

Rathlin Development and Community Association

Members' Annual Report

Year ended 31 March 2023

The members present their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2023.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	Rathlin Development and Community Association
Charity registration number	XT29073 & NIC100
Principal office	The Resource Centre Rathlin Island Co Antrim Antrim

The members

Mr Michael Cecil (Chair)
Ms Patricia McCurdy (Vice Chair) (Retired 27 January 2023)
Ms Marianne Green (Treasurer)
Mr Fergus McFaul
Ms Marina McMullan (Secretary)
Mr Tom McDonnell
Mr Ciaran McCurdy
Mr Pablo Mitchell
Miss Millie Eyre

Independent examiner	S O'Neill & Company 14 Main Street Toomebridge Co. Antrim Northern Ireland BT41 3TQ
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Structure, governance and management

The Committee Members present their report and the financial statements for the year ended 31 March 2023

The day to day decision making is undertaken by the Development Officer under the guidance of the Chairman. Decisions of strategy and policy making are taken by the full Board of Committee Members with financial matters being addressed by the Association Treasurer as outlined in the Corporate Governance Procedures and Controls Report.

It is the responsibility of the Committee along with the Development Officer to ensure Funders regulations are met and adhered to.

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Members' Annual Report *(continued)*

Year ended 31 March 2023

Objectives and activities

Rathlin Development and Community Association (RDCA) objectives are to enhance community capacity and involvement in community development work, to ensure that basic services and infrastructure are provided and to improve access to services, to encourage appropriate economic development and advance policies for a sustainable island community and to promote the benefit of the residents of Rathlin Island (the "area of benefit") without distinction of age, gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, political, religious or other opinion by associating with the statutory authorities, voluntary organisations and inhabitants in a common effort to:

- advance community development;
- advance education;
- advance health;
- relieve those in need by reason of youth, age, ill-health, disability, financial hardship or other disadvantage;
- provide facilities in the interest of social welfare for recreation and other leisure-time occupation with the object of improving the conditions of life for the said inhabitants; and
- continue protection of the environment.

Our aim is to develop a vibrant and healthy community and increase the involvement of islanders in the development of policies and projects that improve conditions for all the people of the island.

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Achievements and performance

Three major RDCA projects continued to make meaningful progress.

LIFE RAFT: The RDCA continues to play an active part in the Rathlin Acting for Tomorrow (RAFT) project, a major, 5-year biodiversity restoration and enhancement project. The project is funded by EU LIFE programme, DAERA, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The major focus is the eradication of non-native predator species (rats and ferrets), for the benefit of ground nesting birds and the island's seabird breeding colonies, some of the biggest in the UK. The project also includes a significant socioeconomic development strand, aimed at maximising the opportunities the project will provide for strengthening the island's social fabric and economy, particularly assisting with post-COVID recovery. This aspect of the project began a new phase in the first three months of 2023 with support from Appreciating People and the asset-based community development tools of appreciative inquiry. The eradication programme is in preparation for its first phase over the 2023/24 winter, with additional benefits to the island from increased employment opportunities in the team, accommodation uptake and other financial spin-offs through a variety of food and service providers. The project continues to capture the attention of environmental and conservation agencies at international level, not least due to the LIFE Raft projects unique aspects. Work continues towards the launch of a new website for the RDCA which will include a dedicated platform for the LIFE Raft programmes. RDCA also continues its full participation in other environmental initiatives, such as the European Marine Site and Environmental Forum.

East Lighthouse project: This large-scale project continues to be a major focus for some of the RDCA Committee and the East Lighthouse Project Board. As well as ensuring all foundational surveys and studies are in place and as robust as possible, an initial application was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund for a first development stage, including a development worker and resources for the design and implementation of preliminary programmes associated with the opportunity of East Lighthouse development.

Rathlin 360° Destination Green: Continuing the RDCA commitment to achieve carbon negativity by 2030, Energy Co-ops Ireland completed and presented a final report from a comprehensive scoping study outlining how Rathlin Island can become an exemplary beacon of sustainability for Northern Ireland. It explored how maritime expertise of the North Antrim region may develop an innovative hydrogen vessel geared towards the future offshore service vessel sector. The study commissioned by the Rathlin Sustainable Island Network identified economic growth opportunities on Rathlin Island and in North Antrim from the potential for energy generation from natural resources for use on the island, energy storage and export to grid exploring the electrification of the Island's energy demand. It demonstrated an economic opportunity in North Antrim manufacturing fuel cell electric RIB vessels (FCEV RIB) and plotted a path to achieving a sustainable transport solution for the island with hydrogen powered ferries. The report formed part of the background material for a Green Ambitions Day at the end of 2022, with representatives from five NI government departments, Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, the Centre for Advanced Sustainable Energy (QUB) and others. Recommendations were made to explore options for further government funding and investment. (NI Government Executive entered another sustained period of absence shortly afterwards.) Meanwhile, previous support from the Dept for Infrastructure's Blue/Green Infrastructure Funding Programme to develop a Rathlin E-transport scheme began to bear fruit. A seven-seat hybrid car entered community use and has begun to be well-used by community members. Twenty e-bikes were purchased and, pending the securement of insurance and a purpose-designed shelter, will then be on loan within the community, with others for hire to visitors at commercial rates. As Rathlin increasingly presents an opportunity to consider trialling Government Departments commitment to addressing the climate crisis and to developing transition plans to renewable options, the RDCA engagement with Departments has increased. Conversations began with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, in Westminster, with a view to creating an Islands Forum. Representatives from islands around the UK would be involved, most represented by Councils. Rathlin would be represented from within the community, with additional support from the Department for Infrastructure.

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Other activities:

Manor House: At the close of 2021, the operators of the Manor House (RDCA social enterprise, Guest House and Restaurant) made RDCA aware of their financial difficulties and wish to leave their contract early. Through sensitive management of this situation, the contract was closed and an interim, one-year, contract offered to an island business, MC Catering. The new team inherited some considerable work needed to the fabric of the building as well as some debts from previous operators. The new operators' financial commitment to the Rathlin CIC/RDCA was waived for the first year to enable some of the work to be done. By the beginning of March 2023 MC Catering were able to accept a contract and trading began again in April. This has continued with welcome success.

Ferry service: Through the second half of 2022-2023 there was considerable concern over the security of the ferry service, mostly rooted in financial commitments between the government subsidisers and the operators. This had deep impact on ferry staff, most of whom are island residents, and eventually led to limited industrial action. The ferry operators declared themselves insolvent and ceased trading at the beginning of January 2023. A new contract had been negotiated by DfI and awarded to new operators. The process involved RDCA at various levels, including meetings with DfI, ferry operators and Unite the Union, as well as continual communication with island residents. Although the lifeline ferry service for the island was enabled to continue and most of the jobs secured, ongoing issues remain regarding the closure of previous contracts. The events underlined the vital importance of a good, reliable ferry service for the sustainability of the island. The ferry business is also the biggest secure employment provider for the island and has major importance for the island's economy and sustainability.

Future Island-Island proposal: In January 2023 a call was launched by Arts and Humanities Research Council for Green Transition Ecosystems projects. Ulster University led a team involving Queens University and a small representation from Glasgow School of Art and University of the Arts London, working intensively to craft a proposal collaborators and activities across Northern Ireland. The proposal submitted in March 2023 is for an extensive team of designers and researchers from academia and business to engage with the Rathlin community in a co-design project around the circular economy. The project includes five strands: managing organic and product waste, improving tourism sustainability through digital resources, and building on these experiences for better green education and green policy design. The RDCA is a partner in the application which, if successful, would run from October 2023 to May 2025. (NB. The application was successful, and the project is under way.)

Youth work: thanks to excellent support from key youth workers in the Education Authority, the children and young people of the island have been able to participate in a regular, weekly programme of activities, including some residential opportunities and frequent inclusion in programmes with young people from Ballycastle and Portrush. This activity has strengthened the confidence and capacity of our young people, offering successful youth training for some, and increasing the opportunities for some to place their time and skills at the service of their own community. This initiative has been further strengthened by ongoing work with Gael na Glinntí Irish Language Development programme

Rathlin Sound Maritime Festival: This successful celebration of Rathlin's maritime heritage and culture was able to take place again in May/June of 2022 after a two-year period of absence due to COVID. The ten-day Festival, in partnership with Ballycastle Community Development Group, Causeway Maritime Heritage Group, and the Causeway Coast and Glens Council ensured the island was at its capacity for accommodation and activities for all ages were plentiful. It attracted, as though its history since beginning in 2013, many visitors who arrive in their own boats, some from the northern Scottish isles, others from the Republic of Ireland, Britain, and elsewhere.

Ongoing advocacy and lobbying: Examples, not exhaustive, of regular RDCA activities, some completed, some ongoing...

- Floating Support (an important island support service that was closed before, during and after lockdown and only began to be restored in October 2022)
- Health - review of island health and wellbeing services, support, and opportunities; nursing support; prescription deliveries; First Responders/CPR/Defibrillators, etc

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- Roads - (continuing concerns affected by halving of regional roads budget)
- Ferry - ongoing engagement with all parties concerned to date
- Housing - after lobbying for additional social housing programme, including through latent housing need surveys, a new Rural Housing Association scheme to provide ten social housing units (single occupancy, two-bed and three bed units) began, with the initial sod-cutting in June 2022. Due to representation from RDCA and collaboration with RHA renewable heating options have been included in the build.

Networks: The RDCA has active membership with many related and sectoral networks. This is a two-way flow with RDCA benefitting from the connections, resources, knowledge, and links to others. The networks are increasingly aware of and responsive to the activities on Rathlin, seeking out the RDCA and often inviting participation in other forums. The following list is not exhaustive but gives an indication of the wider network activity through the Resource Centre.

- Rural Community Network (RCN)
- Age-friendly Network
- Development Trust NI (DTNI)
- Island Innovation (global island network with annual Virtual Summit)
- Northern Area Community Network (NACN)
- NI Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA)
- Heritage Trust Network (HTN)
- GenComm (GENerating energy secure COMMunities through Smart Renewable Hydrogen)
- Islands Forum (Department for Levelling Up, Housing & Communities, Westminster)
- BEIS (Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) Islands Working Group

The RDCA is grateful for the continuing funding support for salaries and running costs from the Department for Communities' (DfC) Community Investment Fund (CIF), with supplementary support from the Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council.

The RDCA was - and is - only able to fulfil such an intensive programme of activities and working relationships with a strategic spread of Government Departments, Council, and agencies thanks to the ready commitment of the volunteer Committee, giving time and energy in the gaps in otherwise busy lives. We are also grateful for the ongoing involvement of each Committee member, and for all the diverse work and care of residents and RDCA members that strengthens this island community's pride and confidence in itself and makes it a better place to be.

Financial review

The RDCA is currently working almost entirely with restricted funds only and does not have sufficient financial surplus to dedicate for reserves.

This policy will be reviewed each year by the RDCA Committee and if, in the future, the RDCA is able to generate sufficient unrestricted funds, setting aside an appropriate percentage for a minimum of financial security will be reconsidered.

Against the backdrop of limited resources and insecurities over funding, it has continued to be difficult to plan or develop services. The deficit for the year was £51,467 (2022: surplus was £139,657) which has decreased the total fund balance carried forward to £871,963 (2022: increased £923,430). Its success in obtaining new funding for 2023/24 from Community Investment Fund will provide much needed additional resources.

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Plans for future periods

The year proved to be one of great uncertainty and change due, in most part, to the growing pandemic. The impact of Brexit brings a further level of economic uncertainty. It is not clear how this may affect many of our future activities, as well as those of many others, and much may yet be subject to change. Meanwhile, we will act in consultation with the community and do whatever is deemed appropriate to help keep the community as safe as possible.

Opportunities for targeted visitor experiences connected to a more intentional development of the Green/Blue economy will become an even more crucial factor in shaping a Covid recovery plan. The development aims of the biodiversity project to remove non-native predator species from Rathlin is a project with immediate and far-reaching consequences. It will encourage and enable Rathlin to develop specific activities that protect and promote the island's rich biodiversity while using them wisely as an engine to drive the island's sustainable economy.

The RDCA's commitment to environmental sustainability and the endorsement from the Rathlin Policy for a move towards renewable energy and a reduction of the carbon footprint of the island, will enable us to continue to pursue opportunities to develop these aspirations with growing collaboration with similar networks. We will continue to seek practical support from regional governmental and non-governmental bodies.

The RDCA will continue its work towards a major, creative project at the East Lighthouse, with the invaluable support of the Rathlin Ministerial Forum, particularly the Department of Infrastructure and Department of Finance Innovation Lab.

The RDCA will continue to actively seek opportunities to develop creative partnerships with others that will serve the vision of strengthening a vibrant and sustainable community, learning from and sharing its own models of best practice. Ever-strengthening partnerships with the Ministerial Forum of the Rathlin Policy and with the Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, as well as with other networks, will continue to play a vital part in the island community's development. Opportunities to continue engagement with the International Association for Community Development, as well as strengthening connections and commitments with other island networks, will continue to promote and develop the experience and capacity of the community.

The RDCA will continue its commitment to asset-based community development methods such as Appreciative Inquiry and Learning from Excellence and hopes to learn more of how these methods may be effectively implemented and our experiences shared with other communities.

The RDCA intends to carry out similar activities over the coming year, as much as possible, working on the implementation of the dynamic 'Rathlin 2020' Strategic Plan and the results of the Rathlin Policy Action Plan review.

RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE COMMITTEE MEMBERS

The Charity's committee are responsible for preparing the Committee Members Annual Report and the financial statements in accordance with applicable law and regulations.

The law applicable to charities in Northern Ireland requires the committee members to prepare financial statements for each financial year. Under that law the committee members have elected to prepare the financial statements in accordance with FRS 102, 'The Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and the Republic of Ireland', the Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102) (Charities SORP (FRS 102)) and the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. The committee members must not approve the financial statements unless

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they are satisfied that they give a true and fair view of the state of affairs of the charity and the income and expenditure of the charity for that period.

In preparing these financial statements, the committee members are required to:

- select suitable accounting policies and then apply them consistently;
- observe the methods and principles in the Charities SORP;
- make judgements and accounting estimates that are reasonable and prudent;
- state whether applicable accounting standards have been followed, subject to any material departures disclosed and explained in the financial statements;
- prepare the financial statements on the going concern basis unless it is inappropriate to presume that the charity will continue in operation.

The committee members are responsible for keeping adequate accounting records that are sufficient to show and explain the charity's transactions and disclose with reasonable accuracy at any time the financial position of the charity and enable them to ensure that the financial statements comply with FRS 102 (Charities SORP (FRS 102)) and the Charities Act (Northern Ireland) 2008. They are also responsible for safeguarding the assets of the charity and hence for taking reasonable steps for the prevention and detection of fraud and other irregularities.

The members' annual report was approved on 31 October 2024 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:

Mr Michael Cecil

Mr Michael Cecil (Chair)
Member