

MINUTES – DIRECTOR’S MEETING 13th JANUARY 2015

1. **Attendance.**

Present: Rhoda MacDonald, Norman Iain Mackay, Neil Campbell, Roddy MacLennan, Murdo Mackay, Dougie Ferguson, Richard MacLennan, Duncan MacPherson (Commercial Development Manager), Lisa MacDonald (Development Officer) and Linda Armstrong (Administrator).

Apologies: Fiona MacKenzie, Finlay MacLennan and Neil MacDonald.

2. **Approval of Minutes 8th December 2014** (see appendix 1).

The minutes were unanimously approved.

3. **Review of Action Points**

- **Tackle BT on broadband provision**

Duncan and Murdo met with Donnie Morrison and Stuart Robinson. They asked that the Trust compiled a list of all businesses in West Harris, Leverburgh and the Bays of Harris so that a strong case could be made for the need of improved broadband.

There may be more money made available for the rollout of superfast broadband. It was decided to contact our MP and MSP to help ensure that the money is spent where there has been a low agreed connection rate.

Connected Communities is to be upgraded in March to 2MB and bigger packages will be made available.

- **Vodafone Mast – contract renewal**

Both Vodafone mast contracts are coming up for renewal. Duncan to ask Anderson Macarthur for missing lease agreement.

There has been poor Vodafone signal throughout West Harris since before Christmas.

Duncan to use information received from the met mast to support a case to Vodafone for poor service, if required.

4. **Updates**

Financial

A report for both the West Harris Trust and West Harris Renewables was shown, see appendix 2 and 3.

Commercial Development Managers Report

The Report was noted, see appendix 4. The following updates were given at the meeting:

Scarista Wind Turbine

The cabinet containing all the electrics to the turbine was severely damaged during a storm earlier in the month resulting in the turbine ceasing to work. On inspection of the cabinet it transpired that it was only held in place with 4 small bolts which considering its size was far fewer than required. Roddy MacLennan spent all day on the 13th of January attempting to reconnect Angus

Mackay. Roddy is of the opinion that given the length of time that the electrics have been exposed to the elements, all components should be replaced. The directors agreed that a professional engineer should be asked to carry out an independent assessment of the cabinet fixings if required.

Community Enterprise Centre

Duncan to visit the architect and mechanical and electrical engineers in Inverness tomorrow, 14th January to discuss why the mechanical and electrical tenders came in so over budget and options for reducing these costs.

The current timetable is to go out to tender by the end of January with the aim of having a contract in place by the end of March. The Trust will lose £200k of Scottish Government grant if a contract is not in place by 31st March 2015.

Pontoon

Patrick Cannon of Airfloat has suggested that a different mooring system should be used when the pontoon is repaired. This would see the chains coming up to the middle of the pontoon rather than to the edges.

Murdo also suggested that concrete be added at the top end to stop it from sliding down the beach.

It was decided that in future the pontoon must be removed from the water by late August/early September.

The directors asked a number of questions;

- How do you dismantle the pontoon if the proposed mooring system is used?
- Why wasn't the proposed mooring system suggested when the pontoon was first installed?

Development Officer Report

The report was noted, see appendix 5. The following updates were given at the meeting:

HIE Digital Tourism Pilot

Lisa has applied for HIE's digital tourism pilot which hopes to recruit up to 60 businesses who are keen to make the most of digital technology in tourism projects. If successful, the Trust could apply for a grant of up to £20,000.

Community Share Issue

Dave Hollings mode of transport was questioned as the directors felt that he would spend too much time travelling to the island and not enough on the project. The directors agreed that they were happy to pay for a flight for Dave.

5. AOCB

Crown Estate

The Smith Commission has recommended that Crown Estate powers be transferred to the Scottish Government and the government is committed to passing control of these to the islands.

Community Land Scotland has campaigned that near to shore rights be granted but has not specified a distance for sea bed rights. Directors were asked how far from the shore they considered to be a fair distance. It was decided that West Harris would suggest a minimum distance of 3 miles from the shore.

Crofting House Grant Consultation

The crofting house grant consultation proposes that the grant be changed from 3 to 2 levels, a high level £28,000 and medium level £23,000. The directors believed it to be unfair that those on the previously low level of grant assistance would see their grant increase by almost 100% whereas those on high grant assistance would see a much smaller increase. Directors also agreed that the grant offered to people carrying out home improvements should be as high as the new build scheme due to the importance of preserving old houses in the community.

Directors agreed that keeping the rule that houses must contain at least 3 bedrooms was fine to stay. When asked whether they thought it fair to impose a build cost limit for a 3 bedroom house of £170,000 the directors felt that there should be an exception rule for difficult to develop sites. The directors also suggested that house builds in the Western Isles/other remote areas should be offered 40% more due to the high cost of building.

Q5 – Non implementation of business plans – directors felt that the Crofting Commission should follow up crofters’ business/croft use plans.

Q7 – Can crofters building on an apportionment benefit from the grant? – Yes

Q9 – Timing of payments – the directors agreed that the timing of payments made it difficult for people to build. The directors believe that it would be more beneficial to pay the grant upfront as there will be conditions imposed upon it requiring reimbursement if conditions are not met.

Land Reform Consultation

It was agreed that the Trust would base its response on that of the combined response from CnES and Community Land Scotland.

Emergency Plan

The response of the council and emergency services during a recent spell of bad weather which resulted in extensive powercuts and communication failure was discussed. Roddy MacIennan had suggested that the Trust should purchase 3 VHF radios, one to be available for each township for emergencies in the future.

Diary Dates for future meetings:

- February 17th
- March 17th
- April 14th
- May 19th
- June 16th
- August 18th
- September 15th
- October 13th
- November 17th
- December 15th