

PAIRC TRUST AGM 2022

TUESDAY 1ST MARCH, 7.30PM, HELD REMOTELY VIA MS TEAMS

Directors present:

Angus McDowall (AMcD), Ken Kennedy (KK), Iain Norman Macleod (INM), Joe Wilson (JW), Angus Nicolson (AN), Audrey Scott (AN).

Apologies:

Kenny Mackay (KM)

Others also present:

23 members.

Fiona Stokes (FS)

Calum Macdonald (CIB Services) (CM)

1. Welcome & Apologies

- AMcD opened the meeting, thanked everyone for attending and asked for any apologies from those who couldn't attend.

2. Minutes from 2021 AGM (held on 3rd March 2021)

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

3. Matters Arising

- John Randall updated the group on the publication of Bob Chambers' book on the Pairc Trust Buyout. 2 launch events were held in October 2021 and John thanked AN for attending to speak at both.

4. Financial Report

- CM reported on the accounts for the year ending March 2021. A copy had been made available on the Trust website prior to the AGM and CM confirmed they are written as dictated by OSCR's standards.
- Page 6 - Statement of Financial Activities. There had been a large drop in income from the previous year, due to the completion of the Gravir housing project which had attracted grant income.
- Page 7 – Balance Sheet. A strong growth year on year can be demonstrated by total funds at the end of March 2021 of £955,840. An increase of assets was due to the purchase of the Resource Centre.
- No questions were raised by members and AMcD thanked CM for delivering his report.

5. Chairman's Report

- AMcD provided a report on activity from April 2020 to March 2021 and spoke on behalf of each working sub group – Housing, Tourism, Resource Centre & Crofting. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).

6. Update on Recent Developments

- AMcD outlined activities of the Trust for the period from April 2021 to the present. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).
- He made special mention of 3 directors standing down this year (see attached)
- He welcomed 1 director appointed this year (see attached)
- He welcomed 1 director re-appointed this year (see attached)
- He thanked FS for her work for the Trust, as she moves on after 5 years (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. Ken Kennedy proposed and David Phillips seconded. CM accepted the appointment.

8. Any Other Business

- John Groom asked for the position with the Pumped Storage Hydro Scheme. AMcD reported that the viability of the PSH scheme is greatly influenced by new windfarm developments at Eishken and Stornoway and the capacity of the interconnector. If these developments go ahead, the PSH scheme will become much more viable.
- John Groom thanked all at the trust for the work they have been doing through the year.
- Iain Nicolson echoed JG's thanks and considered the departure of FS as significant news for the Trust, hoping that someone as capable and professional could be appointed next.
- John Randall asked for clarity on who is currently a director of the Trust and whether the Articles of Association are being followed regarding director rotation. FS confirmed that, as identified in the Accounts – Trustees Report:
“Under the terms of the Articles of Association the Elected Directors are appointed by the whole body of members at the Annual General Meeting. One half of the Elected Directors must retire by rotation at every third Annual General Meeting, the last rotation being March 2021.” FS then confirmed the names of the 7 current directors. John was happy that the rules are being followed.
- AN thanked the community on behalf of the board for their continued support and recognised the need for community backing for the Trust to continue with its work.

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 Tuesday 1st March 2022

This report will cover the financial year from April 2020 to March 2021 and then review Recent Developments since then.

April 2020 to March 2021

The Coronavirus pandemic and lockdown was announced at the end of March 2020 which had an obvious impact on all of us. 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 Scottish Land Fund continued in the background, but all other work was put on hold until staff returned in September and October 2020.

In Crofting & Estate Management:

At the beginning of 2020 we had employed a Records Officer to digitise the estate crofting records, with joint funding from 2 local community benefit funds - Muaitheabhal Community Windfarm Trust and the Western Isles Development Trust. Donald Macleod from Balallan was able to return to work during October 2020 and completed the backup of historical crofting records by the December. We now have a Data Protection agreement in place so that tenants are able to request a copy of their own croft records, which is very useful for the tenant to manage their land. In some cases these records date back to 1878.

In November 2020, the decision was taken to suspend collection of croft rents for 2020, to minimise the risks to people attending the office to pay in cash. We later collected 2 years rent in June 2021. The crofting sub group continues to work closely with our solicitors who advise us on crofting law. We received over 100 crofting enquiries from Apr 20 – Mar 21, on a number of subjects including requests for feu's & house plots, regulatory applications from the Crofting Commission such as assignments and de-crofting, requests for access and servitude rights, and requests from agencies such as Scottish Water, SEPA and telecoms companies such as BT and EE.

At the end of 2020 we negotiated an Early Entry Agreement for the new mast installation in Calbost. Following continued negotiation with EE, we were able to bring in a much needed one off payment for the estate from an Early Entry Agreement and subsequent lease. We have received further requests for telecoms sites throughout the estate and following crofting law we will share any income 50/50 with the relevant common grazing or tenant whose land it falls on. So far 3 common grazings have had, or are going to have income from these masts. This is a new source of income for the estate which we had not anticipated and it is gratefully received.

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 act as a case study for students at Glasgow Caledonian University and Queen Margaret's University Edinburgh, on Sustainable Tourism

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projects. The results were presented to the Trust in early 2021 and are available to any group or individual interested in tourism.

The Pairc Tourism Group has now adopted an approach of 'Slow Tourism' in Pairc which ensures our valuable assets are managed sustainably for the future - it is important that any new developments do not damage what is precious to our community.

December 2020 saw the 5 Year Anniversary of the buyout reaching its final conclusion, after a 13 year journey to put the Estate into the hands of the people who live here. To mark the occasion the Trust launched an annual award of £500 for a young person to be helped to reach an ambition of theirs. The first award was made later in the year to Adam Cheesman, who lives in Marvig, who impressed a panel of board members with his entrepreneurial spirit and sustainable use of materials to create bird houses and bird boxes. This award will be advertised every May and we hope many more young people will apply.

As 2021 began we responded to the new working requirements being enforced by the continued Covid 19 situation. Rather than meeting and conducting business in person, we received funding from HIE to support our directors to get online and increase their IT skills. Our Records Officer Donald Macleod was able to put his computing degree to good use by offering 1 to 1 support, and as a legacy produced a number of useful 'IT Tips' videos that can be seen on the Trust's Youtube channel. I myself have used some of the videos for finding crofting information online and I found them to be very useful and easy to follow.

The Resource Centre purchase completed in January 2021, and the 3 main groups who regularly use it (Pairc Trust, Hebridean Childcare & Pairc Community Council) have been discussing terms for shared use of the building. Crown Estate funding, accessed via the Pairc Area Forum, has covered the first year's running costs, which has helped us take on this new responsibility comfortably. We are continuing to look at how to manage use of the building for the long term.

Recent Developments

A large part of 2021 was taken up investigating a potential Housing Project to encourage families to settle in Pairc and support our services and school. Local property experts TIG carried out an initial feasibility study in Spring 2021, to inform purchase of land next to the Habost industrial units. It is land that is outside of crofting tenure with a fixed price and was a straight forward site to pursue. The feasibility study results were taken to the community for consultation during July 2021 and the results of this survey showed a preference that a housing development should be located further into Pairc, so that it could better support the school roll. The board agreed in September 2021 not to pursue a housing development in Habost.

As well as an online & paper questionnaire, our survey included a number of case study interviews, which allowed us to collect more meaningful, detailed information on Housing Need in Pairc. In October 2021 we published the results from this consultation. As well as confirming the position that there is a consistent need for rented houses in Pairc, it concluded the need for the Trust to work closer with partner agencies such as the Hebridean Housing Partnership, the Comhairle and local groups such as the Community Council.

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Hebridean Housing Partnership published their own Housing Needs & Demand Assessment in November 2021 which also 'recommended with confidence' that a site in Pairc should be identified that would hold 2 units for social rent. On the request of Pairc Community Council, Alasdair Allan will be calling a meeting of all stakeholders soon and we hope this meeting will lead to much needed new social housing for rent in Pairc.

Our own houses for rent in Carn Aonghais, Gravir continue to be filled and we are very proud of the success of this project, completed in July 2019. It took a long time to plan and co-ordinate the funding, paperwork, renovations and letting, but has been worth the effort.

'A Long & Tangled Saga – The Story of the Pairc Estate Community Buyout' by historian Dr Bob Chambers was launched in November 2021, at events at An Lanntair and Pairc Free Church. Angus Nicolson spoke at both events to thank Bob for his painstaking work completing the book. It now serves as a timeline of activity during a long 13 year buyout process and puts the Pairc story firmly within the history of community ownership and land reform in Scotland.

A final important mention is to be made on some of the changing faces of the Trust during the 2020/21 year and into 2022.

Ishbel Groom has attended Pairc Trust meetings as an appointed director from the Co-Chomunn since 2016. This has been an important link between the Trust and its neighbour at Ravenspoint and her input will be greatly missed as she stepped down in October 2021. Ishbel was instrumental in setting up the Youth Enablement Award and we are happy to continue this legacy into the future.

David Simpson and Mark Griffiths joined the board at the 2021 AGM, and made an active contribution to the Tourism and Resource Centre sub groups. Many other commitments within the community have meant they have decided to stand down but they are thanked for offering their time and energy so willingly.

Audrey Scott joined the board in November 2021 and is particularly interested in the issue of employment opportunities within Pairc. We look forward to working with her on these and other projects.

John Murdo Matheson has decided to re-join the board in 2022. He previously served from 2016 - 2021, when he stood down but remained involved in the crofting sub group. His knowledge of Pairc's crofting practices and land-use is not something that can be bought in and we are very grateful to have him on the board again.

Community Ownership is most definitely about teamwork and we thank each and every person who has contributed their time over the years to the success of the Pairc Trust.

Finally, after 5 years of working for the Trust, Fiona has decided to move on from her role as Estate Office Manager. We hope that she can be proud of what she has achieved in a relatively short time. She is a very organised and diligent person who has helped no end and she will be greatly missed. I would like to put it on record that the whole board thanks her for her time and hope that whatever she goes onto next, meets with the same success.