working with them to change into a small and biodiverse "country park" for people to enjoy and walk through. We call it **Coronation Park**. Over the years it has been provided with a bridge, footpaths, benches, around 100 trees and shrubs and many Spring bulbs. Last year we added about 20 new native species trees to this area and planted – with the help of Culter School and the Cubs – around 200 wildflower "plugs" to give some colour to the grassy areas. The trees are thriving but we left the wildflower planting too late in the year and so we lost a lot of the plugs through drought. This year we're going to enlist the help of Aberdeen Greenspace which specializes in the renewal of underdeveloped or waste city land and together we're planning a more ambitious and earlier project which should make a difference in future years. In all **600 new plugs** - red campion, ox eye daisy, meadow cranesbill and yellowrattle - will be planted this spring. We've also noticed that walkers have created a new route across to the sports field around the back of the area, but that there is a rather tricky rocky outcrop in the way which Aberdeen Greenspace are kindly going to make safe. These projects will not cost a lot in cash – but we will have to work alongside their volunteers! We hope to be able to continue improving this community resource for the benefit of walkers

Rather more noticeable to people passing through Culter are the **summer hanging baskets** on lamp posts, which in the past we have only been able to afford on ten lamp posts (20 baskets) at the West end of the village. We plant these up and keep them in our polytunnel at Kennerty farm until we hang them up in June. Last year we were able to secure the help of a kind local tradesman to manufacture eight more brackets – at a cost less than half commercial rates – and set these up to extend the length of the display further along North Deeside Road. We still need to decorate a **further six lamp posts** to complete **the full length of NDR** – ACC are donating some of their surplus baskets for us (these would otherwise cost around £40 each) and we are hoping to obtain the brackets from the same source as before. Just for information these still have to be watered by specialized equipment from ACC at a cost of around £35 per basket per year – so this is a very significant part of our annual budget. With so many baskets to prepare in early summer we will also be at absolute peak capacity for our polytunnel!

While still on the subject of hanging baskets we hope you've seen the new **six basket tree** at the top of Kennerty Brae at the West end of the village - this was very kindly donated by Mains of Drum nursery – but we had to pay to insert a strong concrete foundation for it!

Still on baskets, you have probably heard of our "**adopt a basket**" for **£8** scheme which we offer to houses fronting on North Deeside Road, around 25 in all. The £8 offer has remained the same for at least six years now – defying inflation, again made possible only through public sponsorship. In the past these were brought on by our volunteers in their own greenhouses, but last year we were very fortunate to gain the assistance of Easter Anguston Farm in looking after them prior to hanging out. You'll be pleased to know that all being well and subject to adequate fundraising we hope to be able to continue the **same offer with even better plants**– at the same price for the seventh year!

If you walk along North Deeside Road on the South side you won't have failed to notice our **wall mangers** – over 20 of them, which we've had in place for a few years now. These were replaced last year with larger ones, and while originally they were only planted up for the summer, **this year we've winter-planted them** with polyanthus, crocus and muscari which we hope will withstand the winter frosts. Incidentally our smaller mangers are now surplus to requirements and for sale – offers welcome!

Probably the most striking features on the main road as you approach it from the city are the **raised bed** on the left and the **little train** on the right. **Both were improved last year** – the bed by being raised a little higher and the train by having a border placed in front. At the other end of the village – the approach from Deeside there is still nothing new – but more of that later!

Probably the most noticeable aspect of what we do is to plant up twice yearly the **flower containers and whisky barrels on North Deeside Road**- over 50 in all, each with our own selection of annuals in the summer and polyanthus and bulbs in the winter. Last year we decided to **use perennial plants** (bergenia, dianthus, heuchera) **in some of these** to reduce the need for constant 100% changes but you'll be pleased to know that we still intend to have a dazzling display of summer annuals in the main ones in future.

However we have developed a few new areas for **perennial planting**. First there is the little strip in front of **the petrol station**. In autumn 2010 this was excavated and filled with soil and manure. We then fought a long battle to keep people from walking all over it till we planted it out with perennial shrubs and bulbs assisted by a few rocks – it's looking quite good now it is established despite numerous footmarks. Then in 2011 we have inherited two small areas formerly looked after by the City Council – **at Kennerty cottages** and the “point” of the hairpin bend at **the foot of Malcolm Road** and planted them - with herbaceous plants and potentilla shrubs respectively. We expect to continue to enhance areas like this but of course we need two things – agreement on use of the land and a willingness by someone to water and tend the areas. For example we're hoping to find a “minder” for a **new bed on Craigton Crescent** in front of the commemorative bench in memory of Zoe Skea.

Work continues to help the **school garden**, but we have limited access to it and it really needs to be the responsibility of classes with their teachers. We've also tried to enlist the help of the Parents Council but only one volunteer has come forward. We have an **agreement with the school** that the three wooden planters which we obtained help from Easter Anguston Farm to fill up with compost will each be looked after by a separate class each year with its own projects. In addition we've agreed to help with some **educational signage** and to organize periodic clear-ups this year.

Talking of clear-ups I must mention the sterling efforts of our **litter clearance teams**. These normally have two campaigns a year throughout the village – in Spring and before judging time and are well supported by volunteers. I'm sure we will be in contact again soon about 2012 work

I mentioned earlier that we've been thinking for some time of a **village entrance feature** to welcome visitors to the Culter from the West side. The only suitable ground for this would be the embankment next to the Rob Roy Bridge. It's rather shady there and we think that to make a year-round impression something sculptural rather than floral would be needed, although it would of course be set off by carefully-selected flowers and shrubs. A large stone could be part of the answer – but they're rather commonplace – Banchory, Westhill and Aboyne have theirs already, incidentally all of them advertising something other than the community itself.

So we decided to be more ambitious and enlisted the help of a well-respected local garden designer and lecturer Ian Anderson from Maryculter to help us create an original feature which would not only welcome people to Peterculter but fix the name in the mind of the traveller as a proud community with its own distinct heritage. He consulted with us, reflected on what we had said and presented us with some outline options. The one which obtained overwhelming support

is the one which you can see on display at the back of the hall – we call it **St Peter**, but it includes references not only to the saint who gave us our village's name through the Templars in the middle ages but also more symbolically the more recent history of the paper mill and the Culter Burn which provided its water supply. All this bedded in a large stone yet to be determined, granite or gneiss, and surrounded with perennial plants and shrubs.

We've quite a way to go on this one – beginning with approvals from ACC for land use and planning, but we have always worked well with ACC and certainly hope to negotiate a satisfactory outcome. Once the way ahead is a little clearer we will advertise the final design more widely and start the necessary requests for support which are likely to be both practical (for materials and skills to make it) and financial.

As I have mentioned **fundraising** it is only right to thank the many individuals and businesses who donate generously year after year to Culter in Bloom. Without your help we could achieve very little. Each year we issue a request to the whole village courtesy of the Culter Courier and this year is no exception. For several years we offered a free shrub to donors who give us £10 or more but the same people have been so loyal over many years now that we fear we may have filled their gardens with shrubs so we have moved on to seeds, and this year we have obtained a special **wildflower mix** from Scotia Seeds of Brechin to enhance any area of the garden – or indeed any waste ground. Of course we also receive valuable support from local businesses too and this year we want to devise a new form of **window display certificate** to recognize their sponsorship – in some cases where a donation has made it possible to obtain a new feature we have put a permanent emblem on the item – as for example at the little train (for Balmoral Group).

Practical help is of course equally important in our work and here I have to thank all the volunteers who turn up when we run special campaigns – whether litter clearance, summer or autumn planting. We have a register of volunteers' names and if you would like to add yours to it please contact our secretary Carol. Each year we enter Culter in the annual Beautiful Scotland competition and each year the judges consistently give us our highest score for community support and participation – not only for Culter in Bloom but for the obvious dedication of many others in the village to the Hall and the Heritage Centre for example. Our **Silver Gilt award**, displayed in the library, is our second and this year gave us the second place in our classification. We expect to **continue** to compete in this scheme as we feel it gives us an incentive to keep improving – and we obtain much more help from the City Council when we commit to it. We may one day achieve an even higher grade than so far – and entry into the competition means that the village always looks its best in early August when the judges are coming.

Finally in closing I must also **thank all the members of our committee** who attend our numerous – and often rather lengthy – meetings to discuss progress and plans, take the lead on projects and always form the core of our workforce in fair weather and foul. This year we were sorry to lose George Arthur who resigned from the committee in October. George has been a driving force in our team – without him we would never have had the energy and enterprise to buy and build our polytunnel, and his dedicated work with his jeep and trailer has enabled us to clear, feed and plant our containers much more efficiently than ever before. I take some comfort from the fact that he has offered to continue to assist us as a volunteer – so George can count on quite a few calls! On the other hand we have also gained two new committee members Dave Reid and Kim Coleman whose advice and assistance has helped us. Please feel free to chat to our committee this evening and share your ideas – as I mentioned it's your commitment and support which makes it possible for us to keep going with our aim of "planting pride in the community".

Erik Stien
February 2012

