

Rathlin Development and Community Association

Members' Annual Report

Year ended 31 March 2024

The members present their report and the unaudited financial statements of the charity for the year ended 31 March 2024.

Reference and administrative details

Registered charity name	Rathlin Development and Community Association
Charity registration number	XT29073 & NIC100375
Principal office	The Resource Centre Rathlin Island Co Antrim Antrim

The members

Mr Michael Cecil (Treasurer)
Ms Marianne Green (Secretary)
Mr Fergus McFaul (Retired 8 March 2024)
Ms Marina McMullan (Chair)
Mr Tom McDonnell (Vice-Chair)
Mr Ciaran McCurdy
Mr Pablo Mitchell
Miss Millie Eyre
Ms Sorin McMullan (Appointed 8 March 2024)

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 2024.

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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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

Introduction: The RDCA logo (based on two interlocking cogs) reflects our interconnected island community, where mainland decisions often disrupt local practices, stretching our limited resources. Immediate demands divert efforts from long-term goals, yet the past year has been busy and impactful despite these challenges.

Main RDCA Projects:

1. East Lighthouse Project: Securing funding for the project, especially in the current funding climate in Northern Ireland, has proved difficult so far, with some application disappointments. Fresh applications are in preparation. Rathlin hosted the Great Lighthouses of Ireland (GLOI) Annual Gathering (9th Oct 2023), boosting the project's profile, with a follow-up workshop in March 2024 exploring the East Lighthouse project with GLOI, Tourism NI and other agencies.

2. Renewable Energy: With support from NI Government Departments, funding was made available to install solar panels at the Manor House, the RDCA's social enterprise project. A pier shelter with solar panels and charging points is in planning. Two 2023 workshops, one convened through the Ministerial Forum, overseen by the Dept. for Infrastructure, and a second for the wider Rathlin community, helped shape a Climate Action Plan, with e-vehicles and talks with Artemis Technologies advancing carbon-negative commitments and goals.

3. LIFE RAFT: The biodiversity restoration and enhancement project, principally funded by EU Life, DAERA, and National Lottery Heritage Fund, has gathered strength in human and other resources. The first stage of eradication, feral domestic ferrets, has been completed and is now undergoing continual monitoring. Intense preparations are underway for the second, more demanding stage, rat eradication. Community engagement is essential for the effective management and eventual success of the project, and this is bringing benefits not only for the eradication programme but also for the socioeconomic development of the island community. This included Rathlin's participation in the NI Science Festival with a week-long on-island programme, driven by the community with full support from the Life Raft community/socioeconomic team and support from the Future Island-Island project. Involvement in the Festival opened tourism opportunities in the winter season and strengthened further exploration of Rathlin's Dark Sky potential.

4. Future Island-Island: This is one of four Green Transition Ecosystem projects across the UK, funded by the Arts & Humanities Research Council. It is led by Ulster University and Queens University, Belfast, with twelve business partners from the private sector working on sustainable tourism and digital options, design and green transition. The co-design project works with growing islander involvement, producing heritage outputs and youth-focused work.

5. Health and Wellbeing Review: In response to the challenges presented to services on the island due to changes or gaps in supportive governance from delivery agents, and recognising significant opportunities for an exemplar model of integrated health and wellbeing practice for Rathlin, a comprehensive review was designed and implemented. The review was supported by NHSCT and carried out by Rural Community Network (RCN), with RDCA guidance. Interviews with 45 residents highlight nursing and ferry lifeline roles, access issues, and youth facility needs, strengthening advocacy with NHSCT. RCN, NHSCT, and RDCA representatives are exploring options for better delivery of services in the light of the review.

Other Projects and Activities

- Youth: Ongoing EA programmes and leadership qualifications.
- Irish Language: Foras na Gaeilge funding support for Irish language development on the island, initially through children and family activities.
- Heritage: Oral history and museum archiving progress, with invitation to RDCA to participate in a symposium on sustainable heritage initiative for small islands. The invitation came from the Keough-Naughton Institute for Irish Studies, University of Notre Dame, on the topic "Island Livelihoods in Climate Crisis", with RDCA invited to present and participate in a week-long event in Orkney, from 4th April 2024.

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- Rathlin Sound (Maritime) Festival 2023 was a positive and engaging success with participants from Scotland, the ROI, and from Notre Dame University, alongside more local partners and visitors. Planning for the 2024 Festival was underway in the fourth quarter of this reporting period.
- Rathlin Manor House: New operators (MC Catering) secured a 5-year contract, boosting occupancy, employment, and service quality of this social enterprise, overseen for RDCA by its Rathlin Development Community Interest Company.
- Rathlin Development Community Interest Company: The Board, now overseeing a much-strengthened enterprise (above) is actively seeking new members to expand social enterprise.
- Defibrillators: Eight machines are now in service and available across the island, with support from Life Raft, RSPB, NIFRS, NIAS, and RDCA.
- Rathlin App: This new service, available on Android only, is linked to the current RDCA website, with plans to continue with the new website under construction (www.rathlin360.com)
- Connectivity: With engagement from the (Westminster) Dept of Science, Innovation, and Technology (DSIT) a Starlink trial (200mbps) was installed at the Rathlin Co-op shop in Feb 2024. This service is expected to lead to further engagement with DSIT on advanced connectivity in the future.

Networks: The RDCA continues to raise and strengthen the island's profile and resources through 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 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

Funding: 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.

Additional grant support has been provided by:

- CCGHT: £90/month (App).
- Foras na Gaeilge: £1,750 (2024).
- DfE: £80k (low carbon).
- DfI: £10k (feasibility).
- CCGBC: £1k (heritage, pending).

Advocacy and Lobbying: RDCA regularly engages DfI, DAERA, Causeway Coast & Glens Borough Council, and others, on health, ferry, roads, and numerous other immediate and longer-term issues. Regional government's return was promising, though austerity cuts persist.

Conclusion: 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 and others, thanks to the ready commitment of the volunteer committee, and the diverse work and care of residents and RDCA members that strengthens this islands community 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.

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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 £20,730 (2023: £51,467) which has decreased the total fund balance carried forward to £851,233 (2023: £871,963). Its success in obtaining new funding for 2024/25 from Community Investment Fund will provide much needed additional resources.

Plans for future periods

The RDCA will continue its commitment to environmental sustainability and the endorsement from the Rathlin Policy for a move towards renewal energy and a reduction of the carbon footprint of the island. It will continue to pursue opportunities to develop these aspirations with growing collaboration with similar networks and increasing interest and support from within NI government Departments, Westminster, and beyond.

Life Raft: The RDCA will continue its active partnership with Life Raft, the major biodiversity restoration and support project, managed together with RSPB and Causeway Coast and Glens Heritage Trust. This project is gaining widespread support and interest as it develops and we expect it to bring significant benefit to the island, not only through the direct enhancement of the island's rich biodiversity but also through its socioeconomic development commitment to the community.

'Future Island-Island': The RDCA is a partner in a consortium led by Ulster University, in partnership with Queen's University Belfast, that has secured funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) for one of four new 'Green Transition Ecosystems' across the UK.

From September 2023, the Ulster University-led 'Future Island-Island' project began a new phase of work with the Rathlin community to co-design and shape new design-led green economies over a 24-month period focusing on five strands:

1. **Product Waste Ecosystems** - rethinking waste plastics and electrical equipment as a commodity, serving repair and product innovation cultures through reuse, recycling and repair for new purposes.
2. **Green Digital Industries** – using state of the art film and animation technology with storytelling to help build a digital representation of the island that can be used to generate new income for the island while helping to preserve its heritage, culture and biodiversity for future generations.
3. **Organic Waste Ecosystems** – reimagining new sustainable uses of the island's natural resources in more sustainable ways to provide alternative options for land, food and water use and related waste produce (e.g. waste wool for more sustainable farming)
4. **Education strategy** proposals take the issues of Rathlin to students across Ireland and in our universities to educate them about island realities and have them involved in the problem solving, while also engaging with the island's own school children and young people.

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5. **Policy Strategy** will help develop the Rathlin Island Action Plan and inform other strategies for management of waste across Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Scotland where Rathlin will be the example of best practice.

East Lighthouse project: this project will continue to be a major focus of RDCA attention, with the invaluable support of the Rathlin Ministerial Forum, particularly the Department of Infrastructure and Department of Agriculture, Environment & Rural Affairs.

The RDCA will continue its commitment to asset-based community development methods and hopes to learn more of how these methods may be effectively implemented and our experiences shared with other communities. Opportunities to develop these experiences will be valuable as the LIFE RAFT biodiversity and Future Island-Island projects take root.

The RDCA intends to continue a programme of similar activities over the coming year, as much as possible, working from the base of the continuing and dynamic 'Rathlin 2020' Strategic Plan, and the implementation, with its partners, of the Rathlin Policy Action Plan. We will continue to fund our work and core costs through the Department for Community's Community Investment Fund and the Causeway Coast and Glens Borough Council Community Development Support fund, with other projects seeking funding elsewhere as necessary.

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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 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 27 May 2025 and signed on behalf of the board of trustees by:

Ms Marina McMullan

Ms Marina McMullan (Chair)
Member