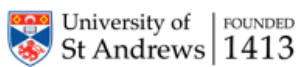# Community Heritage Scotland
Project summary and 'Next Steps'

Catherine Gillies, Robin Patel, Annie Tunnicliffe ERGADIA
Gavin MacGregor, Ingrid Shearer NORTHLIGHT HERITAGE

Introduction

The Community Heritage Scotland project arose out of the sense of a need for positive change in the community and independent sector. This was based on feedback, and sometimes vocal calls to action, from people working and volunteering in community heritage and independent museums across Scotland.

The sector is growing rapidly and has transformed over the past 25 years, reflecting a combination of changes to national cultural strategy and local authorities, and a growing movement of more empowerment within communities.

Once the province of small traditional museums and heritage societies, it is now a diverse and lively sector doing everything from managing nationally important assets to delivering arts projects around intangible heritage. It is a thriving and demanding environment, and arguably the most exciting growth area in the Scottish heritage sector.

However welcome, these changes are placing unprecedented demands on what is still an overwhelmingly volunteer-led workforce with few paid staff. Those of us who work and volunteer in community heritage are aware of the stresses and strains on the sector, and this project is the direct outcome of that experience on the ground.

Launching the project

The project has been developed by Ergadia Museums and Heritage, a consortium of museums and heritage freelancers who work almost exclusively with community heritage and understand the sector well. They have been joined by Northlight Heritage, expanding the skillsets across archaeology and a wide spectrum of community heritage and place-making activities.

Historic Environment Scotland has shown vision and generosity in providing the 75% of the funding and enabling the project to launch, with additional funding provided by Museums Galleries Scotland, the Association for Independent Museums and University of St Andrews. Archaeology Scotland has provided strong in-kind support. Ergadia and Northlight continue to commit substantial pro bono time.

A short early engagement project launched in January 2018, running for about 8 weeks. This report represents the summary outcome of this project together with a short-term strategy for 'next steps'. A longer discussion document covering the twists and turns of the lively debate is also available.

An interim steering group was established for this project as follows:
Community participants:
- Sue Furness - High Morlaggan township project, Argyll.
- Susan Kruse - ARCH Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands.
- Bob Hay - Lismore Museum
- Andrew Johnson - St Andrews Preservation Trust
Sector lead organisations:

- Museums Galleries Collections Institute, University of St Andrews: Dr Karen Brown, Ann Gunn, Dr Ulrike Weiss
- Historic Environment Scotland: Laura Hindmarch, Eve Boyle
- Museums Galleries Scotland: Loretta Mordi
- Archaeology Scotland: Eila Macqueen

Broad aims and objectives

The aim of the overall community heritage project is to improve knowledge and understanding of the sector in order to develop clear and effective strategies to support it going forward.

The broad aims for this early stage project were to develop a bottom-up, collaborative approach and provisionally (dependent on consultation outcomes) support:
- creation of a community heritage network
- a community voice at a national level
- a community-led approach going forward

The main actions for this stage reflected lack of knowledge of the sector in this time of growth and change. The actions were focussed around the simple questions of 'who is doing what and where' and beginning the process of getting the community heritage sector talking about its future. To this end, the project delivered:

- ➢ Survey
- ➢ Sign up email database
- ➢ One meet up event: **Community Heritage Scotland – Going Forward**, scheduled for March but delayed until May by weather.

This limited but effective project has delivered the tools needed to go forward: basic data which identifies opportunities and concerns, and critically, an email database which will support further conversations.

The raw data of the survey is held by University of St Andrews and Ergadia, and all data meets new GDPR regulations which came in during the lifetime of the project. All documents are published on the University of St Andrews Museums, Galleries and Collections Institute website.

Survey

The survey has been at the core of the project, and has asked:
- Who is doing what, and where?
- What would you like to do and what is stopping you?
- Would a network be a good idea, and how do you network at the moment?

Response and survey feedback

The survey was devised collaboratively by the steering group and was widely circulated by members of the steering group, including the networks of leading heritage organisations, local networks, as well as development trusts, social enterprise networks and a broad swathe of other community-facing bodies.

The survey was designed to be as open-ended and neutral as possible offering opportunities for an undefined "sector" of individuals and groups to share perspectives. This research has resulted in data which is qualitative in nature, compared to data that is objective or designed to take precise measurements. It is, in a sense, a tapestry of perspectives and opinions.

The survey yielded 543 responses from organisations and individuals. Most people signed up for the email database.

It is also important to note that this group represented the engaged part of the sector. We also heard anecdotally of groups and people who were varyingly hostile to the survey or felt it didn't apply to them, despite heritage often forming part of their cultural offer or activities.

Making more of the data

The short timescale of this project means that only limited analysis has been possible, and that there is much more than can be drawn. Each organisation involved in the steering group has their own areas of interest, and they are planning to drill down into the data to support these.

The survey data is available for everyone to use. It has been a key aim of the wider project to produce useful data for people involved directly in working with local heritage. For example, the data could help to evidence need in funding applications or support project planning.

There is scope for ongoing data collection, and it could be suggested that a "post-box" portal for comments and responses is developed so that feedback continues to be at the heart of future development.

In addition, there is scope for open dialogue around the discussion points in the main research document, particularly regarding capacity building and how a new network could drive capacity and sustainability for the overall sector.

A new network?

Research during this project found that while there are multiple networks (by subject or location) there is no single network which represents the interests of the community heritage sector as a whole.

The survey asked the question: *Do you think a heritage network for the whole of Scotland would be useful?* It recorded 275 people for 'yes' to just 4 for 'no'. 'Not sure' accounted for 112 respondents, opening up a healthy route for debate about if and how this might work.

A new network was the core discussion area at the Going Forward event, with really useful conclusions – the main one of which was that further discussion is needed, and that this should take

place directly in communities. There should also be further work looking at existing networks, to see if any could adapt to fulfill the function.

Please visit the discussion document and survey for the range of responses and ideas, and some early stage ideas for differing levels of network delivery.

Discussion and Ideas

The project was always intended to be a forum for debate, and this proved to be the case.

It has also been a listening forum, and it is exciting to learn that Museums Galleries Scotland, for example, is already re-examining training needs in independent museums based on the outcomes of the survey.

Notable areas of discussion, within the steering committee and showing through the survey and meet up day, have included:

➢ **What is community heritage**? After much discussion it was agreed that a formal definition wasn't useful at this stage, and that it would probably define itself. A rough premise was that community heritage amounts to a broad range of heritage-based perspectives and activities developed and run by communities themselves.

➢ **Capacity:** Perhaps the single 'stand out' message from the survey was concern over the shortage of the triangular equation of money, time and skills needed to run heritage in communities.

➢ **Sustainability:** Linked to the previous points but with particular concerns around the future – finding and keeping more volunteers, balancing finances, maintaining energy and enthusiasm.

➢ **Opportunity and need:** A disconnect emerged between the opportunities for funding, training and other support offered by sector leads and big funders, and the vocally-expressed view from communities that they can be too difficult to access.

➢ **Networks and networking:** People and organisations in heritage appeared as being somewhat insular in their networking, staying within disciplines, and with limited networking outside the sector with more general community organisations.

Should we be worried?

The data and meet-up responses (that can be seen in full in the discussion document and survey) undoubtedly raise the temperature of the debate around how community heritage is working currently. While there is certainly abundant activity, opportunity and energy in the sector, this project has lifted the lid on the experience of communities managing their own heritage.

It was common to find a single survey respondent outlining an extraordinary range of outputs and aspirations for their organisation or project, followed by despair over the difficulty of keeping going

with an entire workforce made up of volunteers, or at best with very few paid staff. The sense comes through of a sector which remains passionate about their heritage, but is worried, frustrated, and weary.

Money was inevitably a core theme. The overwhelming feedback was that the current system of project funding – however full of opportunity – is simply too complex, too time-consuming, and all round too difficult to do. Training was also identified as not always meeting the needs, despite the range of opportunities that exist.

The project also revealed differing perceptions of community heritage across the wider heritage sector. There was a palpable sense of frustration across the board: sector leads offering grants, active support, opportunities and training, and yet the communities repeatedly saying they needed precisely these things. Is this simply a glass ceiling, or do the particular needs of community heritage demand a whole new, innovative approach?

Next Steps

Conclusions drawn from the early project are that:
- The project is worthwhile and is broadly welcomed by the community heritage sector
- A network of some sort would be welcomed
- Any project should be led from within the community heritage sector.

The consensus of the steering group is that another step is needed in the process to bridge the gap between the end of the current funding/production of the final report and whatever model is chosen going forward, as the complexities and geography of the sector demand a more direct and inclusive approach.

This **development phase** should:
- Review the current stakeholder team with the aim of creating a more broadly-based committee with more community members, and a wider range of sector lead stakeholders to reflect the breadth of activity at community level.
- Aim to reach more groups by a range of outreach approaches.
- Set up a basic website/blog to facilitate communication.
- Gather more information on the types of heritage activities that people are involved in and consider how these might usefully be categorized.
- Gather information on the wider impacts of engagement in heritage-related activities.
- Continue to identify challenges facing the community heritage sector.
- Identify relevant agencies and statutory bodies and keep them informed.
- Further consider feasibility of various longer-term network options.

Funding will have to be found to support project officer time to carry out the work going forward, as it is agreed that the over-stretched community sector cannot be asked or expected to drive the project forward on a voluntary basis. Various options are being explored.

Actions

1. Community Heritage Scotland committee

The current steering group was established with invited members as an interim arrangement to support the first phase of work, with the intention to open up participation once an email database was in place.

It is proposed that a new committee be formed by inviting people involved in community heritage organisations to stand for election. An online ballot to elect community members would then be held.

Statutory bodies and sector lead organisations would be invited to put forward one representative and it is suggested that the following organisations/sectors be included:
- University of St Andrews (as the continuing lead partner)
- Historic Environment Scotland
- Museums Galleries Scotland
- Archaeology Scotland
- National Libraries of Scotland
- National Archives of Scotland
- Local authority heritage/culture service
- Third sector organisation (ie Development Trust)

2. Improving communication and participation

Enabling community members to participate in a committee is fundamental to both its reach and its success. Several people who have expressed interest have said they could not commit the time involved in travelling to meetings.

Development work would include research into remote networking which is reliable and achievable (ie not just Skype), possibly through further education institutions which are set up for remote learning. The challenge would be to connect them throughout Scotland. Alternative software systems will also be explored.

The aim would be to enable any community member who wished to serve on the committee to attend meetings through remote access, supporting inclusive participation and genuine representation.

3. Community Heritage Scotland roadshow

Develop a roadshow of workshops/discussion days to carry out consultation within communities throughout Scotland, finishing with a central event to finalise a strategy for the sector.

The workshops would continue to gather information along the lines of the survey and discussion day already held, with the format of a network/organisation explored as a potential framework which could deliver support, communication, advocacy and change.

The University of St Andrews in partnership with Ergadia hopes to source academic funding to expand four of the workshops around additional research questions and potentially include an international dimension, working with the university's South American partners to share knowledge around the extensive and more developed community heritage networks and management models which exist in countries such as Mexico.

The roadshow may consist of:
- ➢ A significant number of workshops (minimum 20) including remote and rural locations.
- ➢ 4 'hub' workshops which will have the core themes expanded as part of the academic research programme by University of St Andrews.
- ➢ A final conference or meet-up event at which a draft strategy (based on feedback from the whole project) would be presented for discussion, amendment and approval to give a clear mandate for a framework going forward.

4. Connecting Up

A key finding is the apparent disconnect which has been identified between sector lead organisations and the grass roots around funding and services, which is explored in more detail in the discussion document (National Networking page 14).

Teasing out the problems will be complex, but the steering group is agreed that a useful start point would be to collect and collate funding and services at national level. This will help to define what is on offer while potentially highlighting problem areas.

This project may include the following:

- Identify all the relevant organisations across Scotland and further afield (ie Association for Independent Museums UK).
- Invite all these organisations to outline their offer and opportunities.
- Develop an effective framework for displaying and dispersing this information including:
  - o Exploring options for how a central database could be developed.
  - o Exploring options for how all sector leads etc co-ordinate their offer.
- Explore the potential for a single funding portal for community heritage projects.

In conclusion

The short early phase project has been successful in unlocking the conversation and gathering baseline information. However, it was never expected to lead straight to strategy and change for the sector.

The ambitions were modest, and they remain so for proposed 'next steps', focussing on broadening the base of the working committee while taking the conversation out around Scotland and looking further afield for useful models and best practice.