

Coupar Angus Regeneration Trust

Chairperson's Annual Report 2007-2008

Introduction

The year was notable for two principal reasons, one very happy, and the other very sad. As far as the Townscape Heritage Initiative (THI) is concerned this was the best year to date since actual physical work began and I will describe that in more detail under the "Projects" heading below.

The sadness was occasioned by the death of a great friend of Coupar Angus, Crichton Lang. Crichton was a founder member of CART and had devoted much time and effort to the promotion of the work of the Trust and, in particular, the THI. His untimely death in September 2007 caused us all to reflect on what were trying to do and determine that we would continue if only to ensure that all that Crichton had worked for came to fruition. As can be read below we are now closer to realising those purposes than ever before. Anyone wishing to learn more about Crichton should read the appreciation published in the November edition of the *Coupar Angus bulletin*, the Trusts newsletter which I, or our Project Manager, Graham Young, can supply. It is also available on the CART website in the archive section.

Graham Young has worked with several local groups to try to develop new ideas for Coupar Angus and to encourage people to work together to achieve improvements. I am most grateful to him for all his work which is noted more fully under the "Projects" heading below.

I would also like to record my thanks to my fellow Trustees and all the people who have assisted CART throughout the year. There are too many to list but in addition to John McCrone and Sara Carruthers of Perth and Kinross Council, and Officers of Perthshire Housing Association, I would mention in particular Rachel Jackson who has continued to compile and edit the *Coupar Angus bulletin* from home. This monthly newsletter has become an essential feature of local life carrying news, diary dates, photographs of events and other material which might never have been available in any other form. I am also grateful to Culross, the local printers, for their professional and timeous work in publishing it.

Community Groups and Events

The 15th of March 2008 saw the third Coupar Angus Horse Fair which was again a highly successful event. CART has now fully transferred the running of this event to a Community Interest Company set up for that purpose. Given that increasing community capacity is one of the objectives of CART this can be counted an unqualified success and while we will be happy to help in any way we can in future I feel that this should be the last mention of the Horse Fair in this report other than if we support it in any material way in future.

Similarly the Pride of Place group has continued to develop and now has a very active committee and group of "on the ground" participants. They continue to raise more than adequate funds from their ceilidhs, table sales and charity shop weeks. This year has seen them acquire new hanging basket trees which will add to the floral displays in the town and they are negotiating with THI building owners to ensure that appropriate brackets and fixings for flower baskets are incorporated in the new façades. The same process is being carried on by the Illuminators (Christmas lights committee) to allow of their decorative displays being carried on the new frontages.

The Rural Renaissance Project will be treated under its own heading below but it is necessary to mention here the Friends of Larghan Park group (FoLP). This was set up by Perth and Kinross Council to give a direct liaison channel for local input to the park master plan process. That work was well advertised as likely to take some two years

but FoLP found it impossible to sustain their cohesion for so long and are now essentially a sub-group of the Pride of Place group who interact with the Parks Development Service when required. I have to say I found this disappointing but when reality strikes one has to deal with it and carry on.

The Blast in the Park fireworks event was again run by local company Blast Design and repeated the success of the previous year. CART's role in this was as co-ordinator and banker and through our auspices a grant of £1,200 was secured from Perth and Kinross Council's Parks Development Service. The event was enjoyed by many hundreds of people and will, we hope, be established as a regular feature of the early winter in Coupar Angus.

Projects

(a) Buildings and Townscape Heritage Initiative

The THI has been CART's most important project for a number of years but 2007 was the year when it really began to come together. All the painstaking work to develop the plan and source the funding has led to physical work for the first time. As I write this report both the Lodging House and the former Co-op building are under extensive renovation. Both will be used for affordable housing, the former by the long-term owner, Perth and Kinross Council, and the latter by its new owner, Perthshire Housing Association.

The official launch of the THI, held in Coupar Angus Town Hall on the 31st of January 2008, attracted well over 100 people who heard details of the scheme, saw the plans and frontage layouts, and saw the exhibition of drawings which was retained in the Town Hall foyer for two weeks after the event to allow everyone who wished to see them to do so. The company were addressed by myself, Provost John Hulbert, Historic Scotland and Sara Carruthers who is the THI Project Officer. In my own contribution I was delighted to be able to inform everyone that the Board of Perthshire Housing Association had agreed, unanimously, to name their development Crichton Lang Court to commemorate my colleague who, as noted in the introduction, sadly passed away in October 2007.

The former Royal Hotel, now owned by Ancaster Properties, is to be redeveloped as housing for sale. At present the final design details are being discussed by the Conservation and Regeneration section of Perth and Kinross Council's Environment Service and Historic Scotland.

I would like to record my thanks to the staff of Historic Scotland who conducted their stone conservation workshops at Coupar Angus Primary School on the 11th of June 2008. This was at the invitation of the THI Project Officer, Sara Carruthers, and was the first occasion such an activity had been run at a school. Having visited the event I can vouch for the fact that it was an unqualified success. The children were fascinated by the techniques demonstrated and participated fully in all the tasks presented to them. Indeed, so pleased was everyone with the day that Historic Scotland intend to pursue this avenue across Scotland in future.

Further on the educational front, I am pleased to say that liaison is taking place between the THI and both Dundee University and Perth College. Students are being seconded from both to learn from and assist with the THI and I hope very much that their experience will stand them in good stead for their own careers in conservation and thus the heritage of our country.

The THI Executive Committee, on which both Graham Young and I (now) serve, has been meeting regularly since August 2007 to manage the project overall and consider applications for grant aid from the common fund. The resources have been sourced from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Perth and Kinross Council, Historic Scotland, Communities Scotland, Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust and CART. The total is some

£1.8 million. Additionally there are non-heritage funds from Communities Scotland, Perth and Kinross Council's commuted sums fund from developers for affordable housing and, as the work of restoring architectural detail progresses, contributions from building owners. I am grateful to all these organisations and individuals for their contributions without which little would have been possible.

Finally in this section I am pleased to note that on the 28th of August 2007 the Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee of Perth and Kinross Council agreed the report number 07/557 entitled *Conservation of built heritage – Coupar Angus Conservation Area*. This report delineated the extension of the current Conservation Area to include the C18 Tollbooth tower and other important buildings south of the line of the dismantled railway which is now occupied by Burnside Road. This has been approved by the Scottish Ministers.

(b) Coupar Angus Rural Renaissance

As noted in my last annual report a bid was made to the Big Lottery's Environmental Justice Fund for money to embark on this project. Sadly that bid did not succeed but nonetheless CART has been able to participate in the plan to regenerate Larghan Park which was part of the larger scheme. Graham Young, our Project Manager, has served on the Project Board and has been instrumental in reaching the point where tendering for the various works to be carried out in the park is close to beginning.

The total funding required to carry out the entire master plan for the park is £462,902. Of this the sum of £413,944 has been secured from various sources leaving a potential deficit of £25,958 should certain other funding bids not succeed.

I am most grateful to those organisations which have contributed to the total to date. These are Perth and Kinross Council (£287,000 from the capital plan), the Gannochy Trust (£40,000), Quality of Life Trust (£20,000), Perth and Kinross Council Corporate Financial Assistance Fund (£12,800), Tayside Biodiversity Fund (£8,006), and Awards for All, courtesy of a bid by the Coupar Angus and District Heritage Association (£7,238) to permit the re-use of the historic stone and wrought iron gates. Planning gain has also contributed £23,300 while CART has allocated £13,000 and local fund raising is ongoing.

I wish to express my thanks to all those involved in this process but most particularly to our Project Manager Graham Young who has directed the scheme, Erin Griffith of the Parks Development Service and Joe Richards, one of my fellow Trustees who, as chair of the Heritage Association, was instrumental, along with their Secretary, John Easson, in the successful Awards for All bid.

(c) Community Garden

Throughout the year our Project Manager has been meeting with the various groups who might be interested in this idea. These have included the Pride of Place group, Coupar Angus, Ardler and Bendochy Community Council, staff of Coupar Angus Primary School, the Abbey Church Youth Clubs and the ToCH committee. It is intended to hold further discussions to try to determine the type of garden to be created, its location and, most importantly, its sustainability.

(d) Halls

Owners of all the halls in Coupar Angus were contacted and invited to discuss possible joint action to improve facilities in the town. This might have been by disposing of some of the sites for capital receipts to be invested in a new building or by other co-operative means. The response to this approach was, frankly, extremely disappointing and unless more of the owners are prepared to enter into discussions there is little chance of the project reaching stage 2 which would have involved building surveys, options appraisal, site identification, funding streams and so on.

(d) Environmental Projects

As noted in last year's report, the idea of floodlighting the Abbey ruins was shelved until the result of the process to extend the Conservation Area was known. As described above this has been successfully concluded so CART will seek, during the coming months, to progress this idea.

Both the Rural Renaissance and Community Garden projects have been detailed under their own headings above as they are major items now in their own right. Thus I shall say no more of them here.

In more general terms the work of the Pride of Place group, which CART will support whenever possible, is addressing many of the subjects relevant to this section so again there is no need of separate material here.

(e) Socio-Economic Concerns

The new housing to be provided in the three THI critical project buildings will go some way to addressing the shortage of housing in Coupar Angus and its environs and we look forward to their completion and occupation. However, more is needed, and CART is in active discussion with Perthshire Housing Association to try to locate further development sites and/or building conversion possibilities.

Graham Young and I will be meeting again with Perthshire Housing Association to review any and all possibilities and thereafter approaching land owners with a view to securing sites for new housing.

In terms of employment I have been in contact with a number of local businesses who have expressed an interest in expanding in Coupar Angus and have met with relevant staff of the Council's Economic Development and Planning Services to explore the possibility of creating a new light industrial area in the town. The reaction was good and as a consequence of the discussion I shall be formally requesting that the process of site investigation be started. CART's role in this will include liaison with local businesses and land owners to secure the necessary agreements to proceed.

The purchase of Grampian Country Foods by the international company VION is another area of concern. Meetings have been requested with their senior management by local MPs, MSPs and Perth and Kinross Council but as yet it is not possible to discern what their intentions for the Coupar Angus plant are. Naturally we hope that it will be seen by them as a strategically vital facility as it has in the past and that the 500+ jobs therein can be secured.

Communication

As noted above Rachel Jackson has continued to produce the *Coupar Angus bulletin* from her home near Kirriemuir with a print run of 1,000 copies. The success of this publication can be measured in various ways but perhaps the easiest to appreciate is that it has been necessary in recent times to increase the number of pages to include all the material submitted. Despite this the publication remains free of charge and we hope that can be maintained. Funding is currently being sought to allow it to continue but it is secure until the August 2008 issue at least. As in the past I would express our gratitude to the shops and other outlets who permit us space to distribute the *Bulletin*.

The CART website <http://www.coupar-angus.org> continues to be monitored and updated by our voluntary webmaster Dave Scott. We are very grateful to him for the time and effort he puts into this medium and take very seriously his continuing concern that local groups, despite there being no cost involved, are not yet making sufficient use of it. It is my intention to contact them again to re-emphasise the advantages they can get from this free publicity tool which is currently attracting well over 300 hits each month.

Regarding the intention to publish a new edition of the book entitled *Close-up on Coupar Angus* by Margaret Laing, I fear little progress has been made. The varying types of files and formats which the text and photographs exist in are making it a very difficult job to compile a definitive version. I have not given up hope, however, and will continue to try to bring this to a successful conclusion.

Community Consultation and Involvement/Development of the Trust

I have conjoined these headings on this occasion since this has effectively been the situation over the last year. The Trustees have discussed the future format of the Trust at length on a number of occasions and, recently, had a joint meeting with members of the Community Council who have been debating the creation of a Development Trust. This route has also been examined by CART and on the 30th of January 2008 we held a meeting with the then chair of the Community Council to hear the Development Trust Association's Development Officer describe the development trust model. Since then another fuller meeting has been held to try to discern a way forward but for the moment CART is not of a mind to wind up. We believe there is too much at stake in terms of the THI and the park redevelopment to risk a lack of continuity. Equally, the Community Council's sub-group wish to complete their research into sheltered housing requirements before determining their way forward. Thus CART envisages remaining in its current form for the foreseeable future.

Perth and Kinross Council Liaison

As in the past this has taken the form of regular attendance at CART meetings by John McCrone, the Council's Conservation and Regeneration Manager and we are most grateful for his continued support and invaluable advice. In addition we now have Sara Carruthers in post as the THI Project Officer who is working with the owners of the buildings identified for restoration of architectural detail to aggregate suitable ranges of frontage for treatment. Sara has reported that the initial reaction has been good but it will take some time before groups of owners can go to tender for architectural services and works. CART receives regular reports from the THI Executive Committee through our own Project Manager Graham Young.

Conclusion

I am more pleased than I can say that my hope in last year's conclusion that renovation works would begin during 2007 has been realised. Now we must keep this process moving thus deriving the maximum benefit we can for Coupar Angus and its people.

Alan D. Grant,
Chair of CART

9th July 2008