

Connected Communities showcase comes to Edinburgh



The Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC) was in Edinburgh this week at Heriot-Watt University's Edinburgh Conference Centre.

The purpose was to show off some of the 200 projects which they fund under their [Connected Communities](#) banner. What the day proved was that there are many diverse ways of bringing communities together, and geography has little to do with it.

The Edinburgh Reporter was there to participate in the session led by [Talk About Local](#)'s Will Perrin discussing the various hyperlocal sites in Edinburgh and elsewhere in Scotland, including our own here, [Greener Leith](#) and also [My Turriff](#) in the north-east. There were also representatives from the [Digital Sentinel](#) project in Wester Hailes which has just received £10,000 of funding from Carnegie UK Trust under its Neighbourhood News funding.

We feel that hyperlocal news of the kind that we, and the others mentioned above, provide is worthy of some debate, so we felt it was a pity there were not more people there to talk about it with us. One of our missions is to investigate other sites providing local news across Scotland. If you know of any then please add them in the comments section below.

On the same day as we were discussing the provision of hyperlocal news, STV Local were disbanding their websites in anticipation of something bigger and better which they promise will be available later this year. STV announced that they will launch brand new local digital services providing all the latest news, events, offers, pictures and videos for consumers in Scotland's largest cities. The new services will

be available as Apps, free to download on iOS and Android devices, and will be accompanied by desktop and mobile web sites for Glasgow, Edinburgh, Aberdeen and Dundee.

STV's current portfolio of local sites will be rolled into the new city services, which will be available later this summer and in preparation for the launch of the new city services, existing STV Local sites will be inactive from the start of July 2013 and users will be directed to the STV news website during the transition.

Pioneering work carried out by De Montfort University's Digital Building Heritage Group was showcased on one of the stands at the AHRC event, and included a 3-D model of the Greek temple on which Edinburgh's own Dugald Stewart Monument was based.

The group, led by Dr Douglas Cawthorne, has been awarded just over £13,000 funding from AHRC.

During the event, the Digital Building Heritage team demonstrated some of the digital technologies that they use when working with community heritage groups and museums. They can also offer advice on how to develop bids for Heritage Lottery funding to bring projects to life using the latest digital technologies.

The team has an impressive track record of working effectively with community heritage groups, museums, local authorities, charities and businesses to help them achieve their aims, whether it be reaching new audiences, developing funding proposals or providing technical expertise.

Earlier this year, the team was also awarded a £90,000 grant from the Arts and Humanities Research Council to work with 11 different groups in England and Wales.

Using the latest technology including 3D laser scanning and virtual reality simulation, the brief was to help "bring back"

virtual versions of forgotten or ruined buildings, some of which are hundreds of years old.

Dr Cawthorne and his team will have models, videos and animations on display as they talk about five projects already completed. There will also be members of Leicester Transport Heritage Trust, with whom the DBHG is working on a project to restore an Edwardian tram depot in Leicester.

Dr Cawthorne said: "There is nobody else doing the work which we do. The Connecting Communities conference is a very diverse event, from oral history to family history as well as stories of churches and village histories.

"We are there to talk to heritage groups who would like to tell the stories of buildings as part of their history projects and we will also be there to help groups interested in applying to the Heritage Lottery Fund. We have been involved in putting together several bids and can advise groups on what the HLF is looking for from applications."

Unfortunately we did not get round to seeing all of the people showcasing what they are doing, but one project that we find interesting is the Rural Connective partnership between Falmouth University and Aberdeen University along with BT which explores how superfast broadband might enhance rural creative and cultural capital. We are very gradually getting superfast broadband here in the city, but of course the situation across the country is not yet universal, despite the Scottish Government's Digital Scotland strategy that Scotland becomes a truly digital nation by 2020 with world class connectivity.

The Deputy First Minister speaks about this policy here:-

AHRC is a non-departmental public body sponsored by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, along with the other UK Research Councils, and mainly provides money for

academics. The AHRC is governed by its Council, which is responsible for its overall strategic direction, and they are incorporated by Royal Charter. The body has a budget of over [£100m per year](#) and claims that it provides a portfolio of programmes to support the best of UK research enabling development of a world-class research base.

They explain their Connected Communities programme like this:-
“The AHRC is leading on Connected Communities, a cross-Council programme designed to help us understand the changing nature of communities in their historical and cultural contexts and the role of communities in sustaining and enhancing our quality of life.

The programme seeks not only to connect research on communities, but to connect communities with research, bringing together community-engaged research across a number of core themes, including community health and wellbeing, community creativity, prosperity and regeneration, community values and participation, sustainable community environments, places and spaces, and community cultures, diversity, cohesion, exclusion, and conflict.

A growing body of work under the programme is exploring the temporal dimension to communities, while other clusters of projects are exploring issues such as cultural value in community contexts and ‘community and performance’. Another strand of research is exploring the potential for arts and humanities to support approaches to engagement with communities to active participants in the research process, through the creative arts and media, narratives, crafts and by enhancing consideration of issues such as ethics, power and voice.”