

FCT Open Meeting Notes
Achmore Hall, 7.30 pm, 3rd March 2022

Attending : Roddy MacPherson, Martin Irving, Georgie Grimson, Neil MacRae, Duncan Gibson, Colin McAndrew, Lizzie Bird, Jim Coomber, Colin Parsons, Jackie Parsons, Jan MacRae

Apologies : Jack Bird, Mary MacBeth, Phil Game, Kate and Callum Bulloch

Colin MacAndrew welcomed those attending the meeting and outlined that the purpose of the meeting was to discuss an offer made to the FCT to buy the old Forestry Office site.

The FCT had heard over a year ago that FLS might be interested in the site as they have moved all their operations from Balmacara to the upgraded outstation here in Achmore. Discussions were held with FLS and with the move from Balmacara they would have an increase in staff to 10 people and needed space for vehicle parking as well as a secure small compound for their machinery.

The FCT had received a provisional offer of £60,000 based on a surveyed land value on the site with the site constraints of having to replace the septic tank, as it does not meet current requirements, and the overhead power cables. A meeting was held between FLS and the FCT in December where the FCT directors said they wanted to consult with the local community before their final decision and have at least until the end of this year to allow the current renters time to relocate.

Views expressed were that the Old Office was an asset for future generations, its rents were 'a cash cow' compared to the land rents, it was a useful facility and the FCT has the money (current balance around 6K) to carry out necessary maintenance. Would the proposed deal be of benefit to the community?

Two of the current three renters who were present at the meeting were obviously concerned about loss of their storage facilities which was fundamental to them and felt that the FCT should support them and their rights to have that space and seek funds to do up the office and support their businesses. One suggestion was that the Trust should sell the old office to the current renters.

Colin MacAndrew replied the FCT income must be managed carefully as it currently includes standing charges, electricity, insurance, path maintenance, land maintenance including the need to replace fencing which is the Trust's responsibility. The FCT needs its current funds to carry out known and immediate improvements. There are also longer-term projects for the Trust to seek and consider which will benefit the whole community but with the current and likely future limitations of applying for community funds, such as a grant to do the old office up, these are becoming very restricted or include match funding of 50%.

Other views expressed were that the Old Office is a current liability due to its age and the ongoing need to repair and replace old wood, windows, etc. and its value as a Trust asset is reducing. It was reiterated that it would require a lot of work including structural and related costs. Another view put forward was that the main asset of the Trust is its land which is of benefit to the whole community now and in the future.

Suggestions were made that the small businesses could link with the HIE. If the old office was sold then what about the possibility of containers to house the small businesses along the allotment road and contacting Housing Associations to build flats on the site.

The meeting closed with the final comment that this was stage 1 for the FCT in its considerations.