



MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF
THE NORTH HARRIS TRUST

TUESDAY 25th APRIL 2023

7.30PM – Community Centre, Tarbert

1. Apologies: Donald Macleod

Present: Calum J MacKay, Kirsty MacKay, Barbara MacKay, Michael Hunter, David Wake, Robert MacKinnon, Finlay E MacLeod, Diana MacLennan, Phil Butterfield, Fañch Bihan-Gallic, Donald J Morrison, Steven Morrison, Kate Lewis, Paul Russ, Lena Morrison, David Cameron, Shaun Hayes, Shaun Bloomfield, Romy Benedetti, Moreen MacRae, James MacRae, John Henry, Ruth Hamilton, Gordon Ness, Gael Hogarth, Andrew Bartlett, Teresa Bartlett, Katherine Rodger, John Moffat

2. Minutes of AGM 2022

Shaun Hayes (**SH**) raised that documents had not been received by members as stated in the minutes of the previous AGM. The Chairman's Report stated "A copy of the previous minute and the 19th Annual Report were circulated previously by email" should read "A copy of the previous minute and the 19th Annual Report were circulated **to directors** previously by email"

With this amendment, the minutes were proposed by Finlay E MacLeod and seconded by Lena Morrison to be a true account of that meeting.

3. Chairman's Report

The Chairman, Calum J Mackay (**CJM**), welcomed everyone to the Annual General Meeting of the North Harris Trust. Katherine Rodger, Marketing Student, had compiled the Annual Report, which was made available on the website last week and circulated at the meeting.

Three of the main focuses of the year was agreeing and adopting a five-year Strategic Plan, a three-year Financial Plan & a Deer Management Plan. There has been a greater degree of director input into the day to day working of the Trust through the appointment of Board Champions and establishment of four subgroups. Calum thanked the volunteer directors for their continued input and staff for their excellent work throughout the year.

The main funding source for the year was from NatureScot for the Native Habitat Restoration Project (NRF) for tree planting.

Fañch Bihan-Gallic (**FBG**) joined the Trust as Gaelic Ranger through funding received from Community Land Scotland and NatureScot.

Community Consultations were held at various venues throughout the estate.

The Trust has been in existence for 20 years this year and is in a strong position as it looks to the future.

Calum expressed that it was excellent that over 70% of the land in the Western Isles was now in community ownership. David Cameron (**DC**) confirmed this.

4. Staff Reports

Staff reports were circulated in the Annual Report.

5. FINANCIAL REPORT

John Moffat, **(JM)** Auditor, Mann Judd Gordon, presented the Statement of Financial Activities found on pages 7 & 8 in the Annual Report.

Shaun Hayes **(SH)** asked whether it would be possible to receive the accounts 6 weeks ahead of the AGM in future. JM explained that standard procedure was to present the Financial Statement at the AGM and best practice was to have the accounts approved by directors before making public. It was agreed to make the accounts available to members, after directors' approval, at the same time as, if not before, the AGM notice for 2024. SH observed that the Board should be looking to capitalise on the benefit of the FSCS's £85k allowance per institution.

JM explained that the funding received from the Nature Restoration Fund **(NRF)** for the Native Woodland Project had now been spent and the funds received from the sale of Quayside Cottages remains in the accounts.

Gordon Ness **(GN)** asked if there were any plans to proceed with the housing project as the funds from the sale of Quayside Cottages, which was ring fenced for housing, was sitting in the accounts. Calum explained that the costs had risen over the past couple of years, and it was difficult to secure funding and an affordable building price from contractors. John Henry **(JH)** suggested looking at appointing mainland contractors. GN suggested building a single unit, but Paul Russ **(PR)** advised that this was high risk to invest in one property.

Theresa Bartlett **(TB)** asked why the Quayside properties had been sold and not renovated. Barbara MacKay **(BM)** explained that the properties were older and required a substantial amount of money to bring up to standard. The properties were a burden on finances. TB asked if the properties had been sold as holiday homes. Calum answered that one property had been sold to the tenant, living, and working locally, at market value. At the time of sale, the other property was occupied by a local estate worker but is now a holiday home.

TB suggested looking at ways other Islands, like Orkney, had proceeded with housing developments.

GN asked whether funds should be spent on housing as it was not beneficial for the community to have funds sitting in the bank for several years. Michael informed that the feedback from the Community Consultations had housing as the top priority.

Shaun Bloomfield **(SB)** raised whether it would be possible to buy private houses for rent. David Wake **(DW)** responded that, unfortunately, no funding was available for house purchases.

GN suggested looking at other ways to proceed for example the possibility of renovating empty homes or entering into partnership with local contractors. It was explained that it wouldn't be possible to partner with contractors as they would be looking to sell the properties whereas the Trust would be looking at providing affordable homes.

Calum informed that the Trust had been working alongside HHP to provide land for the housing project at Scott Road.

GN asked how many bank accounts the Trust had and whether it was advisable to leave the money in the same institution. JM advised that it would be safer to have finances in separate institutions. SH recommended to the Board to split funds between institutions.

6. APPROVAL OF AUDITED ACCOUNTS

Calum MacKay thanked John Moffat for his work in auditing the accounts. The audited accounts were approved.

7. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

Mann Judd Gordon are to be retained as auditors with the caveat that the accounts will be available by members prior to the AGM as requested by SH.

8. CONFIRMATION OF DIRECTORS

Calum MacKay, Tim Langley, Paul Russ and Phil Butterfield were due to retire by rotation. The positions were advertised but no new prospective directors came forward and all 4 directors were willing to stand for another term. Members were asked whether they agreed to confirm the directors. GN, JH and SH expressed that they did not wish to confirm the current directors. Calum asked for a vote by show of hands and all current directors were reinstated by majority with 3 members abstaining. GN stated that he felt the Trust weren't making a good enough effort in the community to attract new directors. He expressed that it was diluting capability by recycling the same blood. He voiced that he was unaware of Phil Butterfield (**PB**) as a Scalpay director. That PB was not undertaking his duty as he was not making himself widely known amongst the community. PB responded by saying the same could also be said of members of other community groups. GN asked how many directors had undertaken OSCR governance training as stipulated in minutes. Calum confirmed he had undertaken the training, but no other directors had at this stage. GN felt that the Trust should promote the positives and encourage people to come along. Calum said that community consultations had been held throughout the estate with better attendance in some areas than others. These meetings were well advertised, and it was the people's choice to attend. GN enquired if the Trust was understaffed with Michael undertaking outdoor work and management. He urged the board to take on more staff.

JM left the meeting at this point.

9. QUESTIONS AND ANSWER SESSION

SH had read in the February board minutes that *"The Board concluded that they perceived the project as a business development and so determined that NHT should not waive the land sale"* in relation to the staff accommodation proposal from HDL. SH recommended to directors that this was a bad decision. Calum explained that the decision had been made on the understanding that it was a business development, and a final decision hadn't been made until further information is received. SH stated that the minute did not reflect this decision. CJM asked Kenny MacLeod (**KML**), HDL director, for an update on the project. KML explained that it was a Key Worker

Accommodation project rather than Seasonal Staff and gave an update. The Board has requested more information will continue liaising with the agencies involved. SH asked whether the Board had responded to the recent HPMA survey. Faïch Bihan Gallic (**FBG**) had prepared a response which is to be issued to the media. The Trust recognises the need to protect the marine environment however strongly opposes any detrimental impact to the local community. SH supports this.

SH noticed in the minutes that when a croft in Scalpay was assigned recently it stated that “there were 9 strong applicants” for the croft tenancy. SH asked whether new crofts could be created when there was such a demand. CJM responded by saying that new croft creation had been discussed and considered in the past and could be revisited. SH expressed that it was worth considering again.

JH asked if the Trust monitor unused crofts on the estate. CJM explained that it was the Crofting Commission’s remit to identify unused crofts through their annual Census.

SH asked if the Trust received payment for all croft rents. MH said that over 90% of tenants had paid to date.

SH asked if there were outstanding amounts on mast income. MH explained that due to a revision of the Telecommunications Code 2017 that a couple of leases had yet to be completed. JH asked whether the Trust would receive the outstanding monies. MH confirmed that the monies would be received once leases had been finalised by solicitors.

SH observed that in the February minutes it stated that a £3000 budget would be allocated for a community 20-year Anniversary celebration. SH declared that he personally wished this budget be used to alleviate poverty in the community rather than a celebration. SH encouraged directors to revisit this decision and the aims & objectives of the Trust.

SH noticed in the May 2022 minutes that “£4000 remained outstanding on the NatureScot claim” and asked for clarification. MH explained that these trees would be used for other purposes or could be sold on.

TB asked how many trees were part of the project and MH informed that over 20 thousand trees had been planted.

SH questioned if the Trust was planning to register for Carbon Credits. Finlay MacLeod (**FML**) responded by saying that a decision of that scale would require community consultation and would not be a Board decision.

DC advised not to enter into a fixed policy at the moment as there was a lot to be learned yet.

SH asked why the Community Development Fund (CDF) had closed and Calum explained that funds had depleted. SH suggested reinstating the CDF by using some of the housing money.

SH asked for a financial breakdown of the NRF project. MH provided him with this. GN proposed to use a different venue for next year’s AGM.

CJM thanked everyone for coming along and for the contributions.

The meeting closed at 21:30.