

Wigtown & Bladnoch Community Initiative

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2023

Held at The Print Room, Wigtown At 8.00 pm
on Thursday 21 December 2023

PRESENT: Matt Kitson, Pete Dobson, Frank Irvine, Gillian Hamnett, Cat Muir, Robin Richmond, Sandra McDowall, Craig Hamnett, Hope London

APOLOGIES: Ada Montgomery, Kev Witt

Minutes of last AGM 21st September 2022 accepted.

Chair's Report: In the absence of KW, PD read out the Chair's report (attached).

Election of nominated Directors:

PD explained that the current Articles require one third of current Directors to stand down each year and may be re-elected if they have only served one term. As MK and KW have served two terms they are not eligible for re-election. PD moved to co-opt KW and MK for a further term. Approved.

GH was nominated to the Board and was duly elected. SMcD was put forward as the Community Council representative on the Board and was welcomed by the meeting.

The full Board of Directors is:

Kev Witt, Pete Dobson, Matt Kitson, Frank Irvine, Dawn Barclay, Sandra McDowall, Gillian Hamnett

Election of Officers:

The following were nominated and elected as Office bearers for the next 12 months:

Kev Witt – Chair

Matt Kitson – Secretary

Pete Dobson – Treasurer.

PD thanked Jak Kane for all of his support and effort as Treasurer and Secretary over the past 12 months.

Review of Accounts:

PD provided a review of the company accounts for 2022/23. The opening cash balance at the start of the year was £24,776.27. The Closing balance was £2,021.00.

Total Income	£70,502.54
Total Expenditure	£93,256.86
Profit/Loss for the year	-£22,754.32

Financial Report

Micro accounts were filed with Companies House covering the year up to the end of February 2023. These accounts will be audited by our accountants before being updated as full accounts in the new year. For this period there was a small loss due to the completion of the bunkhouse works.

The Initiative is breaking even based on current occupation rates within the bunkhouse, however with growth through advertising and repeat bookings we are expecting a modest profit this financial year.

Included in the break-even status is a small investment in fencing to the back garden to make this a more private area for residents.

It has been established that an additional payment was being deducted for electricity for much of the accounting period which is being investigated with an aim of reclaiming the missing money.

For the second-year rate relief has been applied for based on the exemption for NFP organisations.

Due to the complexities of having an ongoing business (Bunkhouse and flats) as well as two potential projects accountancy software is being investigated to make the financial management simpler.

Next AGM:

November/December 2024, at date to be confirmed.

Chairs Report

Governance

This year the W&BCI has seen the election of three new Board Members Frank Irvine, Dawn Cluckie and Peter Dobson as well as the resignation of Sarah Nyland.

The Community Council has now put forward Sandra McDowell as a Director to fill one of the two reserved places for the Community Council.

The role of Treasurer was appointed to Peter Dobson in April 2023 after Jak Kane had again served in this post following the resignation of Sarah Nyland in February 2023.

The Board currently has three serving Directors who have served two terms and are therefore due to retire in accordance with Article 33.4, these being;

- Jak Kane
- Matt Kitson
- Kevin Witt

The Board would like to take this opportunity to thank all retiring and resigned members for their contribution to the community while volunteering.

Later in the meeting we will discuss amendments to the Articles to reduce the turnover of Directors and resolve some ambiguities.

Property and Projects

The Bunkhouse and Flats

The Bunkhouse has now been open for its first full year of trading. Following a slower start, bookings significantly increased over the spring into summer, and we have also seen some winter bookings over New Year. A big part of this has been more active promotion on the booking site Expedia. Due to poor early performance the decision was made to bring the management of bookings back within the Initiative and huge thanks must be given to Matt Kitson for running this throughout the year. It is hoped that with continued growth the revenue will grow to allow additional employment to manage the bunkhouse in the longer term.

Both flats are fully occupied, and works are due to start on the fencing work in the rear garden to allow more private use for residents.

The Plough

The Plough was identified as a potential project as part of discussions in the Town Team meetings. A Presentation was made to the W&BCI Board about the project in the summer and it was decided that we should pursue the project.

The running of the pub is a significant undertaking and therefore it was agreed that investigations should be made on the basis of the W&BCI purchasing the building and partnering with a separate community organisation to run the pub.

The presentation made to the Board was to run the pub as a community enterprise with a focus on delivering training and jobs to local people. The accommodation above would be used as well as the bar being open for public use.

The pub is in good condition having been renovated recently.

Funding is being sought from the Scottish Land Fund and the Community Ownership Fund.

Depending on the purchase being successful and any other developments in the town the possibility of housing a post office in the pub has also been considered as this is a solution that has been successful in other rural communities.

The Church Hall

Following of the confirmation from the Church that the hall was going to be sold it was agreed by the Board in March to investigate the purchase of the building to retain it for community use. Consultation was issued and the responses were overwhelmingly supportive of this process.

Initial funding was secured for surveys and project development through the Scottish Land Fund and there has subsequently been a Stage 2 application submitted for the purchase of the building. Additional funding will be required to carry out repairs and improvements to the building to make it more efficient and therefore cost effective to run.

It is likely that funding will be decided by the end of January with the aim of completing the purchase before the end of March. Further funding bids will be required in the new year for net zero improvements and repairs.

The aims of this project are to secure the building for the community, we believe there is potential to utilise the Hall as a multi-use space. A detailed Business Plan is being developed and will look at all the potential uses for the building, with a key focus being making the building more sustainable and therefore keeping running costs to a minimum. Improvements will mean the building is more versatile and will deal with issues such as the poor acoustics and improvements to accessibility.

Other Potential Projects and Issues

Closure of the Post Office

The closure of the post office will have a detrimental impact on the town, essential services will be lost, and this is going to impact those less able to travel to Newton Stewart the most. We are aware that this has been discussed at the Community Council and there is a proposal to locate a Post office and banking hub within the County Building.

The inclusion of the Post Office within a community pub is a very obvious possibility, however this is only an issue if the proposals to Community Council are not taken forward.

Borderlands Town Plan

Earlier this year a Town Team was established to develop a place plan which would in turn lead to an investment plan with the potential to bid for a share of £13m split between five towns across D&G.

This plan will include projects directly proposed to deal with issues identified through public consultation. As a community organisation authorised to own and develop property there is a high potential for the W&BCI to take some projects forward for the community.

Housing Land on the Old Show Field

One of the main drives for establishing the W&BCI was to look at options for community ownership of the showfield to deliver sustainable affordable housing. Previously the W&BCI registered an interest through Community Right to Buy, however as the land did not return to market in time this has now elapsed. It is common knowledge that the current owners are part way through planning determination and as such are unlikely to sell the land in the near future. If deemed prudent the W&BCI can reapply for Community Right to Buy if there is public support.