

## PAIRC TRUST AGM 2021

WEDNESDAY 3rd MARCH, 7.30PM, HELD REMOTELY VIA MS TEAMS

### Directors present:

Angus McDowall (AMcD), Ken Kennedy (KK), Ishbel MacLennan (IM), Iain Norman Macleod (INM), Joe Wilson (JW), Angus Nicolson (AN), Kenny Mackay (KM).

### Apologies:

No apologies had been received.

### Others also present:

20 members

Fiona Stokes (PT admin) (FS)

Sandy Gomez (CIB Services) (SG)

### 1. Welcome & Apologies

- AMcD opened the meeting, thanked everyone for attending and asked for any apologies from those who couldn't attend.
- Due to the Covid pandemic the AGM has fallen late this year, but special dispensation has been given by Office of Scottish Charities Regulator (OSCR) for a later submission of accounts and annual returns by organisations affected by the pandemic.
- FS ran through some technical points as this was the first AGM to be conducted online.

### 2. Minutes from 2019 AGM (held on 5<sup>th</sup> December 2019)

- AMcD asked those present at the AGM last year if the minutes were an accurate record. The minutes were proposed as accurate by Joe Wilson and seconded by Iain Norman Macleod.

### 3. Matters Arising

- none

### 4. Financial Report

- SG reported on the accounts for the year ending March 2020. They have been made available on the Trust website and SG confirmed this was in line with OSCR's rules.
- Notable items between April 2019 – March 2020: Income increased due to a number of grants received for the Gravir Housing project. Income and expenditure had otherwise remained the same, excepting employment of the Records Officer in January 2020 which had increased payroll expenses.
- The renovated houses at Gravir have now been reflected as fixed assets on the Balance Sheet and when added to the asset of the estate gives a strong value for the business. Cash in bank remains healthy too.
- No questions were raised by members.

### 5. Chairman's Report

- AMcD provided a report on activity from April 2019 to March 2020 and spoke on behalf of each working sub group – Housing, Tourism, Crofting & Renewables. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).

### 6. Update on Recent Developments

- AMcD outlined activities of the Trust for the period from April 2020 to the present. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).
- He made special mention of 2 directors standing down this year (see attached)
- He welcomed 2 new directors appointed this year (see attached)

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### **7. Appointment of Accountant**

- AMcD asked members to propose that CIB Services act as the Trust accountant for the following year. Ishbel MacLennan proposed and David Phillips seconded.

### **8. Any Other Business**

- Donnie Morrison made the group aware of an additional project that the Trust has been involved in, for an 'Internet of Things' trial in Pairc. Work is progressing well.
- John Randall updated the group on a forthcoming book by Bob Chambers on the Pairc Trust buyout. 'A Long and Tangled Saga – The Story of the Pairc Estate Community Buyout' details the process involved in buying the estate and outlines the lessons that can be learned by government and communities. Following delays from Covid19, the book is currently being typeset by the publishing house Acair for publication in Autumn 2021. John thanked all those who had contributed to the book.
- David Phillips congratulated the Trust on its recent purchase of the Resource Centre and asked what future plans for the building are. As well as information that is available on the Trust website and social media channels AMcD said the existing user groups are meeting to discuss needs and usage.

AMcD closed the AGM proceedings and hoped that a return to a more familiar face to face AGM would be possible next year.

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### Chairs report for AGM Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2021

This report will cover the financial year from April 2019 to March 2020 and then review Recent Developments since then.

From April through to August of 2019, the bulk of the Trust's work was centred around the completion of 2 new **houses for rent in Gravir**.

The old Care Unit in Carn Aonghais was purchased from the Council with help from the Scottish Land Fund and HIE, and then renovated to a high standard with funding from a mix of sources including The Rural Housing (Islands) Fund, Outer Hebrides LEADER and the Western Isles Development Trust.

Project managed by Tighean Innse Gall with the work carried out by O'Mac Construction we were delighted with the completed houses, finished to an excellent quality and using energy efficient solar panels and air source heat pumps to make them cheap to heat. Joe Wilson and Kenny Mackay form the Housing sub group and helped take this project from concept to completion.

Unsurprisingly they were filled straight away and our new tenants at 5 & 6 Carn Aonghais were delighted with their new homes. We held a 'Housewarming Party' which coincided with Community Land Week – when community land owners all over Scotland celebrate moving assets into the control of the community.

There is a huge amount of background work to complete on any project – but with the experience gained from this project, the Trust returned next to the idea of **purchasing the Resource Centre** in Kershader.

The idea had first been raised in 2016, soon after the completion of the buyout, but other work was prioritised back then. The Trust consulted the community again on buying this building for its existing users in November of 2019. This 'multi-use community space' is shared by 3 community groups at the moment - Pairc Trust have an office, Pairc Playgroup are based from the building and Pairc Community Council have a small gym in the building. There is also a large meeting room.

An 'Asset Transfer Request' was made to the Council in February 2020, who agreed in August of that year that the community could buy the building at a reduced rate of its market value. It was finally purchased in January 2021 and we are delighted to have ownership for the community.

Another Project reaching completion at the end of 2019, was the **Feasibility Study by AECOM** which assessed whether the Pairc Estate would be suitable for a Pumped Storage Hydro Project.

The report looked at the geography of a site on the South side of the estate to consider if a large hill – Malasgair - and adjacent Loch Sgiobacleit– the largest freshwater loch on the estate - would provide acceptable conditions. It also considered any initial environmental issues and modelled potential construction and revenue from the scheme. A project like this could provide a valuable income for the Trust, and integrate with the Island's electricity grid to better balance the network.

The study was funded by the CARES Innovation fund and we will be returning to them in 2021 to work on the next steps.

At the beginning of 2020 we **employed a Records Officer** to digitise the estate crofting records, with joint funding from 2 local community benefit funds - Muaitheabhal Windfarm Trust and the Western Isles Development Trust. The project has digitised all the estate records received from the

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previous landlord's factor and while it is not a complete picture, it is a very useful resource and historical record, which we hope to be able to make available to tenants and grazing committees in due course.

Our **Estate Office Manager** post also became jointly funded from HIE and Muaitheabhal Windfarm Trust, having previously been self-funded by the Pairc Trust. This was a huge benefit as the estate is still working towards developing a sustained income to support the Trust office and it is vital to have full-time staff to move forward with projects on behalf of the community.

In February 2020 we also welcomed the formation of the **Pairc Area Forum**, of which Pairc Trust is a member. Formed initially to bring together all the community groups in Pairc equally, it came at a time when Crown Estate funding was being released by the Comhairle to all Island communities. By having this overarching Forum and in discussion with the Councillors, Pairc groups have received over £70,000 from Rounds 1 & 2 to spend on projects we feel are important for our own area. The Trust received £10,012 to contribute to the running costs of the Resource Centre.

As the **Coronavirus pandemic** and lockdown was announced at the end of March 2020, the Records Officer and later the Estate Office Manager were put onto the furlough scheme, to protect the business from the effects of lockdown.

Some issues such as the Resource Centre Asset Transfer process and funding from the Land Fund continued in the background, but all other development work was put on hold until staff returned in September and October 2020.

### **Update on Recent Developments:**

In November 2020, the decision was taken to suspend collection of **croft rents** until 2021, to minimise the risks to people attending the office to pay in cash. 2 years rent will therefore be collected this year.

The crofting sub group was able to start meeting again to manage enquiries to the estate, and at the end of 2020 had negotiated an Early Entry Agreement for a new **mast installation in Calbost**. The recently introduced Telecommunications Code had effectively put a cap on annual lease payments that were due to landowners for these Emergency Service Network masts – what could previously attract thousands of pounds in annual rental, had been reduced by law to a few hundred. But following continued negotiation with EE, the Trust and our solicitor's Lindsay's of Edinburgh were able to bring in a much needed one off payment for the estate from an Early Entry Agreement.

**Tourism** was possibly the most badly affected part of the economy for the Islands during lockdown. While everything remained on pause, the Trust was able to create links through the organisation 'Interface', with 2 Scottish universities to help their undergraduate students research Sustainable Tourism in Pairc. Working with lecturers at Glasgow Caledonian University, Pairc Trust was used as a case study for over 600 students to create business plans on Tourism projects – these were presented to the Trust in early 2021.

A similar link was established with Queen Margaret's University in Edinburgh for their undergraduates, and the information gathered during these collaborations is relevant and available to any group or individual interested in tourism, not just the Pairc Trust.

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December 2020 saw the **5 Year Anniversary** of the Buyout reaching its final conclusion, after a 13 year battle to put the Estate into the hands of the people who live there. To mark the occasion the Trust launched an annual bursary scheme of £500 for a young person to be helped in their learning, or to get experience of a project elsewhere which would bring fresh learning back to us.

As 2021 began we have responded to the new working requirements being enforced by the continued **Covid 19** situation. Rather than meeting and conducting business in person, we have received funding from HIE to support our directors to get online and increase their **IT skills**. Our Records Officer Donald Macleod is able to put to good use his Computing degree by offering 1 to 1 support, and producing a number of useful 'IT Tips' videos that can be seen on the Trust's You Tube channel.

The **Resource Centre purchase** completed in January 2021 and the 3 main groups who use it are now meeting to discuss a shared use of the building. Crown Estate funding is being used to help the transition to ownership by covering the first year's running costs, which will support the community take on this new asset.

Finally, the Trust is building on the experience gained from the Gravir Housing and Resource Centre projects to enquire about purchasing the **Habost Industrial Units** and adjacent land. The units will be retained for business use while the land could be developed into more Housing to encourage families to settle in Pairc and support out services. TIG will be carrying out an initial feasibility study in the next few months to inform the purchase.

Covid continues to bring many challenges, but as this year's Financial report shows, from bringing more assets into community ownership the value of our business continues to grow, offering more security for the future of Pairc.

A final important mention is to be made on a **change to the Board** following this AGM and the need for a retiral of 50% of our directors, as per our Articles of Association.

Raymond Hughes joined the board in February 2020. As one of the first tenants of the Houses at Gravir, Raymond offered a unique perspective on the work of the Trust and joined the Housing sub group. He helped work on plans for a potential new development at the Habost units and we are very grateful for his contributions. Unfortunately he has stepped down as part of the Director rotation this year and has decided not to renew his position.

John Murdo Matheson has made a vital contribution to the Board and Crofting sub group since he joined in 2016. He too will be standing down in 2021, but we thank him for 5 years of contributions. His viewpoint on Crofting matters has been invaluable and this working knowledge of Pairc's crofting practices and land-use is not something that can be bought in. He has been instrumental in developing a charging policy, negotiating leases and answering the hundreds of enquiries received by the estate office each year. We are very grateful to him for his time and effort and he will be very missed.

Two new directors will be joining the board in 2021 – David Simpson and Mark Griffiths who live in Garyvard. Since moving to the area from Yorkshire at the beginning of 2020, they have become involved with many local groups and frequently volunteer their time to help out – most especially at Aline community woodland and the Habost Polytunnels where they are never afraid to roll up their sleeves and get to work. They are also trained to lead our regular health-walks, so we're very pleased to see them increase their involvement with the Trust.