

THE PAIRC TRUST AGM 2025
TUESDAY 25th FEBRUARY, 7:30PM
THE RESOURCE CENTRE, KERSHADER



Directors present:

Angus McDowall (AMcD), Ken Kennedy (KK), Iain Norman Macleod (INM), John Murdo Matheson (JMM), Joe Wilson (JW), Jenny Mclaughlin (JM), Donald Nicolson (DN), Chris Coles (CC), Zsolt Szalay (ZS).

Staff present:

Emma Mackenzie (EM), Catherine Muir (CM), Luke Crosland-Thomson (LCT).

Others also present:

14 members

5 non-members

Agnes Rennie (Chair, Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn) (AR)

1. Welcome & Apologies

- AMcD opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. AMcD welcomed Agnes Rennie, Chair of the Galson Estate Trust, who would be speaking about community land ownership later in the meeting.
- AMcD asked for any apologies from those who couldn't attend. Apologies were received from Angus Nicolson.

2. Minutes from 2024 AGM (held on 18th June 2024)

- AMcD asked those present at the AGM last year if the minutes were an accurate record. The minutes were proposed as accurate by Donnie Morrison and seconded by Zsolt Szalay.

3. Matters Arising

- There were no matters arising from the previous AGM to be discussed.

4. Financial Report

- CiB Accountants provided a report on the Trust's accounts but were unfortunately not able to attend the AGM. KK reviewed the report on the accounts for the year ending March 2024. A copy had been made available on the Trust website prior to the AGM.
- Page 5 - Statement of Financial Activities. Income and expenditure were both increased from the previous year. Total funds increased by ~£20,000 compared to 2023.
- Page 6 – Balance Sheet. Total funds at the end of March 2024 – figure of £961,147 with the Trust being largely solvent and possessing a healthy cash reserve. Current asset value increased by ~£10,000 compared to 2023.
- KK asked that the meeting review CiB's notes in the report for additional information. No questions were raised by members and AMcD thanked KK for delivering the report.

5. Appointment of Accountant

- AMcD proposed reviewing Pairc Trust's accountancy arrangements due to ongoing disruptions at CiB. Donnie Morrison seconded the motion.

6. Chairman's Report

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- AMcD provided a report on activity from June 2023 to March 2024 and spoke on behalf of each working subgroup – Crofting, Projects, Property and Tourism. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).

7. Update on Recent Developments

- AMcD outlined activities of the Trust for the period from March 2024 to the present. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).

8. Agnes Rennie - UOG

- Agnes Rennie gave a speech on community land ownership, describing community land trusts as businesses working for their communities. Key to their success is their ability to draw on the experience of their residents, and to collaborate with each other – Lewis & Harris have good levels of co-operation between community trusts.
- UOG covers a vast area of croft land and holds 22 townships with ~2,000 residents. The community buyout in 2007 was founded on a firm business plan footing which prioritised community energy generation, and this business plan was expanded to a full strategic plan in 2017. Key priority areas for UOG include care & wellbeing, tourism, crofting & land use, renewables, the wider environment, and developing Galson as an 'exceptional place'. Partnering with other organisations has been vital in implementing this plan.
- Galson Energy Ltd. is a wholly owned subsidiary which manages UOG's renewable energy systems. The subsidiary took out construction loans for the turbines and Gift Aids the profits to UOG. Historically, Co-Chomunn (community co-op) organisations in the Western Isles distributed profits to their communities, but Agnes sees this as the wrong approach: better to invest in a community organisation to provide ongoing support and benefits for a community. Profits from UOG's turbines are distributed as follows: banks receive the first share (to repay loans, due by 2027), UOG adds a share to their reserve second, UOG operations receive the third funding share, and the fourth share goes into UOG's community investment fund.
- UOG's Community Investment Fund is flexible and can cover gaps in CnES ward funding, or scale to cover larger projects. It is often vital in attracting match funding – generally £1 of UOG funding attracts £7 in match funding. The fund is managed by a dedicated staff member.
- UOG are currently undertaking several key projects:
 - **West Coast Community Energy** is exploring a new wind farm development on Galson land in partnership with the Carloway Estate and Barvas Estate Trusts. Grid space for the project is pending allocation. The Galson turbines will reach end-of-life in 2035, so this is planning for that eventuality.
 - **Affordable housing** is being pursued in the estate. The Crofting Commission has taken absentee action which has seen a croft voluntarily transferred to UOG, which is looking to split the land into new crofts and build a housing development.
 - **Tourism** developments include discussions with the Northern Lighthouse Board to permit a feasibility study re: developing the Butt of Lewis. UOG also co-ordinate community events in conjunction with other organisations in the estate.
- The ultimate vision of UOG is to keep the land secure and in trust. Finding funding for projects is important, but the land is forever.
- Questions & comments were raised by several attendees at the end of the presentation, as follows:
 - What were the funding sources UOG used for the turbine development?

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- Turbine development was funded by Co-Op bank (possibly the last such client they accepted), community grants, Triodos bank, and £750,000 raised through community share offers.
- West Coast Community Energy project would not be possible without UOG funds from wind turbines; grants have now dried up.
- Great British Energy is an unknown quantity at the moment.
- UOG would be in a very different position without the income stream from their energy developments. The income provides real confidence to the organisation.
- What impact is the proposed Spioraid na Mara going to have on Galson?
 - Cable landfall site is unclear at the moment but will need to cross the Barvas moor. UOG & other trusts have negotiated community benefit payments from Northwind, including money for Uig residents under private ownership. Trusts aren't necessarily supportive of the development but want to extract maximum benefits for their communities if the development proceeds: 2-3 years of negotiations to extract concessions.
- How many staff do UOG employ?
 - 18 staff members, mix of full- and part-time.
- The social side of community matters (care, social events etc.) isn't well addressed in Pairc. How can this be addressed?
 - Organisations must work together. UOG hosts open days and subsidises other events. Try to find the current gaps and see how they can be filled. UOG are also negotiating with CnES re: social care provision.
- Please don't hesitate to contact UOG with any additional questions!

9. Any Other Business

- Members requested an update on deer culling in Pairc.
 - Pairc Trust are meeting the shooting tenant in a fortnight to discuss increased cull numbers. Tenant is willing to increase their efforts, currently have taken 150% of last year's cull. The Trust aim to increase community involvement in the matter.
- Pairc has many underutilised crofts & unoccupied homes. Can the Pairc Trust mirror UOG's approach in getting crofts assigned to new tenants and bringing housing back into use? Can Pairc Trust establish a register of underutilised crofts?
 - UOG were in the unique position of being gifted the croft mentioned in AR's presentation after absentee action was initiated by the Crofting Commission. Previously absentee crofts in Pairc have been lotted to new tenants by the Crofting Commission, the Trust is not involved in that process.
 - The Crofting Commission bears legal responsibility for overseeing crofting duties and residency.
- AMcD thanked directors and employees for all their work over the year towards the Trust, AR for attending and presenting at the AGM, local councillors for their guidance and assistance over the year, and all attendees at the AGM.
- AMcD encouraged members present to contact the Pairc Trust if they, or someone they know, are interested in lending assistance as co-opted Directors – 2 positions are available.

AMcD closed the AGM proceedings.

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Chair's Report

This report will cover the financial year from April 2023 to March 2024 and then review Recent Developments since then.

April 2023 to March 2024

The Trust has been in negotiations to purchase the land next to the Habost Units which currently belong to Highlands and Islands Enterprise. There have been several challenges, but we are working with Graham & Sibbald (acting on behalf of HIE) to progress these. The land at Habost will be an important acquisition for us, and an important asset for us to maximise for the community.

We welcomed our first commercial tenant in the Resource Centre – Chanté Batson is now using space for her Osteopathy Clinic, and we have regular community events and meetings which have increased in the last six months. We are committed to ensuring that the Resource Centre is very much a hub for the community, working alongside Ravenspoint and the Co-Chomunn na Pairc. We have hosted horticultural events, dancing classes, arts and craft sessions, and a variety of meetings; and we look forward to more events and activities hosted here.

We are working closely with CCnP to explore making both The Resource Centre and Ravenspoint more environmentally friendly, aiming for net zero, with potential funding to apply for through CARES and Community Energy Scotland advising and supporting. Following on from the Pairc Area Strategic Review, Pairc Trust and CCnP have set up a working group and undertook our first major project, which involved the successful upgrading of the shared septic tank system, vital to the operation of the Resource Centre and Ravenspoint.

In 2023 we were pleased to support Martha Malcolm and Louise Wilson with our Youth Enablement Award. Both Martha and Louise have made good use of the funding in supporting their career progression. Martha has used the award towards purchasing a 3D printer for her studies, and Louise has used the award to obtain an HGV licence. Unfortunately, we have not had any applications for the award over the 2024 period, and we are looking into different ways we can use the funding to benefit young people in Pairc.

We continue to develop plans and proposals for the Tigh Ceilidh at Gravir, and we are currently in detailed design discussions with Tighean Innse Gall prior to submitting our main funding application with the Rural Housing Fund in April 2025.

We were pleased to secure funding from WHP Telecoms back in 2023 for a pilot project to connect homes to 4G in areas without signal. The initial pilot in Orinsay had mixed results but overall reached a successful conclusion – we have learned a great deal and are grateful to the residents who took part in the pilot for their patience and support. An expansion of this project to other not-spots on

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the Estate is ongoing in partnership with the Scottish Future's Trust, and we will be releasing further information on this soon.

The Trust were pleased to announce the formal launch of our Community Benefit Fund in collaboration with MOWI. This fund allowed four pupils from Sgoil na Pairc to attend the Primary Engineer Awards Ceremony at Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen, as well as contributing towards grounds maintenance at Ravenspoint and vital repairs to the roof of the Habost Mission Hall, where the Pairc Historical Society maintain a humidity-controlled document store. We have also contributed towards the upkeep of Garyvard and Gravir cemeteries, as well as helping to fund the 21st Angus Macleod Memorial Lecture organised by the Islands Book Trust at Sgoil na Pairc.

In February 2024, we welcomed Jenny McLaughlin and Donald Nicolson onto the board as co-opted directors. In the same month, Ralph Tonge also joined the Pairc Trust staff as Project Manager and a month later we welcomed Luke Crosland-Thomson as Administrator. Both staff are part time and based at the Resource Centre.

Recent Developments

The first Pairc Newsletter was published in May 2024. We now produce a free monthly newsletter highlighting local events, projects, news, and success stories from around the Estate and wider area. If you have anything that you would like to submit to the newsletter or would like to receive a digital copy each month, please get in touch with the office.

We are pleased to report progress on our project to update signage on the Estate. A new 'Welcome to Pairc' sign will be installed at the correct location on the boundary of the Estate with updated visuals and wording. We are also pleased to announce that we were successful in an application to the Scottish Landfill Community Fund which will fund the renovation and refurbishment of the Habost picnic site. We hope to announce more on this in the near future.

We have been working with Community Land Outer Hebrides and the North Harris Trust to implement a management plan for Gunnera in Pairc, which will be implemented as the new growing season comes upon us. Gunnera is an invasive species and causes a variety of problems with drainage and can take over land quite quickly. Please get in touch with us if you have any gunnera on your property or are aware of an outbreak of it.

A couple of weeks back saw the launch of the new 'Made in Pairc' initiative, which we are happy to be supporting and facilitating along with Ravenspoint and Co-Chomunn na Pairc. Made in Pairc aims to provide an outlet for local producers and crafters to sell their goods to local residents, and the first stage in taking this forward involves gathering as much information about producers and potential buyers of local produce and services within the Estate. If you are willing to help gather this information in your township please get in touch with us.

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Members of the Pairc Trust Tourism Group have pursued an exciting new project in mapping a 'Pairc Trail', with the aim of encouraging the development of 'slow tourism' within Pairc. Part of this involved identifying a walking route between Gravir and Lemreway, which has now been mapped, and the Group is proceeding with developing a full tourism strategy which links in with the launch of Made in Pairc, and other elements of the tourist industry in the Estate.

In 2019 Pairc Trust received funding from Local Energy Scotland's CARES Innovation Fund to look at whether the Pairc Estate is suitable for a Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme. The Trust commissioned a feasibility study with AECOM to assess the suitability of such a scheme, and this development on Malascair is now progressing. The development was in limbo for some time, but now that SSE have confirmed that the interconnector cable to the island is being constructed the project is now being moved forward. We expect to be able to update the community about the proposed Pumped Hydro Storage in the coming months.

The Trust recently completed a refurbishment of the Resource Centre Hall and have also acquired a Cinema Licence Exemption, which will allow us to host events showing licensed films and other media. We plan further developments of the Hall to allow for expanded events and have recently successfully applied for Community Led Local Development (CLLD) funding to examine the feasibility of physically enlarging the Hall to allow for an expanded range of events and sports to be held there. This will also allow us to implement several recommendations from our Greenhouse Gas Audit, provided during the summer by Muirneag Consulting thanks to funding from Climate Hebrides.

Chris Coles, Donald Nicolson and Jenny McLaughlin joined us as full Directors at our AGM last year, with Zsolt Szalay also being invited as a co-opted Director in the Autumn of 2024. All have proven assets to the Trust's aims and objectives. We also bade farewell to both Angus Nicolson, who resigned as our Vice-Chair just after our previous AGM, and Joe Wilson, who stepped down as a director just before Christmas. We would like to thank them for their time and effort in supporting the Trust and wish them the best for the future.

I would like to thank all the directors and staff for all their work for the Trust over the year in contributing to the success of the Pairc Trust.

We currently have two social scientists visiting Pairc Estate on a project exploring the effects of community landownership in Scotland. The project is led by the James Hutton Institute in collaboration with Scotland Rural College (SRUC) and is funded by the Scottish Government. The project aims to understand more about the effects of community landownership over time. They would like to speak to people who live within or near to Pairc Estate, have an interest in the Trust's work, or who are staff members or directors of the Trust. Their work is ongoing so please get in touch and they will suggest some dates for meeting either online or in person when they are next on the island.