# **COMHAIRLE CHOIMHEARSNACHD SHLEITE**

# **SLEAT COMMUNITY COUNCIL**

# Minutes of the Meeting held in An Crùbh

# 7 pm on Tuesday 6 May 2025

## Members Present

**Andy Wiliamson (Andy W) Janet MacDonald (Janet M)**

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

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

**Rob Ware (Rob W)**

**Apologies: Hans Petri (Hans P - Associate)**

 **Members of affiliated Community Councils**

**Public attendance**: **8 members** of the public attended

**Highland Councillors: Drew Miller and John Finlayson**

## Welcome

**Andy W** welcomed Sleat Community Councillors and the public. He was delighted to welcome not one but two Highland Councillors and noted the continued absence of the SCC delegated Highland Councillor. He reminded everyone that proceedings would be recorded.

## Declarations of Interest

**Andy W** and **Duncan M** stated they sat on Sleat Community Trust. **Mairead M** stated she was employed by CDLT.

## Minutes and matters arising from the meeting on 1 April 2025

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

* Approval of the Minutes was proposed by **Janet M** and seconded by **Tim S** and accepted by all.

## The Clan Donald Lands Trust – a community update

**Andy W** said there was little new knowledge. The Secretary has written to CDLT to ask to halt sale, and others from national agencies, MSPs and MPs support that. There has been no reply.

There is no sense that CDLT is listening to its members and beneficiaries. CDLT does not own the estate - it holds it in trust and has not spoken with the beneficiaries. The Sleat community is not a beneficiary. David Macdonald (a previous International Director of CDLT on Skye and now Chief Commissioner of Clan Donald USA) states that CDLT action has no support from clan members.

Alex Stoddart has set up a Sale Liaison Group and asked Sleat Community Trust for three names. Those of Donaidh Macdonald, Eilidh Grant and Andy Williamson were submitted. Andy W was dismissed as being unacceptable. There is no representation from Sleat Community Council, whose councillors are elected to represent Sleat.

At the public meeting at SMO on 7 April there was little enthusiasm for a community purchase of the farming and crofting land. It is not in any financially viable state - the community would not have the resources to buy and turn it around. There are pockets of cultural environmental and archaeological interest.

There was interest in the Castle and Gardens when that appears on the market. Again, that area has been run into the ground with between £2-6m needed to bring it up to scratch. It was suggested a community-led group be set up to bring ideas together. It is difficult to get involved because the CEO has shown no appetite to talk about a community buyout.

Issues can only be resolved by dialogue but that is probably not possible or likely. Our MP Angus Macdonald’s grandfather was one of the founding trustees of CDLT and so he’s interested in what is happening. Andy W reported he has had several conversations with Angus Macdonald who has also met with the CDLT Chairman, Ranald Macdonald, Younger of Clanranald. Andy W will attempt to meet with the CDLT Chairman, and it is a hopeful sign that Angus M is managing to mediate a little.

As far as community actions are concerned there is a plan to organise a community exhibition of the history of the estate, with pictures and stories of all the previous community engagement, which might not be known by a lot of more recent Sleat residents, and to demonstrate what it could be like in the future.

The Museum building and contents is apparently causing some concern in national museum circles - that the archives are in a building that needs maintenance. It would not be just a case of the community taking over a museum, as it needs considerable financial input. There is a lack of technical information about the state of the museum. This is also the case with the state of the Stables building.

There is not just Sleat community interest in the sale. Wider Clan Donald interest from around the world are expressing outrage at this situation. Clan Donald Members (some 2 million MacDonalds around the world) are the ‘beneficiaries’ of CDLT. They have an interest in Armadale because of the historical connection, but they have little sense of connection with the Sleat community itself.

The Sleat community has a sense of connection with the Castle and Gardens because of the economic importance to Sleat. There is an understanding of the history, but apart from MacDonald’s locally there is no real interaction regarding the ethos of ‘Clan Donald’. This lack of interaction has changed dramatically through the large number of emails and messages from clan members around the world who want to help, who want to know what’s going on who want to find out how to support Sleat.

Is the Sale legal? It is possibly illegal on several issues: the selling of assets, and the general management of CDLT. It is clear they have breached their *moral* duty to the beneficiaries. These will become legal duties under new Land Reform and Charity Acts on the horizon.

**Duncan M** commented on the general lack of community response to the various erroneous public comments made by CDLT management in the press and emails. In a recent WHFP article the CDLT management stated the operation is financially untenable because of the low number of MacDonalds coming through the gates, and that it is financially unviable because CDLT was never set up to be a commercial tourism venture. The first is irrelevant and the second is totally untrue. It is time to address such misinformation.

**Rob W** said it is difficult to understand the motivations of the CEO to talk down and run down the business. It would be remiss not to make correct some of this misinformation.

Further comments from the public touched on the general low cost in running Gardens; the possibility of finding a new rich land-buyer; the overly high value placed on the land-sale; and issues of Right-to-Roam and closure of the gardens to the public.

## General News update

**Roads - Rob W** noted that there were plans for an upgrade of the Ardvasar road surfaces soon. The main road has been white lined. There are still concerns over the state of side roads, especially in Caligarry, and the effect on the school bus round on the Tarskavaig loop. **Janet M** noted that visitors were leaving negative comments which would be affecting tourism. Kilmore shouted and got some success.

**Councillor John Finlayson** explained the Skye-wide picture and issues. While there was now an allocation of £20m over several years, the road workforce used to be 53 and is now 16. They plan to move from being reactive to strategic so that over the next few years there should be a massive improvement. Against that it was noted that Kate Forbes MSP can do nothing herself, only pass on information, and that urban Highland Councillors do not understand the impact on tourism or the fragility of single-track roads. There were also problems with high-price accommodation for a visiting workforce.

**Planning** – there was an application for a new house in Kilmore, a cottage demolition in Drumfearn and new cladding on a recently-completed Ferrindonald house. SMO have made changes to their application for a small turbine**. Cllr John F** noted the HC map of potential windfarms which is constantly updated and is coming under scrutiny from many Community Councils.

**Duncan M** asked if it was normal for a Community Council to comment direct on a planning application. This is rare and only if it is notified by members of the public about concerns. The public are encouraged to copy any planning comments they make to the Community Council.

**Sound of Sleat Ferry Committee.** There is a need to create a new ferry committee to work with Mallaig and so far 5 volunteers have been noted.

## AOCB

**Rob W** imminent move away from Sleat will leave a tremendous gap of knowledge after has 16 years as Secretary. **Kate D** has agreed to take on the role. She, **Andy W** and Rob will meet to develop new ways of tackling this work.

**Mallaig C.C.** wish to create a Local Place Plan and **Andy W** has agreed to visit them and offer advice.

**Bun Sgoil Shlèite Road signs** remain confusing in the mis-connectivity of the flashing lights and road-speed signs. There is a strong request from the school for additional road-calming measures.

**Housing allocation** is causing concern with examples of local families and working people missing out on new housing in Sleat, with allocations going to those from outwith the area rather than addressing local needs. The **Cllrs** pointed out that the points situation is directed by Scottish law. Allocation points are undertaken on a Highland-wide basis. There needs to be a strategic review and look at how locals can take preference - as in the Western Isles.

**The Highland Council Aligned Member**. **Andy W** noted it made such a difference to have a Highland Councillor present at the meeting to directly answer questions and give information. However, HC can do nothing to reprimand the non-appearance of aligned Cllrs at a Comm Council meeting. But as membership comes under the same rules as non-appearance for 6 months of a Community Councillor, an Aligned Member can be dismissed.

* Such an action was proposed by **Andy W** and seconded by **Kate D** and agreed by all.

**Cllr Stewart is no longer recognised as the aligned member for Sleat Community Council**

**Telephone Kiosks** – There are four telephone boxes scheduled for removal and there has been interest from Tarskavaig, Aird and Camuscross. Expressions of interest need to come via SCC. There is only one old style red box in Sleat, that being at the Aird of Sleat. (Update: An expression of interest has been submitted to BT Payphones for the Aird kiosk, but the newer type of which there are three can only be acquired for use as a defibrillator housing).

**CDLT clarity –** a comment was made about the accuracy of anonymous comments regarding the state of the CDLT museum. It was noted that SCC is unable to request information from CDLT, as CDLT has refused any communication from SCC. The applicant was asked if they might be able to gain accurate information.

## Next Meeting and AGM

The next Meeting will be on **Tuesday 24 June 2025 at 7.30 pm in Ardvasar Hall**

The Chairman closed the meeting at 8.45 pm