

Tim Negus Presentation

Good Morning Ladies and gentlemen, my name is Tim Negus and I live in the lovely village of Findhorn. It is my pleasure to tell you about some community projects in our village that have been helped by the Moray Firth Partnership.

However, first I should perhaps head off any possible confusion. In our part of the world any mention of the words Findhorn and Community in the same sentence is often taken to refer to our eco-neighbours at the Findhorn Foundation but this is not what I am talking about – Rather I am talking about the wider Community of Findhorn which was already long established by the time it appeared on this manuscript map drawn by The Reverend Timothy Pont in the year 1590.

If you look closely you will note these blobs which represent ships in the harbour of Findhorn which in the 16th and 17th centuries was the port for the Royal Burghs of nearby Forres and of Elgin. That maritime trading ethos was still going strong 300 years later when this picture was taken showing trading schooners at the Findhorn Piers.

Of course nowadays maritime activity is aimed at recreation rather than commerce, but the navigational challenges to present day sailors approaching Findhorn Bay from the deeper waters of the firth are probably very similar to those of bygone centuries.

The complex arrangement of sandbanks which alter position with winter storms remain a trap for the unwary sailor and this offshore sandbar can still be dangerous in strong winds from the north east.

The aim of the Findhorn Fairway Committee is to manage the bay to the benefit of all, and one of their important functions is the provision of navigational buoys in the bay and its approaches. As you can imagine these buoys can take quite a pounding in heavy weather and from time to time the buoys themselves and associated ground tackle require replacement. Recently the partnership was kind enough to give us a grant for this purpose.

I said that the Fairway Committee works to the benefit of all bay users and there can sometimes be conflicts of interest between various user groups. Another project the committee carried out a few years back was to protect swimmers and users of this attractive sandy beach near the north end of the bay by means of a line of yellow demarcation buoys rendering what is now known as the families beach a no go area for boats including windsurfers and especially jetskis. Again this was made possible by a grant from MFP.

The matter of water safety around Findhorn was taken a stage further by the formation last year of MIRO – the Moray Inshore Rescue Organisation based at Findhorn Boatyard. This group was formed following a series of unofficial ad hoc rescues over recent years. A typical example of an incident occurs when people venture out onto the sands often in an effort to get close to our large seal colony and then become cut off by the incoming tide which can sometimes fill these channels in the sandbanks with frightening speed. With exceptional public support, the project quickly gathered momentum and we have purchased and equipped an inshore lifeboat. We are currently working hard to complete the training of our volunteer crews to a standard that meets the exacting requirements of the Maritime & Coastguard Agency and expect to become fully operational and to commence round

the clock cover within the next few weeks. This is another community project which has benefited from an grant from the partnership.

Like any community that can trace its origins back for many centuries, Findhorn is not short of Heritage material. Our Heritage Centre has been welcoming visitors for some 15 years. More recently we have acquired and restored a 150 year old commercial Icehouse and used it to house interpretive displays relating to the local Salmon netting industry and its associated activities. This new venture prompted us to completely rethink our displays in the original buildings particularly those relating to the lost port of Findhorn which was rediscovered on this musselbed at the mouth of the bay in 2002 – almost exactly 300 years after it had been covered by the sea when the River Findhorn changed course. I have to say that the discovery prompted some rather florid press coverage. A grant from our hosts today paid for materials for a self-help project to set up new displays that include actual stones from the lost port.

Just outside the Heritage Centre is evidence of another venture in which the partnership is involved. The Moray Coast Trail guides people through the edge of the village and onwards along the coast and forms part of the Moray Firth Trail which in turn is part of the larger North Sea Trail. You will note how we have cunningly had the post positioned to take walkers right past the door of our Heritage Centre.

What of the future? Well we in Findhorn are starting to look more across the Firth. Possible links are being considered with the already established volunteer lifeboat at Dornoch. We consider that there may be merit 'twinning' our small but I think excellent volunteer run Heritage Centre with an organisation of similar size and aims on the Northern shore of the Firth perhaps with a view to sharing ideas and marketing strategies. We are also looking at ways of increasing the number of yachts visiting Findhorn where we already offer free visitor moorings and of course a warm welcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen I hope that this has given the flavour of some of the projects that have been assisted by the partnership and on behalf of our Community I thank them.

Ladies & Gentlemen thank you for your attention.