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Minutes of Staffin Community Trust Meeting

Tuesday, January 27 2015

SCT Portakabin, 7.30am

Present: Donald MacDonald, Angus Ross, Dugald Ross, Sandy Ogilvie, Kerry Lyall, Hugh Ross of SCT; Ronnie MacRae (chief executive of Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust) and John Lamont (Lochalsh and Skye Housing Association Development Officer)

Roddy Gillies arrived at 8pm. Ian MacDonald did not join meeting until the first agenda item, on housing, was finished as he had suggested a housing site he owns in Tote for consideration, so could not play any part in the discussion.

Apologies: Sine Gillespie and Gordon Higgins

Minutes: The minutes from last SCT meeting 30.10.14 were approved by DMcD and seconded by DR.

- **Housing:** DMcD welcomed RMcR and JL to the meeting and thanked them for coming.

DMcD said it had been a very long time since there were a housing development in the community and there was “a strong feeling” that Staffin had lost a lot of its young people to other areas in recent years, particularly Portree, because of the shortage of affordable housing. He said that if the Staffin Slipway Development went ahead, in approximately two years’ time, there would be an ever greater need for new housing. If the community was to benefit from the estimated 40-plus new jobs then housing would be needed, otherwise the employment would be weighted towards people commuting from other areas, which would be “a real shame” for Staffin.

HR summarised the progress made in SCT’s campaign to secure affordable housing. Following the publication of the Staffin Housing Needs Report last September there was a meeting involving HSCHT, the housing association and Highland Council. From that a local “Call for Sites” was launched in Staffin via posters, a press release and publicity on the SCT website. That ended on November 30, 2014. Four sites were suggested to SCT; one decrofted field in Clachan, another decrofted park in Tote, an area on the Stenscholl common grazing close to the school and a croft in Garafad behind Trotternish Avenue.

HR said HSCHT and the housing association, plus the council’s area planning manager Mark Harvey and Scottish Natural Heritage’s area representative Alex Turner, had all been very

helpful and visited the sites to give their views on their suitability. HR was pleased that RMcR and JL were in attendance so they could offer their guidance as to the next steps for SCT. HR said the Stenscholl site was the most popular site, on account it was close to the school, services, on crofting land which was poor grazing and was in principle supported by the Stenscholl township which may like to get a new farm/facilities as part of any sale, so there was the potential for community benefit. The Garafad site, tenanted by Neil Nicolson, and directly behind Trotternish Avenue, was also deemed to be an interesting site as it was close to existing council houses, services, etc.

Prior to tonight's meeting, HR had received advice from Mr Turner warning that SNH, which is one of several statutory consultees, would likely oppose the Stenscholl site on account of its potential impact on the Trotternish National Scenic Area (NSA) in terms of the "crofting landscape character" which was "further complicated by its location at the transition point between the crofting landscape character type and the moorland landscape". He added that it also "risked acting as a focus for further ribbon development". Mr Harvey, who had previously indicated his support for the Stenscholl suite, said he was now in close agreement with Mr Turner's views, particular as the site had been rejected from the last West Highland and Islands Local Plan.

JL said the Tote and Clachan sites could be ruled out on account of its location on the outer periphery of the Staffin district and space restrictions, respectively. RMcR said it was important SCT suggested locations to the council's Call for Sites for the new Local Plan. He said a housing development pursued by the housing association needed support from the council and Scottish Government and there had to be a shared risk in financing new builds. He said some homes could be funded via shared equity.

JL said the housing association was competing against projects in the Inverness area but hoped Staffin could get prepared for "slippage" in new developments elsewhere. He asked if there was anything currently lacking in Staffin that might be included in a long-term plan for the Stenscholl site which he thought had great potential. In Coigach, the Air Youth Corp had received funding from the MOD to construct a building for its activities which helped the overall cost of a new housing development. Doing something like that attracted a different funding stream. DR said the doctors' surgery was currently inadequate while DMcD added that since Staffin House closed there was a real lack of elderly accommodation.

JL and RMcR told DMcD they would be happy to comment on the SCT's aspiration for the Stenscholl site, ahead of the next Housing Development Forum in February.

DMcD brought up the lack of money available in the Croft House Grant and said there was an argument that it cost the State less as crofters still had to finance the bulk of a new home. He asked if there was scope for a pilot to develop a housing model that allowed serviced sites to be created and said there was a strong case that it helped maintain the population and suggested that HR invite IG MacDonald and Susan Walker of the Crofting Commission to a future SCT meeting.

RMcR said that was already being done through self-build plots and a loan through the government but applicants were struggling to get the loan. He talked about Rent-to-Buy when the loan came from government to build a house, occupants lived in it for five years, paid rent which is kept and then is used to buy the house outright. Gives occupant a chance to save deposit and put finances in place.

DR and DMcD both expressed their surprise that SNH appeared to support building on Neil Nicolson's Garafad croft which was good quality in-bye grazing ground, similar to the Willie MacInnes site which had been previously rejected. HR said Mr Turner was content with the lower part of the croft being used and not all of it. RMcR said that sounded like it would be a constrained development with little potential for expansion.

KL said he was looking for affordable housing and had rented in Staffin for five years. He said that he and his wife could have gone to Portree but wanted to live in community but could not afford to buy on the open market. JL said the Rural Ownership Grant was a real loss to the area.

DMcD thanked both JL and RMcR for their attendance and they left the meeting.

Action Points –

HR to forward the Stenscholl and Garafad sites to the council's Call for Sites.

HR to write a report outlining SCT's aspiration for the Stenscholl site, with input from housing association and HSHCT, for next Housing Development Forum meeting.

HR to invite IG MacDonald and Susan Walker of the Crofting Commission to SCT meeting to debate housing/croft build grants etc.

- **Staffin Slipway:**

HR said there had been a meeting in Staffin on 23.1.15 involving three Skye Highland councillors and representatives from public agencies, including the council, SNH, Crown Estate and Kilmuir Estate. The meeting was generally positive and involved short presentations and general discussion in the portakabin, Slipway and Lealt quarry.

DMcD thought the discussion could perhaps have been improved by asking the attendees for their thoughts on the development. HR said Alex Turner of SNH had understood there was some geological merit in the quarry but he did not know what might be exactly but did not think it would be a barrier to opening it up. The impact on tourists visiting Lealt gorge might be more of a concern, he said.

DMcD charted the progress since the last SCT meeting in October when two options for the Slipway were debated by directors and the engineer John Porteous of Wallace Stone. He said there had been a due diligence process and changes were made to the options in a bid to cut the estimated costs. However, at a meeting of the Slipway working group in Portree last month, involving SCT, SSH and HIE, it was agreed that an option which was "fit-for-purpose" had to be chosen. The preferred option, which retained a west breakwater, to protect the area from north-westerly winds, has an estimated cost of £18.6m.

DMcD outlined the changes and asked the directors if they supported the revised Option 1, which they did.

There was discussion about holding another community consultation event in March to update local people. DMcD thought the SCT had to show the community what improved facilities and improvements could be delivered at the Slipway. He said that he had a contact at St Andrews University who might be able to create an eye-catching animation of marina

facilities etc. There was discussion about the event's format and it was agreed a "drop-in" style was the preference.

Action points –

DMcD will contact St Andrews University to investigate whether his contact can create animation model of Slipway.

HR to book Staffin Hall for consultation event, once date selected.

- **Old Man of Storr**

HR said he and DMcD met with Highland Council officials Emma Georgeson and Ann Hackett in Inverness last month to discuss the Storr. Council is making major improvements like paths, tree paths and is planning new car park/verge parking spaces etc. and is offering the land, either in a sale or lease, to SCT. DMcD said it was an exciting opportunity if the council installed the infrastructure at the Storr, plus the Kilt Rock and Lealt, and the SCT could explore potential income from potential parking fees, public toilets, kiosk/information point etc.

HR said he intended to present proposal(s) to directors at tonight's meeting but had not found the time because of other commitments. He hoped to report back at end of February.

Action points –

HR to research and work on proposal(s) re Storr.

- **Ceumannan II**

HR said the archaeological feasibility study was now complete and the main paths report was nearing completion. The interpretation of the footpaths, both signage and digital, was hugely important and three quotes had been received for the Interpretation Plan. It was hoped to hold a consultation event in next couple of months.

Action points – *HR to award contract for Interpretation Plan, after getting approval of Ceumannan II working group.*

- **Crofters' Memorial**

The Central Belt research trip, scheduled for January 22-23 was postponed because of adverse weather and was now proposed for March. HR not sure how this would affect Norway trip, provisionally scheduled for April. DMcD advised HR to check funding situation with ATLAS group as he understood it may not stretch past the research trips now.

Action Point - *HR to check funding situation*

AOCB:**Beinn Edra anniversary**

HR said price given by Jon Hearach Memorials for adding Beinn Edra plane crash victims' names to Staffin War Memorial was £960. Plans for a 70th anniversary event Saturday, March 7 at 2pm, following a joint SCT and community council meeting last week.