

**Lairg & District Community Initiatives
Minutes from Board Meeting
2PM - Tuesday 26th January 2021**

Present: Kaye Hurrion (KH), Norman McLeod (NM), Robert Johnstone (RJ), Annette Parrott (AP), Alison Magee (AM) , Kirstin Langlois (KL) Project Officer

Apologies: Chris Powell,

Agenda items	Action
<p>1. Approval of Minutes</p> <p>The minutes from the meeting on the 24thNov 2020, were approved by RJ and seconded by AP after the following <u>matters arising</u> were noted:</p> <p>A.Magee had sent her apologies for the previous meeting.</p> <p>Point 4 – The joint funding application with KoSDT to the Rosehall/Achany Panel for the post of Development Officer was successful and funding has been granted for the next four years, which is good news as it means that LDCI can settle in to the role and not have to be constantly looking for funding.</p> <p>Point 8 – Update re the Coach House. RJ noted that KoSDT had provided a report but was disappointed with it in that that it just provided a photographs and a list of what the Coach House could be used for. He had hoped for a bit more direction from it. In the meantime, LDCI has boarded up the windows and doors to make them safe, and has trimmed saplings. Over the Christmas period, LDCI has been approached by Light Up Lairg who asked if they can store the lights there. LDCI has allowed this because it will help out the community and will only be for a year until they get funding to buy a storage container. They have also offered to clear the gutters and tidy up inside because they are getting it rent free.</p> <p>NM proposed that the Coach House could be a good location to store electric bikes – he added that the boarded-up windows can make the village look run down – so there was discussion about perhaps working with the school (after lockdown) to produce artwork to go on top of the boards.</p>	
<p>2. Care and Wellbeing</p> <p>KH talked through the email from Susan of the 22/01/21 that she had forwarded all the directors summarising the current situation:</p> <p><i>“Kaye, Robert and Susan met Albyn for discussions on 17th December following a review of what Albyn were describing as abnormal costs associated with the project. These abnormal costs included costs to cut and fill and deal with ground level differences across the site and potential asbestos disposal costs. Albyn had attributed all of these costs to the Albyn houses making them appear much more</i></p>	

expensive than their other house sites when in fact some of these costs would be shared with LDCI, making the Albyn homes much more affordable. This allowed us to move forward to discuss the overall development as this means that Albyn are still committed to the Lairg site.

The following works are still ongoing at Albyn's end:

- Albyn also think that the spec of their housing needs to be reviewed as they consider it to be somewhat high spec and so this exercise is ongoing.*
- Albyn want to confirm the right of access to the overall site and whether this is an adopted road with HC*

It was agreed that it makes sense financially to try and build all 8 houses at once. This is more cost effective overall as it saves on project management costs, architect and professional services fees and also main contractors costs as you would only have one set of mobilisation and demobilisation costs to pay. With this in mind the following high level principles were explored and have been agreed by Albyn. LDCI need to discuss whether these are acceptable for the community to allow this development to go ahead:

- 1) The project comes together as a project to build 8 houses for the elderly/vulnerable*
- 2) There will be an open discussion with funders including City Deal, More Homes, Highland Council and Scottish Government about creating a funding package to deliver all 8 houses at once – Albyn have had this discussion and the next step is to present proposals and look at other funding options.*
- 3) In principle, Albyn would construct and own all 8 houses as long as LDCI had the ability and risk to agree the allocations for 4 of the houses to ensure community use – the legal structure for this would need to be agreed*
- 4) 4 of the 8 houses would be 2 bedroom but the spec of all 8 houses to be reviewed to try and bring the build cost down*
- 5) Albyn would purchase the land for the curtilage of the houses and access road only*
- 6) Initial Landscaping in the red line boundary are which is affected by the construction process would be undertaken as a project cost – subject to Albyn agreeing the landscaping specification*
- 7) The remaining land would remain under the ownership of LDCI and would be maintained and ongoing landscape would be done by them*

This would potentially bring some income into LDCI whilst delivering all 8 houses and still leaving LDCI land upon which other development could take place."

KH asked the directors present if everyone agreed to the above proposal.

AM expressed concern that the goal posts seemed to be changing, e.g the fact it was mentioned that the houses were 'too high spec'.

LDCI needs be alert to any changes in the specification, in case their need for savings results in any material alterations to the type of supported housing we are hoping for.

There was discussion about the speculation that there might be asbestos/ deep survey costs. It was mentioned that the planning application is subject to 14

<p>investigations being carried out. RJ added that the aim was to determine if the board agreed in principle to the proposal – following that when Albyn start looking at the costings – we will get those questions answered.</p> <p>KH confirmed that this proposal is just an agreement at this stage and no formal contract has been signed yet. This is what we hire Susan for.</p> <p>Everyone in attendance agreed to continue with the proposal that Albyn build the 8 houses – providing LDCI can have control over the four houses.</p>	<p>KH to inform Susan to instruct Albyn</p>
<p>3. Helping Hands Fund (HHF)</p> <p>KL mentioned there have been issues which has caused us to look at the Helping Hands fund to see if it needs tweaked in order to make sure that we are supporting those people that really need it. The first change was to make it a requirement that people now have to provide CAB with evidence of their benefits and their bank account statements to show that they do not have savings over £1500 – and this follows the criteria that has been set by KoSDT in their Helping Hands Fund.</p> <p>Budget: We still have £1862.50 in the budget from the Foundation Scotland fund. £637.50 has been spent. We have until the end of March to spend it. We’ve had six clients apply, with three grants being awarded. One is pending – still waiting to hear back from them. One was rejected because they’d received a grant within the last year. One application was received last week but they have withdrawn because although they are on benefits – they have more than the £1500 worth of savings – and that is the amount of savings that is in the funding criteria.</p> <p>The KoSDT fund is very similar – but they also fund the replacement of energy efficient white goods - so Kaye, Norman, Robert & Kirstin had a meeting with David Watson and Beth Simco of KoSDT to discuss the implications of making a change to the fund and how it could potentially evolve in the future to be more Sutherland wide.</p> <p>It was agreed that we could introduce the white goods element to the LDCI HHF fund – but there will still be that £250 limit.</p> <p>KL noted that she had contacted Eilidh Coll from Foundation Scotland to discuss the slight variation to the fund in regard to expenditure and project reporting to check that we can do that.</p> <p>The fund process would be kept exactly the same despite a few additional funded items. Every request is dealt in an individual manner. A case by case approach is taken with time taken to fully understand the client’s needs in alignment with knowledge/advice from ECSCAB before a decision is made on the grant expenditure by LDCI.</p> <p>KH added that she had applied to the Robertson Trust for LDCI’s circa £6000 running costs. However, they wanted to fund the Helping Hands fund specifically.</p>	<p>KL</p>

<p>There was discussion on how to advertise/ promote the fund as there is still a large amount of the budget remaining – it was agreed that a mail out will be the best bet – especially if the white goods can be promoted. KL to investigate costs with Royal Mail.</p>	
<p>4. Magazine</p> <p>KH reported that the magazine is now monthly and that she is waiting to hear back from the Foyle Foundation about funding. There is enough left in the budget to cover it for the time being. A notice has been placed in the Magazine to say that we accept donations towards the magazine.</p>	
<p>5. Website</p> <p>KL explained that some people have reported that their (Norton) virus protection software won't allow them to access the LDCI website. She believes this is due to the website not having an SSL security certificate (the padlock in the bar at the top). Some work needs to be done to sort this, so she requested that she find out the costs of moving to a new website 'host' in order to make this process easier for her. The board agreed to KL forwarding the costs for approval.</p>	
<p>6. Station Path</p> <p>KL reported that the application to the Sustrans Places for Everyone Fund was submitted on the 6th November and an email had just been received from Sustrans which said that due to the pandemic they were pausing the programme to review operations, and would respond to applicants in the early Spring to see if they want to reapply. They offered feedback, which we have now received. This has been copied below:</p> <p><u>Strengths</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Description of both needs and advantages of having the path – local trip generators, i.e., where people are travelling to and from, are well described, as well as the existing situation of A-road at national speed limit being the only available connection from public transport to the town.</i> • <i>Description of diverse potential users – you have indicated a multiplicity of user needs with intrinsic consideration for protected characteristics, including disability, age, and parental status.</i> • <i>Description of the current barriers to active travel in the area</i> • <i>Monitoring objectives are achievable and align with Places for Everyone aims – these could be boosted further by indicating how path use could be quantitatively monitored, i.e., using a counter</i> • <i>Quotes have been provided for key elements of the project and an existing relationship with Highland Council, including prior agreement for Highland Council adoption of the path, has been evidenced, along with significant community support.</i> <p><u>Areas for improvement</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The proposed design does not meet criteria for Places for Everyone funding, even once reasonable adjustment for rurality has been applied. This is not to infer that the project is not approvable, but as part of any</i> 	

<p><i>funding offer, we would require the current design to be developed to a higher standard in collaboration with Sustrans. Key design requirements we would look at would be the width of the path over the majority of the route and how we could accommodate any pinch points. I've visited the site and I'm aware there are some very restricted sections, however, the width of a path has equalities implications in terms of providing space required for all users. To safely and comfortably accommodate users in both directions with ease, we'd be looking for a width of 2.5/3m over the majority of the route. You might be interested in some of the guidance here; https://www.sustrans.org.uk/for-professionals/infrastructure/sustrans-traffic-free-routes-and-greenways-design-guide</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <i>• Added value to the application would be evidence of the community group's capacity to deliver the project, i.e., prior experience in the project team, prior projects delivered, project team knowledge of CDM requirements, etc.</i> <i>• The delivery programme required is very detailed and well broken-down in terms of actions, but it is ambitious and presumes a "no-delay" scenario. Ambitious is welcomed, but the programme requires contingency planning and making room for risks or lengthy tasks.</i> <i>• There is no apparent indication in the application of early thoughts on match funding sources or future financial planning for the construction stage. Presently, Places for Everyone offers 100% funding for the design stages, and 70% for the construction, with the remaining 30% sourced by the partner. Your infrastructure officer could offer support on this element, but at minimum some form of strategic financial planning is worth adding to a first application. Note that as a community group, you would not need to evidence guaranteed match up until Developed Design stage, but as projects are awarded based on deliverability, it is best to outline your thinking as early as possible.</i> <p>KL and the KoSDT project team will respond to this – as all of the areas of improvement should be easily addressed.</p>	
<p>7. Church Hill Wood</p> <p>KL reported that she has submitted a funding application to the Lairg Windfarm fund for the Signage. This should be discussed at the next Community Council meeting in February. She added that since submitting the application, potential funding could become available through North Highland Initiative for branded visitor management signs across the North Highlands so she has expressed an interest in receiving this. This would be additional signage. There was a discussion about the best place for the signs – Ferrycroft, the Highland Council car park next to Church Hill woods and where the current sign is at the Coach House were the options.</p> <p>KH reported that she and RJ met with Sarah Forrest from Lairg & District Learning Centre. They have funding from to put up an outdoor covered workshop space and were hoping to locate it in Church Hill Wood. However, the money needs to be</p>	<p>KL</p>

<p>spent before the end of March and they still need to find out if they need planning permission so the project is on hold for the moment.</p>	
<p>8. Aires</p> <p>RJ is continuing to explore the cost and viability of this project and felt that a feasibility study would be the best starting point so that opinions of Lairg residents could be gathered. There are two possible sites to consider on land owned by LDCI, Ferrycroft and SA site, but that's not to say there may be other options. The Sutherland Transport Car Park is owned by the council and the chemical waste from the campers cassettes can not be directly emptied into the local sewer system. Also this site is not large enough for a turning circle that is required under planning.</p> <p>NM asked if we can ask KoSDT for guidance on this project as they are further down the line on their Aires project. RJ says he is speaking with them. RJ explained that all options from a site that just has a chemical waste unit to a full Aires site with camping facilities etc.</p> <p>AP and AM expressed concerns that there are other caravan sites in the vicinity and the fact that we may need to be careful about displacement, and to think about the cleaning and maintenance.</p>	<p>RJ</p>
<p>9. Orchard</p> <p>KH reported that Lairg Learning Centre had approached LDCI to ask if we had any land that could be used to plant a small orchard, as they had funding to use up because they had not been able to run their usual programme of workshops (due to Covid). RJ had thought that the land south of the Sutherland Arms would be a good location as it used to be a vegetable garden in the past.</p> <p>However, LLC have to resubmit their application so couldn't guarantee that they would get the funds – so the project has been delayed until later this year.</p> <p>NM added that we might need to be careful with what we do on that land in the meantime until we know what Albyn Housing will be doing. RJ mentioned that a quarter of the land falls into the landscaping for the housing units.</p>	
<p>AOB – there was no other business.</p>	

Close of meeting

