2018 Convenor’s report

It is the volunteers who willingly give of their time and energy who are the lifeblood of Dundee Access Group and through whom anything that is achieved, is achieved. I can safely say that all our work is conducted, not just with determination, but with a real spirit of respect and friendship towards one another.

Therefore, it is with deep sadness that I have to report that the most significant event of this past year was the untimely death last November of Gordon MacDonald, our multi-talented friend and colleague. We are diminished by his passing but are hugely strengthened by the continuing commitment to the group by his beloved partner Lillian Malcom who graces our meetings with her wisdom and humour.

We are grateful that Dundee Blind and Partially Sighted Society host our meetings, providing a ready supply of tea and coffee and biscuits, and to Denise Cameron who always ensures that the relevant papers are all laid out for the start of each meeting.

As in recent years, the provision of ramps to allow wheelchair access to premises has been high among our priorities. Although we failed to make any progress with our ‘Ramp it Up’ campaign in Fintry, we have recently purchased two portable ramps for organisations or businesses to try or borrow. We are indebted to Heather Flood for the arrangements with Shopmobility to operate a lending scheme. Our treasurer Sandy Cameron has drawn up the necessary paperwork for the scheme – as well as keeping our finances in order throughout the year. The scheme has already (in part due to the article and photo of Anne in the Courier) attracted favourable interest.

Accessible toilets – or their absence – have also been a major priority and, thanks mainly to Carole Craig, numerous ‘site’ visits have been carried out.

Amongst our visitors this year was Fiona Harper of PAMIS with their Pamiloo (a mobile accessible toilet) to which we had contributed. We were delighted when we heard the news that PAMIS had been successful in their campaign to overturn the decision not to have a changing places toilet in the revamped Dundee railway station. We are also very pleased that finally the Regional Performance Centre for Sport in Caird Park is progressing. I am sure it lifts the heart of Dorothy Wilson, who provides us with so much information, guidance and support in what we do, and has given us regular updates on the hurdles that had been put in the way of this development. Dorothy is the key link in the good working relationship we have with Dundee City Council.

Another visitor was the Dundee City Council ‘Blether Bus’. This arose out of the Council’s decision to end the taxicard scheme which, we were told, cost the Council something in the region of £150,000 pa to run. £50,000 of that saving is being re-invested in the ‘Blether Bus’ scheme. Whilst some of us enjoyed a trip in the bus, (singing songs from the old Cliff Richards film ‘We’re all going on a summer holiday’) and whilst it may provide a welcome service for some people, it is certainly not a replacement for the taxicard scheme. We understand that the demands for austerity in the public sector puts intolerable strains on the Council’s budgets and a saving of some £150, 000 is not to be sneezed at, but we cannot pretend to be happy when cuts hit the lives of our most vulnerable citizens.

Perhaps the most interesting of our visitors this year was Michael Leeland of Oovert a new development that provides an exciting advance of access guides through video guides. He took us through a guide to Tannadice Park, a site very well known to some present! We think these kinds of video guides are the future.

Work continues on the website and a logo and on employment issues thanks to our link up with Dundee & Angus College’s Access Academy. Bill Varney from Sensory Services is now a regular member of the Group.

Our concern about the governance of Disability Equality Scotland has been an unwelcome distraction. Disability Equality Scotland is a body charged with, amongst other things, supporting Access groups throughout the country.

As the new Victoria and Albert Museum, the centrepiece of the development of Dundee’s waterfront, opens in September we are glad that we have in some small way contributed to the accessibility of the city’s exciting venues for citizens and visitors alike who have mobility difficulties.

Any voluntary organisation depends on the commitment and faithfulness of its office bearers and Dundee Access Group is blessed with such people, especially our ever-present and ever active – and lately our poster-person - secretary Anne Farrow.

The Group have been a delight to convene.

Rev. Erik Cramb,

Dundee,

May 2018.