



MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
OF
THE NORTH HARRIS TRUST

MONDAY 17th JUNE 2013

7.30PM – HARRIS HOTEL, TARBERT

1. Apologies: Barbara MacKay, Linda MacDonald

Present: Calum MacKay, Cathy B Morrison, Kenny MacKay, Tim Langley, Ian MacSween, John A MacDonald, Mick Blunt, Donald J Morrison, Steve McCombe, Sheila Roderick, Donald J Cunningham, Alistair MacLeod, Matt Watts, Mark Lazzeri, David Wake, Karen MacRae, Diana MacLennan, Calum MacDonald, Sammy MacLeod, Robert MacKinnon, John MacDonald, Hans Zeller, Edith Zeller, Ronnie Morrison, Mick Calcutt, Caroline Calcutt, Fiona MacKenzie, Maria Keane, Jean Mills, John M Morrison, Kenny MacLean, Angus J MacLeod, Jeeves Toor, Anthony Latham, Donald J Gunn, Seumas Morrison, Hector Murray, Calum MacAulay, Andrew Morrison, Cameron Morrison

2. The minutes of the previous AGM were proposed by Mick Blunt and seconded by Kenny MacKay to be a true account of that meeting.

3. Chairman's Report

The Chairman, Calum J Mackay, welcomed everyone to the 10th Annual General Meeting of the North Harris Trust. A copy of the previous minute and the 10th annual report was distributed to everyone in attendance.

Introduction

The North Harris Trust marks a significant milestone this year: ten years of community land ownership in North Harris. Involvement with the Trust throughout these years has been interesting, challenging and also rewarding. Those of us who have been involved with the Trust from the very beginning can look back on many achievements which have contributed to improvement within North Harris. We can also look back on minor disappointments as some projects which were proposed have failed to come to fruition. However, there is no doubt that the Trust has been a success story. It is regarded by many people, within Harris and further afield, as a good example of community land ownership. This is reflected in the high number of people who take an interest in the work of the Trust and who use the Trust as an example of good practice.

The continued success of the Trust is principally due to the commitment and hard work of staff and directors. It is also due to the strong support which the Trust has within the local community and the continued support received from partnership agencies.

In reflecting on the work of the Trust over these ten years, it is clear that the Trust fulfils a valuable function within the local community. It has taken the lead in a range of projects throughout the whole estate. A booklet is currently being compiled which summarises many of these projects. The Trust has also supported individuals and companies which have developed business projects in North Harris. This has been done largely in collaboration with agencies such as HIE and CNES.

I will refer briefly to a few of the Trust's activities; individual staff reports will contain more detail about the projects in which they have been involved.

Staffing

During the course of the year, there were a number of changes within staffing. Chrissie Gillies was employed for a year through the HIE Graduate Placement programme with a specific remit for 'Community Engagement'. Throughout the year, Chrissie accomplished a lot of work in that area, consulting extensively with the community at large and also engaging specifically with young people. Chrissie left the Trust in April. We appreciate her input into the work of the Trust and wish her well for the future.

Matt Watts was employed as Administrative Assistant with funding from the OHMEET programme.

Robin Reid, who had been employed as Ranger for a couple of years, left to take up a post as RSPB officer for the Western Isles. Robin's departure was a great loss to the Trust since he had devoted a great deal of time to establishing and maintaining an excellent Ranger service. We were, however, pleased that Robin's new job is located in Harris and he continues to have strong links with the Trust.

After Robin's departure, Matt Watts transferred to the Ranger post. He has ably continued the good work established by Robin. We are pleased that funding for the Ranger post has been secured for the next three years.

When Matt transferred to the Ranger post, Karen Macrae joined the Trust as Administrative Assistant.

Promoting the Natural Environment

There is a visible increase in the number of people visiting Harris to engage in a range of outdoor pursuits. The Trust is active in encouraging visitors and local people to actively engage with the natural environment. There is an extensive network of paths throughout North Harris and the Trust regularly secures funding to maintain these. The input of John Muir Trust volunteer work parties to assist in a number of outdoor projects, such as paths maintenance, is very much appreciated. The second Isle of Harris Mountain Festival in September was very successful. The Ranger led guided walks continue to be very successful. Trust staff are regularly involved with Sir E Scott school on the John Muir Awards project, on the Crofting Connections project and during Activities Week in June. The Eagle Observatory in Glen Meavaig is very popular. Improved parking and information boards at the end of paths has been put in place recently.

Laurie Campbell was commissioned for a year to take photographs throughout North Harris. Laurie is a renowned landscape photographer and he produced an excellent portfolio of work. The Trust plans to print a book containing the best of Laurie's work.

Scalpay

Throughout the last year, the Trust has been actively engaged in discussions with the Scalpay community. Scalpay residents were offered the opportunity to acquire the island without any cost. This was a generous offer from the owner of the island. After extensive consultation, the residents of Scalpay decided to accept this offer. They also agreed that the best way to manage the island would be to amalgamate with the North Harris Trust. Scalpay had, of course, been part of the former North Harris Estate prior to 1975. The process of acquisition of the land and amalgamating with the Trust is currently being pursued by the Scalpay community and it is hoped that it will be concluded very soon.

Isle of Harris Distillery Project

The Trust is pleased to be involved in the Isle of Harris Distillery project. This is a good example of the Trust supporting inward investment into Harris, which will provide up to 20 jobs when it is fully operational. The funding has now been secured by the developers and it is hoped that the project building work will commence in the autumn. It will be good to eventually see a development taking place on the infill area in East Loch Tarbert.

Support from outside agencies

As ever, the Trust is grateful for the continued support received from a number of organisations and agencies which contribute greatly to the work of the Trust. These include Highlands and Islands Enterprise, Comhairle nan Eilean Siar, Scottish Government, John Muir Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage, The Robertson Trust, Esmee Fairbairn Foundation, Carnegie UK Trust and the Brown Forbes Memorial Fund.

Conclusion

The above notes are only a brief sample of the range of activities in which the Trust has been involved over the past year. Further details of the Trust's work are always available on the Trust's website.

In conclusion, I feel that this has been a successful year for the North Harris Trust and that it is a strong position to make further progress in the years ahead.

4. Staff Reports

Development Manager's Report

The Committee of the Croileagan offered to transfer their building to the Trust for a nominal sum in June 2012, in view of their move to premises in Sir E. Scott School. Assurance has been given to other existing users that they can continue to use the facilities and we are seeking ways to use the building to best effect for the benefit of the community, and there have been expressions of interest from seven individuals or groups.

Negotiations are still under way with Marine Harvest for a permanent lease of the shore base facility at Eileananabaich and fortunately the concerns of some local residents have been eased when the pattern of activity and operations to be permitted has been observed over a period.

The footbridge that the Trust placed across the river in Glen Langadale in 2007 on the Bowglass to Meavaig path was unfortunately destroyed in a freak flash flood that happened in July. We are looking into alternative designs and cost effective ways to replace it.

After three years of discussions with CNES regarding the Cliasmol School buildings, and several public meetings held with local residents, the Board decided to withdraw our interest in taking the site over on behalf of the community. We commissioned a structural survey of the school and it was estimated that around £100,000 would be needed to bring the main building up to an acceptable standard and a public meeting endorsed the Trust's recommendation.

Work began on the installation of a water main from a new pumping station at Urgha to Marig and many infrastructural improvements were agreed as part of the project, such as car parks and track improvement.

The bridge at the Lacasdale lochs in Urgha was replaced, the area was landscaped and parking facilities were enlarged. This has greatly improved safety and enhanced the surrounding environment.

Discussions continued with the Isle of Harris Distillery Company to assist them at stages of the project to put in place agreements for the necessary water supply and to identify possible sites for the bonded warehouse facility.

Land Manager's Report

Staff

Mark Lazzeri joined the staff of the Trust in mid October to replace Duncan MacPherson who had left the Trust at the beginning of June to join the West Harris Trust.

Footpaths

Restoration of the footpath from the end of the 4x4 track at loch Bhoisimid east into Glen Vigadail to the car park at Bogha Glas was held up over much of the winter due to bad weather but was finally completed in May. A violent flash flood in July after a long dry spell resulted in the footbridge over the Langadail River being swept downstream and the bases destroyed. We are in discussions with our insurers about a potential claim to replace the bridge. In September JMT volunteers did some specialist stonework repairs to a poor section of the Husinis to Crabhadal path, but significant more work remains to be done. A project bid by HDL to do some of this work did not succeed but they hope a new project bid will allow this much needed work to be undertaken. As part of the installation works by Scottish Water of the Urgha to Maraig water main, we negotiated the installation of geotextile path reinforcement grid along the east side of Loch Lacasdail. Whilst not perfect this has created a useable access up most of this side of the Loch. Another trial using a more robust geotextile for footpath creation is looking even more promising. We have met with officers of the Hebrides Long Distance Footpath to discuss potential routes – this will remain somewhat academic as the project has only sufficient funding to do the Uist sections of path. Increasing footfall, greater numbers of mountain bikes and periods of heavy rain, are all taking a severe toll on our footpaths network and whilst there are funding opportunities for path creation and restoration there is none available for routine maintenance irrespective of how costly this may be.

Forestry / Woodland

The Trust's two native riparian woodland schemes have achieved the establishment standards required by their grant conditions. We have drawn up proposals to extend both of these to build on their success. The original Molinginis Native woodland project had to be abandoned as the original cost estimates on which the grant application had been based were found to be significantly too low when it came to getting quotes. A revised scheme has been developed following the common grazing boundaries and targeting a larger area for both natural regeneration and planting.

The Kyles Scalpay Biomass Trial is in need of significant re-stocking and a new planting and management plan will be developed in conjunction with FCS.

Fencing

Some minor repairs have been carried out during the year, but otherwise they are in very good order. Improvements will be required at the Kyles Scalpay Biomass Trial to exclude rabbits, prior to restocking.

Deer

Bad weather delayed the helicopter count planned for October, and was eventually completed in early March. The count was organised by SNH as part of our Land Management Agreement and revealed an increase over the previous count to approximately 1100 (though somewhat lower than the estimated figures obtained from a foot count in 2008). Whilst the total number is about on target the population is heavily skewed towards hinds and is not distributed evenly across the estate, both of which will need to be addressed.

The Trust organised and subsidised a third and final level 1 Deer Stalking Certificate (DSC 1) training event, run by The Stalking School, to complete the provision of basic training for members of the Harris Stalking Club. Any future training activity will be focussed on intermediate and advanced training needs.

Land

The Trust in cooperation with land agents CKD Galbraith successfully negotiated a contract to lease out so called “naked acres”.

Policy & Visits

In April the Trust hosted an SNH field visit that included almost the entire staff of the Argyll and Islands team. During a walk up Glen Leosaid, Crabhadal, and round to Husinis, we were able to discuss many aspects of the Trust’s land management objectives and plans.

The Trust has been invited to contribute to the Scottish Government’s development of the Land Use Strategy policy and has participated as an exemplar organisation in events and seminars in June, July & August.

In October the Trust was invited to join the Working Group created by SNH to devise a new direction and policy for National Nature Reserves. This project will deliver final recommendations in late 2013.

North Harris Ranger Report

Staffing changes

Robin Reid, the left the North Harris Trust in July 2012, to go on to work with the RSPB. Matt Watts took over as the North Harris Ranger upon Robin’s departure. Matt had been working with NHT since April, spending a lot of time working with Robin, so the handover process was a smooth one.

Guided Walks Programme

In 2012, 360 people attended a total of 38 walks – an average of 9 people per walk. Similar to previous years, the most popular walks were on the Hushinish Machair, the Postman’s Path, the Eagle Walks and the Rutting walks. Feedback from attendees has been very positive, with numerous people taking part in subsequent walks. Through the height of the summer the attendees were predominantly visitors; more locals attended the walks at either end of the season. The leaflet advertising the walks was produced by the Ranger Service in conjunction with Harris Development Ltd.

Eagle Monitoring

As with previous years, the breeding success of all 13 breeding pairs of golden eagles was monitored. The data from this monitoring, particularly the locations of active nest sites each year, is used to inform land management activities including path maintenance operations, helicopter access and deer management, as well as guided walks for the year – to avoid disturbance of the breeding birds at critical times of year.

Eagle Observatory

Over the 2011/2012 winter, the North Harris Eagle Observatory was constructed in Glen Meavaig, and was opened in March 2012. Funding for its construction was secured from Scottish Natural Heritage, Leader, and the Brown Forbes Foundation. A visitors' book was left in the observatory; based on entries in the book we estimate at least 4000 people visited the site in its first year, with over 50% of visitors seeing the eagles. The observatory has received a fair amount of attention from both local and national press.

Invasive Plant Control

Ongoing small scale control efforts of Gunnera were carried out. In May, the JMT work party spent a day digging up Gunnera in Ardhasaig. Further chemical trials were conducted. NHT staff spent a day digging out gunnera on a number of locations in Tarbert in August. Announcements were made in local press (which were subsequently picked up by STV and BBC news), urging residents to cut off and dispose of seed heads. To date, the ranger service has facilitated the removal of gunnera from approximately 5ha of croft and other land on North Harris.

Work with Sir E Scott School

- The Ranger Service continued to assist in facilitating Sir E Scott School's involvement in the "Crofting Connections" programme. This is a national educational initiative that aims to inspire young people to play a part in the sustainable and profitable future of crofting in Scotland. Funding was secured from the Carnegie Trust UK to re-skin the polytunnels in East Tarbert, and they have been used by the school group to grow various vegetables over the season.
- In March the Ranger Service and other staff from the Trust helped organise the second "Enterprise Day" for the whole S3 Year Group at Sir E Scott School. The aim of this day has been to inform the students of the opportunities around them in Harris in terms of businesses and to inspire entrepreneurship.
- The Ranger Service continues to assist the School in delivering the John Muir Awards each year.

JMT Work Parties

The North Harris Trust hosted another two John Muir Trust work parties this year, in May and September. The first group of volunteers was 19 strong, the second 12. The ranger service lead and assisted the groups in carrying out footpath maintenance work, gunnera eradication and beach cleaning.

Isle of Harris Mountain Festival

In September 2012, the North Harris Trust held the second Harris Mountain Festival. This year the scope and number of events was significantly increased from the first festival. The Ranger Service played a key role in the organisation of the festival, in conjunction with NHT's Community Engagement Officer, and delivered a number very popular guided walks. It was a hugely successful week.

Publicity & Promotion

One of the key aims of the Ranger Service is to promote the natural history of Harris, and to promote and encourage outdoor access, to both visitors and locals. The Ranger Service operates in such a way to make this core to every aspect of work – acting as a point of first contact for anyone wishing for information on access etc in Harris.

North Harris Trading Company Report

The North Harris Trading Company (NHTC) is the wholly-owned subsidiary of the North Harris Trust (NHT). It manages "green" projects on behalf of NHT.

The year to November 2012 has seen NHTC continue to work on renewable energy projects to help build a sustainable income for the Trust. It also continues to operate the North Harris Community Recycling Site.

The Bunavoneader Hydro-electric project stalled this year. The UK Government's review of the Feed in Tariff caused uncertainty over the earnings of the hydro-scheme and stopped banks working on projects throughout the country. SSE then informed us that it was revising its grid connection date to 2015. The Trust's bank changed its lending policy and would no longer lend on hydro schemes. Most of these hurdles have now been overcome; a new grid connection date in 2014 has since been received and work is once again underway to fund the scheme.

In July we had a visit from the CEO of Windflow Technologies. He came from New Zealand to re-affirm his interest in forming a Joint Venture with the Trust to develop the Monan Windfarm. This project has also had to wait for a new grid connection date.

Following on from the partnership with Community Energy Scotland Trading that installed small wind turbines at Scaladale, three further machines were installed in West Tarbert. These are connected to three social housing units, and along with HHP's installation of heat pumps, are contributing to a significant reduction of energy costs for the tenants.

The Trust has started to investigate the possibility of re-developing Huisinis Public Toilets. The first stage of the plan has seen two small wind turbines installed. These are now powering the toilets, with excess electricity being exported to the grid.

The Westwind turbine at Urgha returned to the manufacturer for upgrade. It was decommissioned in May and didn't return for 10 months. This has significantly reduced the Urgha Site profitability.

The North Harris Community Recycling Site has continued to grow. With the withdrawal of Community skips throughout the island, the number of visitors to the site has continued to rise. This year saw further investment in the site, with pallet racking being installed in the shed.

The Zero-Carbon Business Unit project took a significant step forward with the award of £32,000 of development funding from Big Lottery. Following the receipt of

Planning Permission in May, Rural Design, based on Skye was appointed to progress the project. The Development Funding has also allowed us to carry out a Community Consultation exercise. This highlighted the need for economic development in North Harris and good support for this project.

5. APPROVAL OF AUDITED ACCOUNTS

Calum MacDonald, CIB Services, gave a brief financial report and informed that the Trust accounts looked healthy. The Audited accounts were approved.

6. APPOINTMENT OF AUDITORS

CIB Services to be retained as auditors.

7. CONFIRMATION OF DIRECTORS

Confirmation of directors approved.

8. SPECIAL RESOLUTION TO CHANGE BYE LAWS

A paper detailing the special resolutions was circulated and the resolutions were passed by all members in attendance.

9. COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

David Wake talked through a power point presentation of the feedback received from the Community Consultation.

10. QUESTION AND ANSWER SESSION

A number of questions were raised on a variety of subjects, including the Harris Marina Project, the effect of wind turbines in the community, gunnera eradication, the proposed venison butchery and the availability of new crofts. All questions were answered satisfactorily.

The 10th AGM came to a close at 9.45pm.