
Managing Director's Report

This is our opportunity to look back over the year and reflect on what we've achieved and learned. Tonight's AGM covers 2024 which is detailed in the Annual Report that you've all received. I'm happy to answer questions on that at the end.

But now, I'm going to look at 2025 which has been another busy year for us, too much to cover this evening so I've picked out a few of our highlights and what's been keeping us busiest. Sign up to blog

We now have two fantastic buildings where our activity takes place, The GALE Centre which we've been operating since 2012 and this fantastic space in the Shielling which we've been working on since 2024.

Over this past year we've been spreading our activity across both spaces testing out how each space works best.

Slide - activities

We're still very much in the learning and experimenting stage. When we acquired the Shielling in 2024 we were given the opportunity to take two years to pilot a range of projects and activities, testing out our new space and how best to use it. The first year ended in September so we're now in year two.

All of these have been local suggestions that have come out of our consultation.

Thank those who have come and supported them or given feedback

Most interest and potential in – ie front runners in pilot at the minute

- Refillery – steady growth with a core group of regular, repeat customers and more coming on board each month. Underestimated the behavioural change element of buying loose/by weight, price concern – matching supermarkets or going organic. Cooking styles are changing.
- Bakery – Available online and fortnightly via Friday bake stall. Mixed response – some regulars but not enough to make it viable yet
- Events – Demand is for informal social gatherings but with an organised element. Trialing this further but keen for more suggestions and feedback
- Young Bakers – 3 volunteers teaching kids and vulnerable adults to cook and bake.
- Workspace – not very glamorous but invaluable. Kitchen, prep room, chill and ambient storage, desk and meeting space, laundry facilities. All have been transformative when it comes to making our activities possible – Refillery, bakery and GC cafe

Challenges across both assets – significantly rising costs (staff, utilities etc), coupled with reduced customer spend and footfall in 2025 putting pressure on finance. Despite the challenges we are still committed to 7 day, year round opening. Something we are proud of but comes at a huge cost and is something we debate a lot internally,

Slide - Volunteer Programme

Much of this activity has only been made possible thanks to our fabulous team of staff and volunteers. Our Volunteer Programme supported 38 volunteers in the past 12 months and we are still one of only a few organisations in the north of Scotland that have the Investing in Volunteering accreditation – a mark of the quality of the volunteering experience we provide.

Volunteering is a great way to shape our work and have a say over what happens at GALE. Volunteers are the lifeblood of what we do, they shape our work through contributing ideas and turning those ideas into practical action from delivering inspiring talks and workshops, to serving customers in the Shielling and GALE

Centre, taking responsibility for the governance of the organisation on our Board of Directors, teaching young people cookery skills, litter-picking, helping provide transport, befriending – and much more

We invest heavily in our volunteers, providing one to one support when needed, covering expenses and fuelling our helpers with plenty of home baking. We spend over £20K per year on our volunteer programme. This funding comes from public donations and the income we generate from our trading activity.

Numbers

All of our activity is about making our area a better place for people of all abilities to live, work and thrive. A key part of a thriving community is about having accessible economic opportunities for everyone who needs and wants them. We directly support about 5% of our population with earned income. Here are some figures I think we can all be proud of.

Looking ahead to 2026

Housing Strategy

This is following on from our CAP produced in 2022. It clearly identified housing as a issue of local concern. We went on to carry out a housing needs survey in 2023 and the next step is a housing strategy. See slide

HECP

Aim to decarbonise home energy across Ross and Cromarty, reducing our carbon footprint and also improving the housing stock in our area, making it warmer, more comfortable and reducing fuel poverty locally.

It's a 5 year project funded by the UK Lottery and of interest nationally with other parts of the UK looking to potentially learn from it.

We're one of 5 community partners delivering the project in our own communities. The others are Coigach DC, Garve and District CDT, Lochbroom and Ullapool CT, Contin DT and TBI,

All partners have recruited Energy Officer's across the year – Photo of Energy Officers

Photo of Simon – here tonight if you have any queries. He's still undergoing a vast amount of training as it is a complex area but should know his stuff early next year

Look out for our Energy Awareness month in Feb when we'll launch properly.