

Chair's Report 2023/2024

Another year has passed, and we still have no inpatient beds at Inch and Community Hospital. As I write this in February 2025, it is nearly five years since the hospital was temporarily closed. Covid is no longer the threat it was, yet we still have no hospital. At every Trustees meeting, we hear of local residents being discharged too early to their homes or placed in distant community hospitals where friends and family struggle to visit due to a lack of suitable public transport. While we are assured there is no bed crisis, that assurance does little to comfort those placed far from home.

The above is, with a date change, exactly what I wrote last year. It is frustrating to see no progress despite an IJB decision in 2022 to explore new beds for the area. The instruction to consult on a wellbeing hub has gone nowhere. We continue to meet with members of the IJB and AHSCP, but just as a follow-up meeting seems to be within reach, another crisis at ARI takes precedence, and nothing moves forward. The cycle repeats, and we have had moments of real frustration—sometimes even tears—at meetings.

Enough! I think we all understand now that there is no desire within NHSG or the IJB to provide care beds in Inch. They have no funding, and they have other priorities. We constantly hear that ARI is short 120 beds and that there is bed blocking due to a lack of community hospital spaces. The NHS has, in many ways, made a rod for its own back—now requiring certain standards to reopen closed beds, making the cost of upgrades prohibitive. I do have sympathy for those officials fighting fires with a lack of resources, but it is a harsh reality for our community.

So, we are once again looking at the idea of a **Community Asset Transfer** and what that might mean. During the period of this review, we held a valuable brainstorming session with local health professionals about what a **Community Health Hub** might look like, and I must thank all those who participated. We are pushing forward with this idea, and we expect to have more news on this by mid-2025.

Despite these ongoing challenges, we have remained active in the community:

- We arranged **Defibrillator Training** for the community.
- A donation was made to **Bennachie Leisure Centre** to assist with gym refurbishment, allowing rehabilitation in partnership with the GP surgery. We also agreed to a **£14,000 loan** to help them through this project.
- We purchased **blood pressure monitors, tourniquets, and cuffs** for the medical practice.
- We continued to push for ways to **facilitate the reopening of Inch Hospital**, making several proposals and offering funds to AHSCP.

- We maintained and improved the **Community Garden** for the benefit of residents and health centre patients.

Beyond healthcare, we also took steps to support community spirit and wellbeing:

- We funded a **Christmas lights display**, bringing some extra festive cheer to Inch. While this happened after the financial period covered in this report, the lights were well received and are now in place for future years. We hope another group will take this project forward.
- **The Strawberry Fayre** remains a key event in Inch, and I extend my thanks to the organisers and everyone who helped on the day.
- **The Vintage Vehicle Event** was another success, raising a decent sum and providing a fantastic spectacle for the community. It was particularly special to see the touring **Memorial to the Fallen**, a stunning piece of craftsmanship. Thank you to the creator—it must have taken hours of work.
- This year, the parade was led by **Cycling Without Age Scotland**. Inspired by this, we part-funded a **trishaw** for the local chapter, which will launch in March/April 2025. You might already spot it on the streets as pilots complete their training. We see a great future for this as part of Inch's health and welfare provision, offering mobility-impaired residents the chance to get out and about—whether it's a scenic tour, a trip to the chemist, the GP, or even the pub!
- **Tea dances** have remain popular. I keep threatening to dust off my dancing shoes, but for some reason, I'm not getting much encouragement!

We have been incredibly fortunate over the years to receive generous **bequests**, which have allowed us to fund vital projects. One of our current initiatives has been made significantly easier thanks to such a donation. If you have not yet made a will, please consider remembering **Friends of Inch Hospital and Community (SCIO 009720)**. As a registered charity, any bequest is inheritance tax-free, and lifetime gifts can also qualify for tax relief, helping us continue our work for the community.

Looking ahead, there is much we hope to share in next year's report. We are hopefully entering a new era—one that, for once, might be more positive.

Finally, my sincere thanks go to our incredible volunteers and trustees. Without their dedication—turning up on cold winter nights to keep this organisation running—none of this would be possible. Thank you.

Graham Matthews

Chair, Friends of Inch Hospital and Community (SCIO 009720)