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AN SUIDHE WIND FARM COMMUNITY FUND HELPS TRANSFORM VILLAGE LIFE

Furnace Amenity Association plays an important role within the local Argyll village community. It owns and manages the village hall and runs a range of community events throughout the year.

An Suidhe Wind Farm is operated by innogy, it has provided grants totalling almost £50,000 to help the Amenity Association turn an ageing village hall into a vibrant modernised hub for the local community. The new welcoming environment has also resulted in more local residents attending events including many more young people.

Over the past few years they have received grants allowing them to add a small extension to the hall to accommodate a meeting room and a bar so as to offset the loss of the village pub. Combined with replacement windows, new seating, a hot water cylinder and acoustic panels this much needed funding transformed the building.

Mike Masters, Chair of the Amenity Association added, "The new extension has become our new village Social Club. The replacement windows have improved the appearance and comfort and is helping to attract a wider cross section of the community with younger people getting involved in activities like carpet bowls! Our monthly bingo session now fills the hall and brings people in from a wider area."

Hall user, Margaret Miller, said "The new acoustic panels in the hall have made a great difference. We can now hear the dialogue so much better during the film nights, and even meetings are a lot better". She also said that her husband has really appreciated the new hot water system in the kitchen for when he has to do the washing up after events.



Keen to improve the area outside the hall, volunteers cleared the undergrowth which enabled the village to hold a 'Big Villge Picnic' to celebrate the Queen's Baton Relay for the Commonwealth Games. They had to borrow picnic benches from the Forrestry Commission for this event. However, a grant from the Innogy Renewables UK An Suidhe Community Fund has paid for new concrete benches and a permanent brick built barbecue and it is hoped that the

development of this space will enable the community to hold more outdoor events in the future.

Funding has also played an important role in improving accessibility to the hall from the Queen Elizabeth cottage housing scheme, home to 45 residents. Lighting and improvements to the footpath have made access to the hall much safer for local people as well children using the playground and playing field.

Mike Masters said, "Without the improvements, residents would have to travel four times the distance to reach the same destination and with 30 older members of the community living in the housing scheme, the pathway lighting has made their journey much shorter and safer. It has also encouraged the families living there to come into the village and get involved in activities. "

With visitors in mind, the Amenity Association applied for funding to improve the Leacainn walk. This is a key local attraction within local woodland and increasingly popular with locals and visitors alike. A grant from the An Suidhe community benefit fund helped with the cost of drainage repairs to the walk.

Local resident, Richard Joynson commented "Just want to express some appreciation for the improvements to the Leacainn Walk as it has been wet recently and the recent drainage work is proving to be really worthwhile. It's a much more pleasant experience. Keep up the good work!"

Further grants have funded other improvements such as a loop system at the hall for the hard of hearing. Micro grants have helped local groups purchase a new set of bowls and run taster sessions for Zumba and Yoga. A projector for the Combined Operations museum has enabled them to take their story to other interested parties such as old folks homes and the British Legion. The camera club also received a grant to help create a permanent exhibition of 'Furnace Past and Present' in the new hall.

Another grant supported the printing of a booklet detailing the lives and background of each person named on the village war memorial. There are several relatives of those named on the memorial still living in the village and booklet has formed a great addition to recordings of local history.

Looking forward Mike Masters said, "There is no doubt that this significant funding has contributed to the sustainability of our local community. We also hope that our new facilities will encourage people to come forward with ideas for new enterprises such as providing bar meals or a daytime café and continue to enhance the quality of life for our residents and visitors alike."

