

Friends of Colintrave Church

Annual Report 2025

The AGM was last held on 18 March 2025. At that time, we had just received and were able to share the Architectural Report (RIBA Stage 2) although we had not had time to analyse it in detail. We shared the design drawings showing the planned layout following refurbishment. This report included a costed QS Condition Survey and measured surveys as well as design drawings. It is proving invaluable now as we grapple with the need for repairs and the way ahead. We are now in a position to discuss it in more detail and a hard copy is available to view later on.

Now, looking back on the last year, it's fair to say that it was dominated by negotiations to purchase the building which formally commenced between the FoCC solicitor and a Church of Scotland solicitor in February '25. FoCC had offered to meet and to negotiate directly with Kirk Session before this but with no uptake. By 17 April, we were notified that there was no leeway in the price, despite 'considerable' essential repairs which had been identified in our survey, at a potential cost of £50,000. A formal offer of £50,000 was then lodged by FoCC at the end of April.

This formal offer was stated to be "financially acceptable" to the Kirk Session and was announced as such, on 11 May by the Church of Scotland Moderator for the region, in a church service. This was welcome news for FoCC but was then dampened by hearing that the offer would only be ratified by the whole Kirk Session, subject to clawbacks being imposed. These were that if the building was sold, or developed for anything other than community use over the next ten years then the KS would be entitled to a payment of "the greater of £20K and 50% of the uplift". There was no way that FoCC could accept this provision over such an unusually long period of time and potentially a lot of money. However, on 30 June, FoCC agreed the actual principle of a clawback being imposed.

At this point, there is a need to thank both Euan Macdonald of Stewart & Bennett solicitors in Dunoon and Claire Macleod, FoCC Trustee, for taking us through the exceptionally long and tortuous negotiations - until finally reaching an acceptable conclusion culminating in the purchase completion on 27 March 2026. Thus marking more than a year of negotiating and waiting for responses.

In the end, we had to accept clawback conditions on the sale but these are significantly more benign than at the outset. In summary, FoCC paid £50K, from £75K which had been received from donations and pledges. If we sell the building within 5 years of purchase or obtain planning permission to develop the building away from community use within 5 years and then sell it within 10 years, then FoCC will be required to pay the KS 50% of the uplift (profit) on the sale price, after discounting the cost of all works and repairs, capped at a maximum of £20,000. This is considered to be acceptable and relatively benign. It's important to note that the clawback does not in any way prevent us from making any changes we want but it may in limited circumstances mean that we will need to make a further payment to the Kirk Session if we then sell and make a profit.

In addition, and after further negotiation, agreement was reached regarding the memorials in the church, including the stained-glass windows. These remain the property of West Cowal Churches and will be 'on loan' to FoCC until such time that we either sell the building or make a decision to permanently remove them from the building.

So, in summary it has been quite a difficult and tortuous year and it is true to say that we were never sure that we would be successful in securing the building. Consequently, we have not had a chance to fully explore further funding options although we are fully aware that this will be necessary, that it's a hard road and that this is actually only the beginning, even although we are several years in already. More of that later but suffice to say we have two applications currently submitted and in consideration with Argyll and Bute council.

There are a few other significant milestones during the year which should be noted as, for sure, there has been work going on in the background.

- over the year we have received several anonymous donations from individuals and from events. These have all been hugely welcome and much appreciated.

- on 21 December a very successful 'Songs for Christmas' event was held right here in the church. Huge thanks are extended to Findlay Peters who played the music and has even agreed to return this year to play for us on 13 Dec. 30 people attended the event last year and 50% of the donations went to Help! Dunoon and 50% to FoCC (£245.50). Huge thanks to Joan Edgar who was and is the instigator of this event.

So, this meeting is seen as a very significant milestone but also very important as we need to gather feedback and views from everyone to use on funding applications. So, please, do consider the questions and please give us your thoughts and comments on the paper provided.

It is hoped that we can breathe new life into the building so that it can be loved and used in a wider variety of uses than in the past and can remain in and for the community. To do that we will need local support - the building is for the community and we hope you will let us know later in the meeting what you think of our general plans for it.

In addition to all donors, I need to note significant financial support from and thanks to Cruach Mhor Windfarm Trust, most recently for conveyancing fees; to Euan Macdonald (solicitor) for restricting his fees after such long negotiations; to Sheelah Jess who used to live in the vicinity but now only supports from afar - for several welcome donations and to Bute Signs for giving us such a good price for the new noticeboard.

Finally, thanks go to all the committee for hanging in there through thick and thin over the last year through some very tricky times and deliberations and especially to Claire MacLeod and Wendy Black. Claire for her negotiations over the sale, even at times while abroad on holiday and to Wendy for keeping us all on track with her minutes and for organising the great new sign so quickly for TidesMeet at the entrance.

Trustees for Friends of Colintrave Church / TidesMeet