



MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE BOARD OF GAIRLOCH & DISTRICT HERITAGE COMPANY LTD

31 January 2024
Gairloch Museum. 4.30pm.

Present Allan Templeton; Corinna Annetts; Pauline Butler; Jeremy Fenton; Peter Lynn; Irene Macintyre; Roy Macintyre; Anne MacLennan; Anna MacQuarrie (Zoom); Gordon McIntosh; Jean Ross; Guy Seaman; Eilidh Smith; Ben Thomas.

Apologies Scott Steedman.

1. Conflicts of Interest

No potential conflict of interest was declared with respect to the Agenda.

2. Minutes of the Board meeting of 13 December

The minutes of the meeting held on 13 December were agreed to be a correct record, proposed by Jean and seconded by Corinna. Matters arising:

- i) Museums and Heritage Highland had responded promptly to our email, forwarded by Ben, with respect to opportunities for heritage sector networking which appear to be fewer than in the past. The response emphasised that all their events and most training sessions are open to everyone, be they employees, Board members and/or volunteers. Logistics and costs mean that most activities are delivered online, but there are occasional 'in-person' conferences. Corinna will circulate information about future meetings as and when received.
- ii) The visit from the RHS estate manager at Worsley, near Manchester, which has an AAOR in the grounds, has been pencilled in for 3 April.

3. Recommendations of the Executive Group

The Executive Group (Allan, Corinna, Pauline, Peter, with Eilidh also attending) met on 18 January. Notes from the meeting had been circulated. Allan highlighted the current and potential 2024 financial realities which demonstrate the necessity to increase footfall and income and reduce costs, including the wages bill. The number of employees, both for Front of House and the café, will be reduced this season. The refocused Financial Sustainability Group is tasked with establishing a sustainable operational model. Volunteering opportunities are currently being promoted on our website and in GDT articles and Allan challenged each Board member to recruit at least one additional volunteer before the next meeting.

The Executive had reviewed the current pattern of working groups. The Board endorsed its proposals:

- i) the Finance Group will be reshaped to deliver on its expanded remit. Roy will chair the group, with Peter providing administrative information and support
- ii) the Personnel Group will continue, with volunteer management being added to its remit
- iii) Corinna will chair the Exhibition Planning Group. This group's first new task will be to prepare the framework for a submission to Museum Galleries Scotland for an Events and Outreach development post to broaden our audience profile and enhance our organisational capacity. The deadline for an Expression of Interest is 30 April
- iv) the Interpretation and Publications groups will meet whenever there is a related project/purpose
- v) the informal Premises Group will become the Facilities Management Group, chaired by Guy, given that the Board has responsibility for Health and Safety procedures and compliance, including routine testing, recording and reporting. We will endeavour to find a volunteer with relevant experience to undertake some of the testing required

- vi) the Events and Outreach Group to be re-established, chaired by Corinna
- vii) Eilidh will set up a more formal Marketing and Communications group, Gordon will bring his expertise to that
- viii) An 'Ever Greener' group will be established once we are clearer what is involved in being a pilot museum in MHH's Climate Ambassador programme.
- ix) Membership and marketing are priorities that need to be addressed through targeted actions. Allan is open to offers from any Board member who wishes to join a group, existing or new. Ben recommended that we investigate whether HES' 'Make your Mark' campaign might offer useful training and resources to develop volunteering skills. <https://www.historicenvironment.scot/about-us/news/make-your-mark-in-volunteering/#>

4. Financial report

Pete had circulated his report and figures for income and expenditure to the end of December, with projections as to the 2024 budget, some of them linked to aspects of the Action Plan 2024-2025. He has worked the figures to a 'break-even' scenario. Roy proposed being more ambitious and setting higher targets for exhibition income, fund-raising, membership and donations. This will be on the agenda of the first meeting of the new Financial Sustainability Group.

5. Curator's report

Corinna's report had been circulated. It covered Documentation; Professional Development and Training; Projects; Funding; Collections Risk Management; Events; and Enquiries. Further to this:

- i) Corinna confirmed that the Treasure Trove Unit of National Museums Scotland is giving us the assemblage of material from a Bronze Age burial chamber excavation in Shieldaig
- ii) she and Eilidh would be participating in a VisitScotland support activity aiming at testing out and enhancing our website
- iii) Corinna has requested feedback and comments on a draft letter to be sent to Highland councillors, our MSP and MP to emphasise the contribution of museums to heritage, culture and tourism, as HC considers its budget decisions for the next year
- iv) we have signed up for a free energy efficiency assessment, which includes a one day consultancy visit and completion of a survey.

6. Gaelic development report

Anna's report had been circulated. Further to this, she informed us that there are likely to be developments in VisitScotland's approach to Gaelic within tourism which will focus more on heritage. She will update us in due course.

As part of a funding submission to Bòrd na Gàidhlig, there are plans for an informal seating corner in the café where the proposed Gaelic conversation group can meet, with library resources available for reading and research.

7. Events and Outreach

The 'Burns Night' Quiz had been very successful, with many 'first time' participants. Volunteers helping out, and entertainment from the Ceilidh House, all contributed to a great atmosphere.

8. Accreditation

Our Accreditation return was submitted on 22 January, well before the 9 February deadline. The outcome is not expected until the summer, though MGS will contact us should further information be required in the interim. We may well be 'visited', given the significant transformation we have been through. Pauline was thanked for her efforts in bringing together the volumes of evidence from the past 7 years to meet the standardised national criteria. She reminded the Board that, in March, we must revisit our provisional review of the 2023-24 Action Plan and finalise that for 2024-25.

9. Operational matters

- i) Café: meetings have been held with our contracted employees to discuss a possible model for this year's operation. Given the financial constraints, a simplified menu will be planned, feasible within

the staffing capacity, with careful monitoring month by month. Jean was thanked for her ongoing work to ensure the café continues to be an asset to the Museum in difficult circumstances.

- ii) Facilities maintenance: Pauline will convene one more meeting of the Risk Assessment task force to finalise the documentation to which everyone has had the opportunity to contribute. A 'shopping list' for the essential Collections salvage materials/equipment, and signage, First Aid kits (etc) will also be compiled. There is budgetary provision for this. The Facilities Management Group will then be responsible for the review and monitoring of risk assessments and the schedule of premises checks and testing. Corinna has completed the 'collections' aspects of the Emergency Plan, leaving just the procedures for dealing with potential 'threats' to be agreed. Ben and Gordon will provide Pauline with some information to help with the compilation of a G&DHC 'Risk Register'. All documentation prepared during the course of this winter's health & safety work will be printed out for the Welcome Desk and available to all via the internal computer network. It is recognised that awareness and training to familiarise everyone with the risks and their mitigations must be built into the pre-season training sessions and ongoing. Training has been arranged for the Collections team.
- iii) After discussion, it was agreed that the Museum should open for the season from 6 March, with public access on Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays for the month. The café will open from the Easter week-end.
- iv) Eilidh confirmed that the Museum is a member of ASVA which brings benefits for marketing as well as visiting other tourism attractions.

10. Any Other Business

- i) The issue of the heating in the Activity Room was raised again, as it is inadequate for the *Whatever the Weather* Wednesday sessions. It was agreed to purchase/acquire another fan heater to raise the temperature more quickly than is possible using the convector radiators.
- ii) We agreed to aim for a regional publicity focus on the solar panels after a year's experience, possibly as part of a broader marketing approach. Guy and Pete will compile some statistics as to the difference they have made. Guy will investigate the overhead 'banging' that is being heard when it is windy.
- iii) Irene would welcome the opportunity to speak to staff about our retail offer to help them understand better the principles of stock choices, pricing and our market niche.

11. Summary of Action Points

- Each Board member to recruit a new volunteer before 6 March
- All working groups, both established and new, to meet before 6 March
- The RA working group to finalise and make available all risk assessment documentation
- With input from the EPG, Corinna, Allan and Pauline to draft the framework for an application to MGS for an Events & Outreach Development post
- Eilidh and Corinna to finalise the pre-season programmes for 'Connecting Collections' and H&S awareness and procedures training
- Pauline and Eilidh to check that the procedures envisaged for dealing with potential 'threats' are relevant for our premises and staff
- A 'Risk Register' to be drafted for consideration at the next Board meeting.

12. Dates of next meetings

The next full Board meeting is scheduled for Wednesday 6 March at 4.30; the Executive Group will meet on 28 February.

There being no other business, the meeting ended at 5.55 pm.