

Minutes of the Board Meeting on 29 October 2020

Present: Flora Macleod (chair), Fiona Jefferson, Innes Harrison, Domhnall Macdonald, Sarah Fraser (Projects Manager), Euan MacLeod (Development Manager).

Apologies: Ranald Fraser

Welcome to the new Directors

Flora welcomed the new directors, Innes Harrison and Fiona Jefferson, after their appointment at the 2020 AGM, and Domhnall Macdonald who was appointed an associate director at a recent board meeting.

Appointment of Office Bearers

Innes Harrison was appointed as Secretary after Flora proposed the appointment, with Domhnall seconding the proposal.

The appointment of a vice chair will be made at a later date.

Issues from the updates

Innes asked if everyone had received the same document in preparation for the board meeting. Euan confirmed that everyone had received the same document.

Flora asked when the Horshader tune commission by Elsa MacTaggart was likely to be ready. Euan said the plan was to film a video in scenic Horshader locations by the end of November.

Innes asked about when events would be likely to resume. At the moment there is no indication of events being permitted, though the team have plans are in pace to resume indoor events at Raebhat House as soon as possible. A number of outdoor events have been planned as part of Slàn san Dachaigh, the newly launched health and wellbeing project. Events planned are: Wild Swimming at Shawbost beach facilitated by Immerse Hebrides; and weekly fitness sessions at Shawbost beach.

Sarah spoke about the filming of Shop and Drop packing and deliveries by Corcadail productions. HCD staff were filmed, as were a number of local residents that use the service, everything went well! The content is likely to be broadcast as part of a series on An Taobh Siar, next autumn.

As a further update to the CNES Budgets meeting, a Shawbost forum has been set up by Lynn Hebdith (The Old School Trust) with support from Sarah Campbell (CNES CLD) with a view to accessing Crown Estate funding and encouraging additional applicant groups from the Westside. Euan will attend the first meeting of the forum on Monday.

Update: Covid Services (Euan)

5 strands of services continue for the Horshader area + North and New Shawbost. After the Scot Gov. funded period (1 May – 21 September) we have been able to continue the services until the end of 2020 without using Trust reserves. Funds have come from other external funders (STV Childrens Appeal, Eat Well Age Well) and from fundraising through donations.

The next Blasta Ready Meals delivery is Thursday 5 November. There'll be a Christmas ready meal event early in December which will be the last. I'm looking for funding to continue the service in 2021.

The Community Support service is not particularly active, we've had no expense claims from the volunteers this month. The service probably isn't necessary unless there is another full blown lockdown – though it's been useful in building up a pool of local volunteers.

Medication deliveries for the area continue, 3 days per week. Anna is in charge of the deliveries as part of the Slàn san Dachaigh project.

Virtual Engagement has largely been taken over by Anna. A lot of good quality online content was produced by Katie Gillies during her summer student placement, the material is now being posted to our social media and receiving a lot of attention. More virtual events are being planned.

Update - Covid Services (Shop & Drop) (Sarah)

Shop & Drop continues every other week. The service is running steadily between 35 – 37 user households. During October I've been working with two young people from the area, Sarah Matheson and Maria Maclean, during Saturday afternoons. We have used the time to bag up and prepare non-fresh items to help manage our time better on packing days. There has been a steady and healthy amount of donations coming through for the service which is great. Plenty of positive feedback from folk too.

The most recent delivery of the service (27th October) was filmed by Christine Morrison and Jim Hope, for Christine's production company Corcadal. The filming followed the morning preparation and packing at Raebhat and then the delivery of 5 drops to pre-selected recipients who were happy to be filmed and interviewed by Christine. Everything went well – thanks to all involved.

Update – Dalbeg/Dalmore Mobile Masts) (Sarah)

I registered the Dalmore/Dalbeg sites with local MP Brendan MacNeil following his press release seeking further '4G Not Spots' – but as it turns out WHP Telecoms are not looking for additional sites at this time. Their request was for suggestions of potential sites in the Grimsay area for a mast that they had already agreed the funding for. So it was worded incorrectly and this caused confusion.

However, I am in regular contact with Donnie Morrison at HIE, who has been very helpful in clarifying the situation. I had asked him the question about the potential costs involved and if the moneys gifted to the community by TransOcean could be used as leverage, his response is below;

“Sarah

Currently there is very little prospect of that approach being successful. Sites cost from circa £350k to £900k depending on the difficulty of getting power and fibre to the site. In the Scottish Government funded project (S4GI) I am working on we have offered £500k to build sites and the operators are not interested. Their main interest is the ongoing revenue costs and in a very small area these can be excessively disproportionate due to rates, landowner leases charges, Ofcom licences, cost of backhaul, ongoing maintenance etc versus very small return so they won't invest. I'm hoping that with SRN they will start looking at small, less expensive cell sites

and that they could use the ConCom mast site at Dalbeg which already has power. Emergency cover will be the key I think.

*Regards
Donnie”*

I agree, that our best course of action is to stay on the tracks of the upcoming Shared Rural Network and/or emergency cover. I will update as this progresses.

Update – Growing Sites (Grinnivat & Dalmore) (Sarah)

Dalmore – all that remains to do here is connect the new and improved water supply.
Grinnivat – any plans for large-scale improvements are on hold until the Trust’s financial position is better known for 2021.

Update – Tree Ark (Sarah)

Chris and Ann have been visiting various estates in Lewis/Harris and collecting seeds, and will continue to do so over the coming weeks. A sufficient amount of seeds are being harvested which is great. The remaining infrastructure (electrics, paraweb fencing and signage) is ongoing.

Update – Covid Recovery Grant) (Sarah)

I have made initial enquiries with Norman Maclean at Business Gateway for advice on offering small business start up grants and there doesn’t seem to be any reason why we cannot do this. He has given me some useful points of reference to be going forward with and Storax Uibhist have a similar grant scheme.

Update – Covid Recovery Gift Voucher (Sarah)

I am working on creating a modest database of local (mainly west side based/some Stornoway based) small businesses and local (Island wide) charities who could be included on the voucher.

Update – Covid Proofing Raebhat House (Sarah)

All staff are compliant in wearing face coverings while inside at Raebhat. Free-standing sanitising stations and information posters are in the process of being ordered and put in place.

Update - Plan Christmas gift for kids (in place of their usual party?)) (Sarah)

No update, carry forward to November.

Update: Scottish Government Gaelic Communities Meeting (Euan)

The meeting was arranged by John Swinney, minister for Gaelic, to discuss the response to issues raised by the recent research, ‘Crisis in the Vernacular Community’ which portrays a grave future for Gaelic in the language’s traditional strongholds (Western Isles, parts of Argyll etc).

Community groups from across the islands were invited to attend, I attended representing Horshader. I thought it was a useful conversation, some good ideas and a lot of interest in

improving the language's chances of survival, mainly based around increasing the opportunities for people of all ages to speak the language 'in the community'.

I spoke briefly, agreeing that community organisations had a key role to play and offering my opinion that, while it's critical that there is government support/funding for Gaelic development, the vernacular communities must take a more active role. As far as I'm aware, there is no coordinated approach to Gaelic development across the west side of Lewis – Comann na Gàidhlig must have some kind of plan for 'Iar-thuath Leòdhais' (North-West Lewis) but I've never come across it.

The work we're doing at the moment to develop the HCD Gaelic Plan is a key step to formalise efforts in our community. Setting a baseline, acknowledging the great work that is already taking place, as well as simple targets (e.g. x number of opportunities to speak Gaelic, x Gaelic events, etc), will allow us to measure the effects of our efforts and then respond accordingly.

Update: CNES Budget Meeting (Euan)

The An Taobh Siar agus Nis Conversation on budget cuts took place on 14 October, with Bernard Chisholm chairing and all the ward councillors present. The session was informative, highlighting the challenges faced by CNES amid the need to significantly cut the budget on an annual basis.

There was more talk on the communities their own running services, though no new info. An attendee asked whether there had been progress made on the plans to use additional community buildings as hubs; Chisholm responded that Covid had interrupted the plan, but that 70% of CNES workers were now working from home and there was no expectation that these workers would return to office work.

As the Crown Estate Funding was brought up for discussion, I highlighted the awards made in our ward – out of 15 funded projects, 12 projects were based in the Galson Estate area, with 3 projects based between Dalbeg and Barvas. Whatever the rationale behind the decisions, the funding clearly hasn't been spread across the ward, something I hope is addressed during this year's Crown Estate awards.

Update: 2020 Community Consultation (Euan)

The 2020 consultation was launched at the end of last week and will run for a few weeks. The paper has gone out by post and email – depending on the preference of individual members. Questions are based on our 9 charitable objects – the aims of the Trust that guide our approach to community development. The aim is to get responses from the majority of member households.

This is the first extensive written consultation in a number of years, the process is very important to our day to day work, and strategic planning. Getting feedback from the community is essential to acquiring funds from external funders. Beyond that, I hope the exercise will engage the members, providing us with some interesting project ideas.

Update: Gaelic Plan (Euan)

The draft plan will be submitted to the board in time for discussion at the November board meeting.

Update: External Funding (Euan)

I submitted an application to the Islands Green Recovery Fund, aiming to purchase an electric van that can be used for transporting equipment and delivering good (shop and drop, ready meals, etc). I'm not optimistic about the app but it was worth a go.

I'm working on applications to Calmac Community Fund, Climate Asset Fund, Maoin Ealain na Gàidhlig, The Robertson Trust, and CNES Crown Estate Fund. These will all be submitted during the final quarter of 2020.

Update: Community Space (Euan)

No further update. No indication of a date for events to recommence has been given.

Update: Annual Planning Cycle – Projects Meeting, Budget Meeting (Euan)

A few months ago the board approved a new annual planning cycle that involved holding a meeting to identify projects for 2021, and then a meeting to set budgets for 2021. This plan was made on the assumption that income for 2021 would be the same or greater than for previous years. As it's clear that 2021 income will be affected adversely, I suggest the budget meeting takes place in advance of the projects meeting. The benefit of this change is that the directors will decide on projects for 2021 fully aware of the financial situation, and the extent to which fundraising through external funds should be the focus.

Both meetings are due to take place in mid-late November, once the staff have collated and circulated the results of the 2020 community consultation. I'll contact everyone to find suitable dates for the meetings in due course.

Sub-sea Cable Update: Euan

You all received updates early last week after we started hearing rumblings of the extent of the recent damage caused to the sub-sea cable. After receiving initial communications from Community Power Outer Hebrides (CPOH) and Community Energy Scotland (CES), the news escalated – being picked up by local politicians and CNES. It seems inevitable that all the island community energy groups will be significantly curtailed (generation may continue at a fraction of the full capacity, or it might stop altogether) in their generation of electricity for up to 12 months. This is clearly disastrous for community groups that have taken on staff, assets, and projects, and are running vital services for their areas. Community funds (like the HCD community fund) may also be jeopardised.

We are, along with the other island groups, are beginning an insurance claim that should see us covered for a significant part of the loss of earnings. I feel more confident in the process thanks to Jordan's input – he worked on the successful insurance claim for 2018/19 which eventually awarded around £180k. At this stage there is no indication of how the process will proceed, or when there may be some conclusion – we clearly have to take a cautious approach and anticipate delays.

As the issue is clearly a long-term one, the 4 affected community groups (Horsahder, Galson, Point and Sandwick, Tolsta) that are part of CES have discussed a joint approach. This would mean formally coming together, with CES anchoring the forum, so that joint responses and action plans can be agreed and acted upon quickly.

Recent updates from CPOH have focused on the damaged cable, which is 10 years past its original lifespan of 20 years. Also, the opportunity that has arisen from this disaster that could

result in the damaged cable being upgraded to a cable with larger capacity for transporting electricity. Although the case for upgrading the cable looked to be at a standstill at the end of 2019, the fact that the cable needs to be replaced makes a good case for laying an upgraded cable, rather than replacing like for like. CPOH see this as being a good opportunity to make the case for the upgrade, and for ensuring that a percentage of the cable capacity is reserved for community benefit.

To give you all the most up to date info we have received from CES, regarding their discussion with SSE, I've forwarded an email from Jamie Adam (manager of CES) to CPOH which includes info on the proposed way for the community groups to work together, and also an attached email from CES to SSE which gives a summary of the dire situation.

Funding applications

The local Mountain Rescue team's project was awarded a grant from the HCD Community Fund.

The Norse Mill Society and Shawbost School Parents Council will be asked to complete an application form before funding is granted.

Actions from the last meeting

The majority of the actions had been completed, with a few rolling over to next month's meeting, as per the updates.

Membership applications

There were no membership applications.

Any other business

The local group responsible for maintaining the defibrillator at Shawbost Mill made contact to ask whether the defib could be moved to Raebhat House. The board agreed that this would be fine.

Euan asked if the bye-law approved at recent AGM was to be added to the governing document with or without removing the sections that the new bye-law contradicts. Fiona believed the bye-law should be added without removing any of the previous sections. Further investigation will take place before any changes are made to the governing document.

30/10/20