

# **Holmehill Ltd**

**Annual General Meeting: August 31<sup>st</sup> 2010**

## **Chairman's Report**

This past year has been one of continuing progress and the achievement of some important milestones concerning the interests of the Holmehill Community Buyout Group. And whilst we have seen some changes to the key personnel involved, we retain a strong focus on our core long-term aim - to take the hill in to community ownership and, alongside this, to ensure its protection and encourage its sustainable development and use by both the local community and visitors to Dunblane.

Our last AGM was held in June 2009, but such has been the activities of late, that in presenting this short report, I have tried to cover the period up until the end of August 2010, rather than just restrict it to a specific year, and also to properly thank the members and others within the local community who have contributed to this success.

I should therefore begin by recognising the work of my predecessor, Caroline Crawford and thanking her for her contributions. Caroline decided to step down as Chair of the Group in December 2009. Her commitment to the Group and her hard work over the last few years to support its development will be a hard act to follow, but I am delighted that she has agreed to stay on the Board.

Replacing one's chairman is hard enough, but earlier in 2009, we also needed to find a new Secretary as, after many years close involvement with the Group, Steve Mason decided to stand down. As with Caroline, it is hard to adequately express our thanks for the tremendous work done by Steve over the years, but again I am delighted that Steve agreed not only to stay on the Board, but to act as Treasurer, thus ensuring we have access to his wealth of knowledge and advice in the future. In persuading Libby Hughes to take on the role of Secretary, we are most fortunate that the high standards of communication and support to the committee and indeed the whole membership has been maintained and enhanced. I would like to thank them both.

The year has seen the production of a number of Holmehill publications, beginning in August with the new *Dunblane green spaces Walks leaflet*. We would like to thank Scottish Natural Heritage and the Dunblane Hydro hotel for their sponsorship, and particularly the group who put it together, Caroline, Alison, Phill and Libby. The launch at the hotel was well attended and received good coverage in the local press, while the leaflets themselves, which are free, have been widely distributed.

Christmas saw the production of our second *Holmehill calendar*, featuring a range of pictures of the hill and Dunblane through the seasons, taken by local enthusiasts and members. The 500 copies printed were all sold, thanks to the assistance of local retailers, and the efforts of members. Again, a special thanks to Caroline and Alan for much work on formatting, and to Dave Prescott for organising distribution. Rather than repeat it this Christmas, we shall be producing four new cards, though without any particular inscriptions so they can be used any time of the year.

The third major publication this year was *Memories of Holmehill* – the results of the Oral History Project, led by Lorraine, Rosemary and Malcolm, with assistance from Alan and Caroline. 300 copies of this A4 booklet were produced and again, like the other productions, these have been widely distributed throughout the local area. Together, they enable us to showcase the Group and present the results of our work at meetings, at the Fling in the local libraries and museum, as well as being available to send to supporters and local representatives.

Beyond regular updates to the membership, our other main form of external communication remains the Holmehill website ([www.holmehill.org](http://www.holmehill.org)) and the blog. ([www.holmehillblog.org](http://www.holmehillblog.org)). Both have been updated this year, and thanks are again due to Grant and Steve for their help, and to Libby and Chris for regular contributions.

The arrival of a new secretary and chairman was also the impetus for writing to our elected representatives in Dunblane and Stirling, and reminding them of our existence and aims. We were delighted that of those we approached, Dunblane Councillor Colin Finlay, Dunblane Councillor (and Leader of Stirling Council) Graham Houston and our local MSP Bruce Crawford all accepted our invitation to meet, and we held productive meetings with each.

Perhaps the most important activity this year has been our detailed work scrutinising and then responding to the Stirling Local Development Plan, and in particular to the Main Issues Report. Expressions of interest from developers in the whole Dunblane area were laid out for public view in a special edition of the Dunblane Community View. This included a full picture of Allan Water Developments' proposals for Holmehill and Bogside, as of July 2009. Along with an interest from Stirling Council themselves in part of the Bogside area, Allan Water's proposals represent the greatest current threat to the future of Holmehill and its immediate surroundings, and challenging these proposals goes right to the core of our existence.

The Board has worked hard to produce a response; meeting with the Planners, attending a range of public meetings and consulting extensively with members. Our response (available on the website) firmly rejects these proposals, whilst at the same time promoting the sustainable development of the whole area for wildlife and enhanced community use. I am particularly proud that the resulting letter of response from the Holmehill Group was forged by the Board working with the membership in an open and transparent manner, and was the subject of an open meeting in July, prior to the final version being submitted to the Council. I feel that it is vital that we continue to work in such an open and inclusive way, whilst being true to our main aims and objectives at all times.

At the same time, the Board has also responded to Stirling Council's Open Space Strategy. Again, we have firmly reiterated our belief that the whole of Holmehill, including Bogside should be protected and developed for the community as an open space. It already has such great value for wildlife, education, recreation, walking and leisure; an importance that can and should be enhanced through better management and improved access.

Finally, and most importantly, we should not forget that as in previous years the Group has also been very active actually on the ground! As ever, our ability to

improve the area, to share its value with others, and to interpret its environmental interest and recreational potential is limited by the current ownership. We are concerned that no active management of the site has been undertaken, such that the walls are beginning to crumble, and the trees and meadows remain unmanaged. Nevertheless, we are delighted that the Council, ably supported by our members, have now erected new footpath signs across Holmehill from Perth Road and Braeport. Until now, both entrances were very unwelcoming, indeed discouraging of any access, whereas within minutes of erection of the signs, we had folk entering on to the hill, having previously not dared go in!

Whilst, we did not hold a Family Fun day this year, a number of other events proved attractive, not least our third Annual Dawn Chorus on May 9<sup>th</sup>, led by Chris and Douglas Kerr. Some 30 folk enjoyed a very early morning guided walk around the Hill and then across in to the Laighhills and along the river, recording 42 species of bird. This was followed by a cooked breakfast in the Braeport Centre, once again provided by members and supporters, led by Claire, Debbie and Libby.

Chris has also continued with his bimonthly surveys of birds on the hill, reporting regularly now on the Holmehill Wildlife blog. Highlights for this last year included breeding by Tawny Owls and Stock Doves, as well as by our resident Roe Deer. Other birds of interest over the winter included Waxwings, Brambling and Woodcock, as well as a Peregrine that for a while roosted on the cathedral spire! In summer, a Green Woodpecker, a soaring Goshawk and the migrant chiffchaffs and Blackcaps joined the resident rooks, with some 89 nests counted this year.

September 2009 saw a wildlife excursion of a different kind, when we were held our first ever Bat evening – with a talk and walk led by Scottish bat expert and local resident, Annie Youngman. This was highly successful with some 60 folk attending the presentation in the Braeport, and then being shown Pipestrelle and Daubenton's bats, identified with bat detectors, as we walked round the area at night.

Life has not all been wildlife though, and once again we are indebted to Dave Topliff for arranging the evening of Story-telling at the Braeport Centre on October 30<sup>th</sup>, though numbers attending were disappointing. And again, it is to Dave that we also owe thanks for his organisation of the now annual March Blues night in Dunblane. Not only do these and other such activities raise the profile and interest in the Hill and the Group's work, they also help raise funds for our activities.

Several members of the Board helped represent the Group at the annual Dunblane & Doune Fling down by the river. This is always a good community event and gives us a great opportunity to talk to local residents and visitors, showcase our publications and what we are doing, create interest in Holmehill and engage with newcomers.

Finally then, can I once again thank the members of the Board and the wider membership for their continuing support for the work of the Group. We are always looking for new members and for new ideas – so please feel free to come and along and get involved!

Professor Chris J Spray MBE  
Chairman of Holmehill Ltd.

August 2010