**Errogie Church Meeting - Notes**

**Date: Tuesday 9th July, 2024**

**Meeting time: 12noon**

**Meeting location: The Gathering Place/ Errogie Church, Errogie**



**Present:** Gareth Jones (GJ),Caroline Tucker (CT), Jillian Barclay (JB), Sarah Byrne (SB)

Fiona Ambrose (FA), Abi Discombe (AD), Margaret Davidson (MD), Molly Fraser (MF), Fiona Larg (FL), John Parrott (JP), Kade Stuart (KS), Alex Sutherland (AS), Janet Sutherland (JS).

**Apologies:** Mark Henderson

1. **Welcome.**
* CT welcomed all to the meeting and introduced Molly Fraser, Abi Discombe, Kade Stuart and John Parrott as new members of the steering group.
* Apologies from Mark Henderson.
1. **Minutes and actions from last meeting**

2.1 FL to liaise with SLNHG to identify if summer exhibition on the back of Highland Gathering exhibit a possibility. FL to update in Heritage update.

2.2 Group to suggest potential locations to visit for biodiversity and heritage inspiration. Brainstorm session had and the following possible venues were listed:

* + RSPB Boat of Garten
	+ Trees for Life, Dundreggan
	+ Gairloch Muesum
	+ Ben Eighe Visitor Centre
	+ Kilmartin Glen Visitor Centre
	+ Tomatin Community Hub
	+ Portmahomack Old Church and Visitor Centre
	+ Abriachan Nurseries
	+ Inverness Castle
	+ Highland folk Museum
	+ SB noted that there is a funding pot available for educational purposes that this could feed into. **Action – take this forward *(who, and how?)***

2.3 CT to ask SB to contact MD. Done

2.4 CT to ensure letter is sent to all members of the community. Done – update in community re-engagement.

2.5 CT to arrange further re-engagement meetings. Individuals emailed but no meetings organised yet. Follow up after Highland Gathering.

2.6 CT to take forward conversations with caterers. Not done yet but noted as a requirement.

2.7 Group asked to forward any content or suggested content to CT or JB that can be included as stories to promote Errogie Church/ The Gathering place. Ongoing.

2.8 CT to add remaining members of steering group to Sharepoint folder. Done, but noted still technical issues. **Action – CT to follow up with Admin Officer. Also add new members.**

2.9 WhatsApp group to be set up. To discuss in Communications update

2.11 Governance documents to be shared with group to review and feed back thoughts to CT. Documents shared, no feedback received.

2.12 All references to steering committee updated to steering group. Done, keep checking documentation and correct references where required.

2.13 Group to review governance diagram and share feedback with CT. No feedback received.

2.14 GJ and MD to work together on visual aspect of diagram. GJ updated that further work carried out on this. **Action – CT to circulate to group for feedback.**

2.15 MH to develop a plan for social area. GJ to update on this in community and culture update.

2.16 Budget submitted to SFCT Board ahead of June meeting. Done.

* Minutes agreed.

**3. Report of activity in April**

* CT summarised June activity report:
* *The Project Co-ordinator and lead director, with assistance from the Steering group finalised a letter to go out to all members of the community to update everyone on current Trust projects and as a call to action to anyone who would like to be involved in helping with Errogie Church/ The Gathering place.*
* *The Gathering Place hosted 3 events this month, a wedding, a private birthday party and a talk & film screening. All were successful.*
* *Work on installing broadband to the building is almost complete – cable now runs up to the building and connection into the building is scheduled for Thursday 11th July.*
* *Engaged with Architect to draw up visualisations of potential car parking areas. Conversations ongoing regarding the suitability of a plot of land currently for sale in Errogie for car parking.*
* *Ongoing conversations with biodiversity and heritage groups on development and usage of the building.*
	1. Biodiversity – CT introduced JP, who is joining the Steering Group to represent biodiversity at a local level alongside SB.
* SB summarised recent Biodiversity Group activity:
	+ Now 13-14 people in Biodiversity Group, and actively looking at a formal merger with BEN (Boleskine Environmental Network).
	+ Biggest issue is not owning land and requiring a conduit between landowners and the group, but they are progressing with a handful of small projects – floating platforms for nesting birds on Loch Mhor and Loch Tarff and liaising with a number of individuals in the community about installing swift boxes on the back of the swift talk in June.
	+ JP added that he has past experience of engaging with landowners re conservation projects.
	+ The main issue is that much of the land in the area is owned by a small group of people who may not be interested in biodiversity. Some may be open to persuasion – communication is crucial.
	+ In general, people who move to this area do so for the love of the local environment. Embrace this – education is key. The swift project is a good example, everyone loves swifts. Not only will the installation of swift boxes help protect an endangered species, but it will bring people together to talk about wider issues.
	+ SB highlighted the other work that the group has been working on; Errogie Corner has been allowed to grow ahead of being planted as a flower meadow next year. Surveying is being done by the group to see what is there already.
	+ The group have also been working with FLS on a patch of land at Ault-na-Goire, with the removal of non-native sitka spruce. Water voles have been recorded on this site too.
	+ JP reiterated that the potential for education is vast – even small sites like these, what can be found there, is it native, how do we manage it? What is the objective – do we maintain as is, or do we remove species in favour of others?
	+ GJ thanked SB and JP for their summary. He asked whether the objectives will be set by the Biodiversity group and whether they wanted guidance from the steering group? JP answered that the objectives would be set by the Biodiversity Group.
	+ GJ also asked if the Biodiversity Group and BEN were likely to merge, and JP said he believed that they would. Discussion had on the merits of this – the main one being that BEN are constituted therefore this gives them access to more funding opportunities. GJ also noted that their themes of education and engagement fit extremely well with the priorities of the Errogie Church project.
	+ **Action – SB and JP to share their plans, once ready, with the steering group to see how the two groups can work together.**
	+ GJ introduced MD to talk about wider biodiversity.
	+ MD noted that she was pleased to see the level of current activity with the Biodiversity Group and valued being invited along to their next meeting. She added it is great to start with small actions, but her interest is in what biodiversity looks like across the wider landscape – we need to see change happening. The Highland Council have recently launched their ‘Nature Networks’ project. Although they invited communities to take part in this, the uptake was small as little is known about what is involved – ask someone from Highland Council to come out and talk to the group.
	+ In terms of other wider initiatives, look at deer management programmes, peatland restoration and tree planting as examples. MD asked how we get these going? She used the Eagle project in the Monadhliaths as an example – this research was done as a condition of a planning application. We need to work with the landowners – get them onside, start by praising them for the work they have already done, ask them to come together and tell us about it, is there anything else they would like to tell the community about?
	+ Biodiversity is now written into the planning framework, which means that it can form the planning conditions. Get a better idea of what is planned for the area over the next 10 years – how does biodiversity fit in to the wider plan? We are lucky in the South Loch Ness area that from a biodiversity perspective the landscape is not in too bad a condition.
	+ Other than private landowners, the next largest land owner in the area is Forestry and Land Scotland – would they work with us? The answer will likely be yes, if it is of no cost to them.
	+ JP pointed out that Cairngorms Connect is a successful project that has been running for a while, and its success is due to the link created with positive landowners. Is there, or could there be, something similar in this area?
	+ MD responded that there wasn’t – difficulty here is the amount of land owned by one particular owner may not be large enough.
	+ SB pointed out the Birchfield Limited at Killin has 100acres, this may be a good starting point?
	+ AS added that there was once a local nature reserve at Inverfarigaig, but this was wound up due to access being difficult for older volunteers. Maybe we could reactivate this by acquiring appropriate land. AS also pointed out that the previously mentioned land at Errogie corner is the site of the old smiddy and therefore is of interest from a heritage perspective. It has also been previously ear-marked for housing.
	+ MD summed up that all of this would feed well into this being a building with a real focus on technology, interpretation and also local jobs. Biodiversity is a growing sector and there a lot of demand for jobs. We should put some serious thought into this, perhaps discuss with Business Gateway.

**Action – look into job creation and promotion of this.**

* 1. Heritage – CT introduced FL. Update as follows:
* Summer exhibition not likely to be linked to Heritage stand at the Highland Gathering due to the issue of ownership of exhibits and display boards.
* Funding application forms received so will work on the small grant for funding towards interpretation boards for planned exhibition.
* FL and SB to liaise on larger fund application for feasibility study.

**Actions – FL to look at funding application for interpretation boards ahead of possible exhibition. SB and FL to work on larger funding application.**

* 1. Community & culture – GJ summarised that Mark Henderson had started pulling together some ideas for this. Following the recent communication, three new members have come forward, all who are keen to be involved from the community perspective.
* GJ introduced AD. AD is a new resident in Errogie and has a young family. Keen to get involved.
* GJ introduced MF. MF did a good piece of work for SFCT which fed into the recent place plan – she visited all residents in Torness area and asked for their thoughts on what they would like to see in their area. In terms of a social space, the consensus was that they would look to Errogie Church as their social centre.
* GJ introduced KS. KS keen to represent the younger generation and come up with options suitable for them too. Possibly think about sports activities.
* JP suggested badminton. Used to be played at Gorthleck Hall, but ceiling is a bit low. Not a problem here.
* GJ suggested that MH, AD, MF, KS and himself sit down together to put together a community proposal.

**Action – GJ to arrange meeting between the above members to discuss community options.**

* GJ asked AS & JS how to support Gaelic and stimulate interest in the local Gaelic culture?
* AS said that he had previously organised a walk around the Inverfarigaig forest trails to coincide with the Royal National Mod being in Inverness, which looked at Gaelic plant names. This was successful and could be done again, tying in with the facility at Inverfarigaig. Trips could also be organised for the Gaelic primary school.
* SB added that Gaelic is also tied in with so many place names in the area, something could be done with this too.

3.4 Events/ activities

* CT updated that there were three successful events last month, as mentioned in the activity summary earlier in meeting.
* Building is booked for a cycle event on the 21st September and we had hoped that Moteh Parrott would do a gig and album launch on 7th September, however this has now been postponed to the spring.
* Next events to focus on are Heritage exhibition and art exhibition.
* JS asked who was doing the art exhibition and whether it was stand-alone or if there was room for other artists. CT responded that it is a local sculptor and on this occasion it is likely to be stand alone.
* JP queried whether it should be stand-alone, given that the artist in question is a Trust staff member.
* AD responded that this could be used as a starting point to engage with other artists and do a wider exhibition in the future.
* GJ supported this and added it was important to get the communications around this right, use it to promote that the space is available. This was backed up by JB who said that we could put together a specific communication ahead of this exhibition targeting other artists and asking them to get involved.
* Conversation had about selling arts and crafts from here – this has been mentioned as an objective, either as community market or pop up shop. Need to look into legalities and requirements for this.

**Action – CT and JB to liaise with Artist to pin down comms and promotion for exhibition.**

3.5 Community re-engagement – this has been covered previously in the meeting.

3.6 Car parking

* GJ met with Mike Lawson, SFCT’s retained Architect, this morning. His suggestion is to focus on small clusters of car parking local to the church. He is going to work on some Artist’s impressions to support his proposal. He can also develop some mood boards to demonstrate how parking can be incorporated sensitively into the landscape.
* Discussion moved on to plot of land for sale on the Yellow Brick road. Concern raised about the work required on the site – the stream runs through the plot, so drainage would be an issue. Site is not good, and questions asked as to whether the land is even saleable.
* Concerns also raised about the small bridge between the site and the church – this is narrow and unsafe for pedestrians. Should contact be made with planners to discuss what options there may be here? Question asked as to how proactive the council would be in this situation.
1. **Governance and project management**
* GJ updated that as mentioned in the actions from the last meeting, he has updated the diagram shared at the last meeting. This will be circulated with the minutes.
* He pointed out that we do not have any governance in place over steering group members, everyone who is interested in the project are welcome to join. He asked if we need a wider task around appointing members?

**Action – look at management of group.**

* FA asked if we would then need some standardisation across all steering groups? GJ suggested that the work done on this project could then be rolled out to other projects. FA asked if this would extend to the likes of pathways or biodiversity, and GJ responded that as they are constituted groups they would have their own governance.
* MD suggested getting guidance from DTAS.

**Action – discuss steering group governance with DTAS**

* CT mentioned that Appointment of Chair has not been resolved. Suggested that we also discussed this with DTAS. In the meantime GJ and CT to continue co-chairing until a chair can be found.
1. **Communications**
* JB discussed the proposal of setting up a WhatsApp Group and asked all attendees to confirm that they would like to be part of it – all confirmed. Phone numbers asked for and JB to set this up. **Action – JB to create WhatsApp group.**
* CT asked how this would be managed. JB responded that she would be on it and would monitor it, GJ supported this.
* AD suggested that any important updates made on the group would need to be shared with the wider community for transparency. All agreed.
* GJ also asked that the group use it to generate news stories. We would like to be able to put an Errogie-related story out every two weeks, but JB needs content to do this. If any members of the group have anything they would like to share, please send it to JB.
* SB also asked if anyone has any suggestions for developing the building, please share them on the WhatsApp group – there are lots of funding pots available.
1. **Fundraising**
* SB updated the group that there is a large fund open just now under the Historic Environment Funds programme – she needs to put an expression of interest in for this by 31st August. She suggests this would be too good to miss out on but she needs ideas.

**Action – SB and GJ to organise a brainstorming session next week to generate ideas.**

* Discussion had about linking this in with Gaelic culture, mentioned earlier in the meeting, or reviving some of the traditions lost due to the change in agricultural techniques.
1. **Date and time of next meeting**

Tuesday 10th September, 11am at Errogie Church.

1. **AOB**
* None.

Meeting closed.