**Minutes of AGM of Community Out West Trust – 10 January 2022**

**7.00 pm, Kinlochewe Village Hall**

**Present:** Andrew Peacock, David & Maud McIntyre, Mary Peart, Edwin & Mary Ann Cross, Patricia & Robert Coke, Mat Webster, Carole McIver, Graham Phillips (Members) & Tony Cresswell.

Apologies with proxy: Caroline Hamilton, Kate Ellis, Felix & Sarah von Racknitz, Terry Doe

Apologies: Colin Stevenson, Doug & Pam Stevenson

**Introduction**

Andrew opened the meeting and welcomed all participants.

1. **Trustees Report for 2021/22**

Previously circulated to members.

Continued day-to-day operation of the toilets. Open 24/7, 365 days. Only shut briefly due to frost damage. Thanks to Carole for continuing to keep them so clean and fresh.

**Improvements to the site**. Thanks to funding from Scotland Loves Local and North Highland Initiative the COW Trust (“the Trust”) was able to instal signage, plant some additional screening and fencing around the recycling area and at Glen Docherty.

**Major improvements**. The COW Trust was awarded about £293,000 by RTIF to rebuild the toilets and at the start of 2021/22 the Trust was still progressing with this. However, the Trust became increasingly uneasy with the whole development and finally withdrew in June. The reasons for this decision included the excessive level of bureaucracy involved with having to use Public Contracts Scotland and the difficulty in getting the help needed from the Highland Council (“HC”) and RTIF. Our main concern though was that such a costly project no longer seemed appropriate in the post-Covid economy and with cost of building materials escalating rapidly.

When the Trust withdrew it stated that it considered that it was more appropriate to refurbish the existing toilet building, and that the Trust would aim to do that in stages as funding allowed. HC at this point offered its full support and encouraged us to submit an application to the Coastal Communities Fund. The Trust did this and it now has £94,000 funding to redevelop the toilets.

However, moving forward with this project has been incredibly slow. The Trust struggled to find builders who would even reply to the Trust. The only company that responded was Simpsons Small Works (“SSW”) – a branch of Simpsons that specialises in refurbishments. SSW has been very helpful, but SSW is very busy and progress is slow. The Trust now has an architect finalising the plans, which are nearly ready to go to planning and building warrant. A copy of the plan is available for you to look at this evening, and will be put on our website. Comments and suggestions are very welcome before it goes to planning.

We plan to replace the roof and change the internal layout to provide:

* Three unisex superloos
* The current accessible toilet
* One unisex shower room

Each would have its own entrance to the outside, with some natural lighting from a sun tunnel

Energy efficiency would be improved with insulation of the walls, ceiling and floor, as well as sensor lighting and hopefully solar panels.

The building will have larch cladding and a corrugated sheet roof.

Since March 2022 – we have been progressing with these projects, but it has been slow. In light of this the Trust will need to attend to maintenance including the roof which does leak. The Trust had hoped that this would be addressed in the refurbishment.

The Trust has also been involved in the TKCC Development Plan and the Planning for Real exercise.

1. **Treasurer’s report for 2021/22**

Previously circulated to members.

**Total income** was £15,207

Donations £6,074.Predominantly honesty box, but also includes donations via Amazon Smile and Facebook. In addition, the Trust is grateful to the Episcopal Church and Celtman for their donations

Grants - £6,400 from Ward Discretionary Fund and HC for various improvements to the site and NHI for Glen Docherty fence

Also, income from Highland Council’s Comfort Scheme of £2,600 and Fund-raising £133

**Total expenditure** was £9,513

Day-to-day running of the toilets was £7,446 and Site upgrades were £2,067

Total assets as at 31 March 2022 were Fixed assets £55,000 + Funds £11,914 = £66,914

Of this - £8,415 is restricted funds – set aside for redevelopment and match funding

This year honesty box donations were £3,785, well down on last year, due to fewer people, poorer weather and the cost of living.

A member present at the meeting commented that donations were also down at Torridon public toilets and asked if the donations by text was proving successful. The latter has only been in place for a few weeks so too early to tell, but there have been a few donations.

1. **Election of Directors**

Thanks to Karen and Dave Twist for their work as Directors helping to set up and run COW Trust. The Trust is very sorry to see them leave the village but wish them well for the future.

The Board recently co-opted David and Maud McIntyre as Directors. Since joining the Board they have been very involved and active, building our website, setting up the capacity to donate via text, etc. The Trust is delighted to have them on board.

As outlined in the Articles of Association – David and Maud stood down as co-opted directors and were duly elected to the Board.

According to the Articles of Association, 1/3 of the Board should stand down at each AGM and Directors can stand for re-election for two terms. They should then take a break of a year before standing for election again. These are the “best practice” arrangements which we would like to follow, but in the absence of anyone else standing for election as directors we propose to amend the Articles of Association prior to the next AGM in order to give us a little more flexibility to cope with the reality of the situation. In this context Andrew and Mary stood down and offered themselves for re-election for a further term. They were duly re-elected.

1. **Up-date on refurbishment plans**

Already covered in the Trustees’ report

1. **Other potential community projects**

David raised the question of what other projects the Kinlochewe community would like the Trust to be involved with. In this regard, a possibility of the community running what was the Gorse Bush presented itself just before Christmas. Given the timeframe, there was no opportunity to consult with the community, so the Trust submitted an expression of interest to the Hickman Trust, but have gone no further as yet and are keen to know whether there is support for us taking the possibility further. Our plan would be to run a community café open throughout the year, with opening hours varying throughout the year according to demand. It would offer an additional space for the community to come together and also provide a venue for local artisans to showcase and sell their products. Profits would be returned to the community, generating cash for other projects in the village. It would be partly staffed by volunteers, but would offer some paid local employment and the potential for training for young people interested in the hospitality business. An outline proposal was submitted with the expression of interest and separately, for internal purposes, a preliminary business plan and financial assessment was done. From this analysis the project appeared viable.

A discussion followed, highlighting the challenge of getting adequate staffing, a challenge common to all cafés and hospitality in the area, especially given the lack of accommodation available locally. It was pointed out that it would need a “host” to take the helm and “live and breathe” it.

TDCA had considered a community café for the Torridon Community Centre, but considered that it did not have the resources.

The meeting generally considered that it is a good idea in principle. It was noted that there was a massive demand for cafés and food outlets in the area, with visitors frequently looking for somewhere to eat and with few options for locals out of season, but it was acknowledged that it would be challenging. The meeting noted that it was necessary to get the support of the Hickman Trust in terms of the lease. It was noted that the Trust needed to get clear terms and conditions from the Hickman Trust before making any commitment, especially with regard to the 3-year lease. Also need to be aware of the challenges and costs in terms of staffing, utilities, etc.

It was put to a vote of the 11 people present. There were 9 votes in favour of pursuing the possibility and 2 abstentions.

Post Meeting Note.

The Trust attended a meeting with the Hickman Trust on Monday 16 January. Further to that meeting the Trust is no longer interested in pursuing the lease of the Old Hall (formally operated as the Gorse Bush).

1. **Any other business**

Carole suggested that campervans should be allowed to park overnight in the car park again to increase income from donations. It was agreed that a few each night is not a problem and is financially helpful but no overnight parking was a planning condition based on the flood risk.

It was questioned whether the Trust would consider a community take-over of the Kinlochewe shop and Post Office. The Trust had thought about this but decided it was too big a project for such a small group. The idea had been revisited when GALE had suggested a joint project. However, the process of obtaining funding and completing an asset transfer is a very lengthy one and, though initially very interested, once aware of the timeframe, the owners felt they could not go down the community buy-out route and chose instead to put the house and shop on the open market. The Trust will continue to monitor the situation.