

## Minutes of the Horshader Community Development Trust Special General Meeting

**Date:** Monday 11<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**Location:** Raebhat House Community Space

**Purpose:** The meeting was called to discuss the question: Do you support Horshader Community Development taking forward applications to fund redeveloping The Old School Centre, and if successful take ownership of TOSC?

**Present:** 28 members and 1 associate member were noted to be present

**HCDT Board:** Carole Miller (Chair); Fiona Jefferson; Jimima Macleod; Flora Macleod

**HCDT Staff:** Donna Maclennan (General Manager); Gordon Matheson (Development Officer, non-member) & Derick Maclennan.

**HCDT Members:** Dollanna Maclennan; Chrissie Macdonald; Ian Mackay; Fiona Knape; Tina Finlayson;; William Jefferson; Ian Hazell; Ruth Hazell; Donald Murray; Mary Maclean; Andrew Macleod; Etta Morrison; Roddy Morrison; Nicola Finlayson; Kathleen Murray; Colin Miller; Peter Lidgett; Roddy Murray; Lesley Wiseman; Alistair Wiseman; Donald Macleod; Donald A Macleod

**HCDT Associate Members:** Catherine Campell

**Postal Votes:** Advance notice of the question had been submitted to members, and 7 members and 2 associate members were found to have supplied postal votes.

**HCDT Members by Ballot Slip (“Yes”):** Gareth Watson; Anna Macleod; Diana Hesketh; Don Macdonald, Graham Gardener; Angela Gardener; Neil Macleod

**HCDT Associate Members by Ballot Slip (“Yes”):** Dolina Joan Maclean; Donald Smith;

**Opening Remarks:** The Chairperson (Carole Miller) welcomed attendees to the meeting and noted that it was quorate. She explained that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss the proposals in relation to The Old School Centre/Ionad nan Seann Sgoil in Shawbost, known as “TOSC”.

**Presentation:** The Trust’s Development Officer (Gordon Matheson) presented the progress made on developing a plan for the future of TOSC in HCDT ownership.

He outlined the community consultations that had taken place, including online surveys, in-person public meetings, and interactions with key building users and groups.

The plan’s key plank is regenerating the building’s renewable energy production capacity, to bring energy costs under control. Once this is achieved, there are three strategic objectives:

- Support for childcare, through an After-School Club
- Health & Wellbeing, through a community gym
- Culture & Heritage, through an archive facility for Commun Eachdraidh an Taobh Siar

The advantages for HCDT were outlined:

- The preservation of a significant, well-used community asset
- A significant cost saving, in moving our offices to TOSC from Raebhat House:
  - Current annual net cost of RH - £25,400

- Projected Net Operating Cost of TOSC, with all the planned services realised - £13,200.
- Projected saving to HCDT - £12,200.

The key to restoring TOSC to sustainable operation was in two projects:

- Aspect 1 – A full building overhaul, including replacing the wind turbines, lighting, repairing the heating system, and creating an access control system to the building.
- Aspect 2 – The installation of a Solar Photo Voltaic System, and a Battery Storage System on site. HCDT were assisting TOSC’s trustees in going ahead with this project already, as it could be achieved without transfer of ownership.

Aspect 1 was estimated to cost £150,000, with primary funding sought through the Community Ownership Fund, a UK Government fund.

Aspect 2 was estimated to cost £37,000, with primary funding through the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES), a Scottish Government fund.

Peripheral benefit was found in eliminating the “two sites” problem – with community spaces at TOSC and Raebhat House. TOSC, because of its central location, and community affinity as the former primary school, was a preferable venue for activities.

If successful, this project would leave Raebhat House surplus to requirements, and potentially empty until sold, or repurposed to another use (e.g. supported accommodation for older people).

**Questions:** Several questions were taken from the floor:

- The status of the croft adjacent to Raebhat House – is there any progress on fixing the boundary issues, to facilitate a sale of the building, and/or the Tree Ark Site?
  - This is an ongoing matter with the Trust’s solicitors, and Barvas Estate. No progress to report. It would have the potential to delay the sale of RH if we wanted to.
- The status of Shawbost Old School Trust – would they have an ongoing role in running TOSC?
  - No. Our understanding is that after they sell TOSC to us for a nominal fee (£1) SOST will trigger their dissolution clause.
  - It is possible to look at a governance structure for the future of TOSC, to promote community engagement in the use of the building, but it will be a HCDT Asset, managed by our team.
  - It was stressed that the purchase of TOSC would not change the Articles and rules of HCDT.
- Community Ownership Fund timescale – when would we know if successful?
  - A non-binding Expression of Interest had been submitted (today!).
  - The COF decision was expected to be in June 2024. If the SOST AGM also gave a “green light” to the project, we would approach other funders seeking match funding, e.g. National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- Full Costings Not Clear – The membership was being asked to approve a plan without full costings – was this right? Was there not to be a feasibility study?
  - We have preserved the caveat that HCDT will only take over ownership of the building if we can full fund the repairs and revitalisation from external funders.

Our commitment will be to the long-term sustainable operation of the building, and that is costed in the business plan.

- There are risks – as with any venture, but these are being assessed, and will be mitigated against as best as we are able to.
- The cost estimate of £150,000 is not an unreasonable figure, after discussions with contractors: Lewis Builders Ltd., ACES Ltd., and Energee Services Ltd.
- There was no commitment made to carry out an external feasibility – just for our Development Officer to prepare scope of necessary repairs, and a business plan for sustainable operation after consulting the community. This plan would then be taken back to the members for consideration – which is the purpose of this meeting.
- Ongoing cost of Raebhat House – What is the expected cost of retaining Raebhat House if it does not quickly sell, or is not quickly repurposed to another use?
  - This does affect the short-term projection for a saving moving our office base to TOSC. The ongoing operating cost of Raebhat House is expected to be ~£6,000 – to maintain a low level of heat, buildings insurance, rates, etc.
  - It underscores the priority in seeking an alternative for RH.
- Raebhat Rental – Would there be a possibility in renting out Raebhat House to a tenant?
  - It is an option, but compounded by the presence of the Tree Ark, and the various sheds – the grass cutting team are based there, and An Eathar Rowing Club would need to relocate their boats.
  - There are other objectives within the Trust’s Development Plan, to which Raebhat House might be repurposed, e.g. to create a support living accommodation for older people in the community.
- Director Load – Are the directors being asked to take on too much responsibility?
  - HCDT Directors are keen to create a more effective community hub in the village. They recognise that TOSC offers a better opportunity to provide this, as it has stronger emotional ties to people from the area than Raebhat House does.
  - HCDT Directors also stressed their desire to create a sustainable community hub – and as noted previously, this may involve a new structure to build community engagement in the way TOSC is used.
- Alternatives to Refurbishment – With improved revenue from the Risort Turbine, would it be feasible to save for two or three years, and build a brand-new community building instead of investing in a refurbishment?
  - Risort income is not that high – after meeting rising operating and servicing costs, and the extensive cash reserves policy, it is maybe better to view Risort as a “cash calf” than a “cash cow”.
  - Cost of a new facility probably more than the income we would be able to save in the meantime.
  - The potential of a new facility in the future must be weighed against the loss of TOSC in the immediate.

There being no further questions, the chair asked for counter motions. There were none, so the question was put to a simple “Yes / No” ballot by show of hands.

Do you support Horshader Community Development taking forward applications to fund redeveloping The Old School Centre, and if successful take ownership of TOSC?

- Yes – 20 (plus 7 postal ballots)

- No – Nil
- Abstentions – 8

The chair closed the meeting and thanked all for attending a harmonious and (what was thought to be) HCDT's best attended General Meeting.