# **COMHAIRLE CHOIMHEARSNACHD SHLEITE**

# **SLEAT COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

# Minutes of the Meeting held in Ardvasar Hall

# 7.30 pm on Tuesday 1 April 2025

## Members Present

**Janet MacDonald (Janet M) Rob Ware (Rob W)**

**Tim Shone (Tim S) Duncan MacInnes (Duncan M)**

**Kate Duffus (Kate D) Mairead Macdougall (Mairead M)**

**Hans Petri (Hans P - Associate) Apologies** - **Andy Wiliamson (Andy W)**

**Public** - 70 members of the public attended, including **Dan** from Broadford.

**BBC Alba** were present to film the meeting and undertake interviews.

## Welcome

**Janet M**, as vice-chair, welcomed Councillors and residents. She stated that **Andy W** deeply regretted not being here tonight. Since the news broke last week, of the sudden announcement of the sale of CDLT land, he has undertaken a load of very hard graft, speaking to people, crofters and the grazing clerks, many organisations, MSPs and MPs. We would like to thank him for all the hard work he has done.

She reminded everyone that proceedings would be recorded.

## Declarations of Interest

**Janet M** introduced herself as having crofting interests in Tarskavaig. **Duncan M** stated he was on the Board of Sleat Community Trust and was a non-working croft tenant in Kilmore. **Mairead M** stated as of today she was employed part-time with the Clan Donald Lands Trust.

## Minutes and matters arising from the meeting on 4th March 2025

**Duncan M** summarised the minutes of the last meeting which will be available online immediately.

* Approval of the Minutes was proposed by **Tim S** and seconded by **Rob W** and accepted by all.

## The Clan Donald Lands Trust – a community update

**Janet M** asked for rational discussion. It has been a shock to hear the CDLT land was suddenly up for sale. For many people it is not just the land but our homes, and some families can trace their people back many years. Some have chosen to come and live in Sleat. All have contributed their skills and talent to make the community that we are today. We will not agree on everything in the community, but it is in the best interests that we work together and provide a consensus and a united front. We support the Clan Donald staff in a time of uncertainty for them. If there is any potential buyer out there who wishes to invest in the community then the Council would be very happy to work with them.

In the absence of **Andy W**, **Duncan M** summarised the current situation: -

Everyone is in shock. Information is rattling around so fast it is difficult to keep up. To start with I must address two misconceptions that are doing the rounds:

1. Misconception no 1 is ‘SCC and SCT are deliberately not talking to the community’. Both groups are working together but there has been NO joint meeting to discuss the way forward. There has been no meeting to which Crofters were not invited or the general public ignored. That Public Meeting happens next Monday 7 April probably in Sabhal Mòr Ostaig. In the meantime anyone, everyone is welcome to make contact with SCC and SCT with comment, advice or concerns.
2. Misconception no 2 is ‘It is all being decided by Incomers.’ SCT and SCC between them have 15 people ( 2 overlap) of which 8 have strong Sleat family connections and all have lived here for 5 to 20 to 60 years. All have been voted in by the community in open votes at which anyone can stand. If there is concern – stand up and be part of it.

We are only one week after this news and already a lot has happened . Everyone has been trying to absorb information, or actually the enormous lack of it. We are only just starting to respond and tonight we can begin to make sense of a community response.

SCC issued a statement regarding the announcement on 26 March – see appendix.

Last Tuesday, the day after the sale announcement, Scottish Parliament debated the Land Bill. Three MSPs mentioned CDLT in their speeches, stating the Land Bill was necessary, just exactly because of the lack of commucation between a landowner and its community prior to a sale.

On Friday SCC had a zoom meeting with Emma and Gemma of Scottish Land Commission. **Rob W**, **Andy W** and **Duncan M** were part of that. Janet was unable to join in but **Angus Macdonald** Chair of Tarskavaig crofting township was invited to be an additional voice. That was good because it expressed to the Land Commision how essential it was for the crofting community to be heavily involved in the discussion. The Land Commission outlined the possibiliites open to us with regard to registering an interest, given the suddenness of the sale and the fact that any funding would have to be agreed by the end of August, as the Land Fund will go into abeyance before the Scottish Elections next year. The detail of all that can be given at next week’s public meeting.

This prompted Andy, to make contact with as many as he could of CDLT crofting townships clerks.

A zoom meeting has been set up with Kate Forbes our MSP for 4th April.

While there have been several separate extra meetings this week for SCC and SCT, let me reassure you, there has been no joint meeting at which anyone was excluded.

You will have read comments and statement in the press and in Social Media – including Clan Donald USA, sent out by David Macdonald who was previously Managing Director at Armadale; Clan Donald Scotland, and Lord Macdonald himself. There have been public letters from the Chair of the Scottish Land Commission. All express dismay at the sudden sale with no prior knowledge within the wider Clan. There has apparently been further correspondence from CDLT to Clan Donald Members and the crofting community.

The over-arching need is to ask CDLT to halt the sale, to give the community time to react in a suitable manner. Thus a letter has been sent to CDLT management from SCC and SCT and to Strutt and Parker, who are handling the sale, requesting a delay. This morning CDLT management wrote to SCT asking that it join in a working party set up by CDLT to included crofters and the community to find a way forward.

We are also aware of the need to be sensitive to the concerns of those from the community who work at Armadale.

Please look out for details of next Monday’s Public Meeting. It is not a public meeting seeking any sort of vote. We are looking for intelligent debate. If you cannot come, do let us know what you feel. There will be a place on the SCT website for anonymous comment.

**Janet M** reminded us it was not just crofting land, but also farming land up for sale.

**Rob W** gave a background history to the numbers of Trustees in past years and the current state of Trustee numbers. He read a statement from **Sir Iain Macdonald** who had just stepped down as Trustee but who supported the sale. That left just 3 Trustees, the minimum number – **Bruce Macdonald**, **Diane Carey-Schmitz**, and the new Chair **Ranald Macdonald of Boisdale** – ie no Trustees resident in Scotland or even Skye. **Lord Macdonald** also had published a statement. Various other statements had also been issued by CDLT. All are available online.

There has been no response to the SCC letter to CDLT to halt the sale.

## General News update

**Rob W** provides a monthly update on community issues. This is on the SCC website. This included sending the **Sleat Local Place Plan** to Highland Council; timetables for the **Armadale-Mallaig ferry**; the need for new membership on a local **ferry discussion group**; the **road repair** allocation for Sleat; local **planning** applications and **Kilbeg houses**.

**Hand P** said he visited the Broadford CC on 17 March to share news on development plans in the Strath area.

## Public Discussion and AOCB

From the floor, a request for the letter from SCT and SCC be available to the crofting community. Janet requested that SCC has contact emails of crofting community representatives. It was also suggested that the crofting community might wish to add their names.

Di van Ruitenbeek thanked everyone in SCC/SCT in keeping the community informed and for all the hard work undertaken, and how important it is that the community remain engaged and connected.

It was suggested that legal action from the community be undertaken but that would be an expensive option.

**Duncan M** suggested an ongoing discussion on the Right-to-Buy and other information regarding CDLT sales were best held over to the public meeting next Monday.

## Next Meeting

The next Meeting will be on **Tuesday 6 May 2025 at 7 pm in An Crùbh**

**Janet M** thanked everyone for coming and welcomed the high numbers of public present.

She closed the meeting at 8.45 pm

Comhairle Choimhearsnachd Shlèite/Sleat Community Council

**Statement on the Sale of the Clan Donald Estate and Armadale Castle**

**March 26, 2025**

Like others, the Sleat Community Council (SCC) learnt yesterday morning that Clan Donald Lands Trust (CDLT) intends to sell its land and property holding in Sleat. This has come as a shock to many, not least because at no point was the community consulted on this matter.

Dr Andy Williamson, Chair of Sleat Community Council, stated that “this is not just a piece of land, not simply an estate, Clan Donald has a rich, deep and long-standing connection to the place and people here in Sleat”. Former trustee of CDLT, Lord Godfrey MacDonald said, this sale is “bringing to an end several hundred years of unbroken connection between the Clan Donald and these ancient lands.” Beyond this history, CDLT has been at the heart of economic development in Sleat for many years and, as a significant local employer, SCC are concerned for the future of employees at this challenging time.

However, the reality is that costs are spiralling for all of us and CDLT is no exception. The Sleat Community Council notes the efforts made to turn the finances of the Trust around but equally recognise the reality that this has not been possible. We draw some solace from the fact that CDLT intends to re-focus its efforts on supporting culture throughout the Gàidhealtachd.

Dr Williamson added that “we are mindful that this sale comes with both opportunities and not inconsiderable risks and we are extremely disappointed that CDLT has chosen not to engage with the local community over this matter.” He noted that CDLT leaves with no clear plans or vision for the estate and calls on them to hold a public meeting to address the concerns of the community.

Sleat Community Council believes strongly in working with and supporting all of our community. We welcome the opportunity to engage with any potential buyer at the earliest opportunity and to help them shape a forward-looking vision for the future of the estate and castle. We are mindful of the aspirations of our community, expressed in the Local Place Plan, and we would encourage all interested parties to familiarise themselves with this as a starting point for fruitful, ongoing engagement.

END