**Directors present:**Angus McDowall (AMcD) (via Microsoft Teams), Angus Nicolson (AN), Ken Kennedy (KK), Iain Norman Macleod (INM), John Murdo Matheson (JMM), Joe Wilson (JW) Jenny Mclaughlin (JM), Donald Nicolson (DN).

**Staff present:**

Emma Mackenzie (EM), Ralph Tonge (RT)**,** Luke Crosland-Thomson (LCT).

**Others also present:**31 members

Calum Macdonald (CIB Services) (CM)

Calum Iain MacIver (CnES) (CIM)

**1. Welcome & Apologies**

* AN opened the meeting and thanked everyone for attending. AN welcomed Calum Macdonald from our accountants CIB, and Calum Iain MacIver, Depute Chief Executive of Comhairle nan Eilean Siar who would be giving a presentation later regarding renewable energy opportunities.
* AN asked for any apologies from those who couldn’t attend. Apologies were received from Nellie Kennedy.

**2.** **Minutes from 2023 AGM (held on 16th May 2023)**

* AN asked those present at the AGM last year if the minutes were an accurate record. The minutes were proposed as accurate by Iain Norman Macleod and seconded by John Murdo Matheson.

**3. Matters Arising**

* There were no matters arising from the previous AGM to be discussed.

**4. Financial Report**

* CM reported on the accounts for the year ending March 2023. A copy had been made available on the Trust website prior to the AGM and CM confirmed they are written as dictated by OSCR’s standards.
* Page 5 - Statement of Financial Activities. Income and expenditure were both increased from the previous year, the expenditure increase largely due to depreciation of the Trust’s rental properties.
* Page 6 – Balance Sheet. Total funds at the end of March 2023 – figure of £941,408 with the Trust being largely solvent and possessing a healthy cash reserve.
* No questions were raised by members and AN thanked CM for delivering his report.

**5. Appointment of Accountant**

* AN asked members to propose that CIB Services act as the Trust accountant for the following year. Iain Norman Macleod proposed, and Donne Morrison seconded. CM accepted the appointment.

**6. Chairman’s Report**

* AN provided a report on activity from April 2022 to March 2023 and spoke on behalf of each working subgroup – Crofting, Projects, Property and Tourism. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).

**7. Update on Recent Developments**

* AN outlined activities of the Trust for the period from March 2023 to the present. (Copy attached as an addendum to these minutes).

**8. Calum Iain MacIver – CnES**

* Calum Iain Maciver presented a PowerPoint presentation regarding major renewable energy projects in the Western Isles and the opportunities they present to local communities (shared alongside these minutes for reference).
* Crown Estates opened up leases for bidding last year and several large renewables projects are planned with significant generation capacity.
* These projects are reliant on the planned interconnector upgrade being completed in 2030 – the cable for the interconnector has been ordered and SSEN are already investing in infrastructure upgrades to support this across the islands. Planning applications for additional substations and cabling are expected late-2024/early-2025. Ground-based wind-farm sites are ready to start construction when work begins on the interconnector upgrade, marine sites around 2029. There will be a massive construction programme to install the necessary infrastructure, which is expected to peak around 2029 – local contractors would be preferred, but the scale of the works will require off-island support.
* Combined with a hydrogen generation project at Arnish Point (currently being planned by a consortium including CnES, HIE & UHI), CnES hope that 450-500 jobs will be created after the initial ‘boom phase’ of construction.
* CnES plan to set up a Major Developments Forum to strategically co-ordinate actions to ensure the projects are implemented smoothly and that any growth opportunities and community benefits are maximised, while challenges are mitigated.
* These projects offer benefits via the creation of jobs, peat management & mitigation, supply chain development, accommodation & housing, and through the creation of significant community benefit fund.
* Questions & comments were raised by several attendees at the end of the presentation, as follows:
  + Given the increased pressure on housing that would be caused by contract workers, are there plans to introduce a rent cap for island residents?
    - Current plans involve focusing on bulk housing solutions for contract workers, which will then be freed up once the projects are completed.
  + How will the impact on CalMac services be managed when moving large amounts of material and workers?
    - CnES are meeting with CalMac & Transport Scotland to discuss strategy around this potential issue. Developers will also be using their own charters and transport to deliver to the islands, which should reduce pressure on CalMac. Doubling the current number of Loganair flights has also been discussed.
  + Will CnES buy-in to any planned projects?
    - Offers have been made to CnES and several communities. CnES are not opposed to this and can potentially raise funds at below market rates if presented with solid business plans, however there is no firm decision yet.
  + Is there any scope for cheaper electricity for Western Isles residents?
    - Possibly. Ultimately down to OFGEM whether they implement an exception to their tariff bands.
  + The roads between Stornoway & Eishkein will likely require alterations to allow turbine components to be moved along them – have plans for this been submitted?
    - CnES are aware that some work will be needed, but less than one might think due to advances in how large components can be manoeuvred on public roads. Delivery by boat to Eishkein is also still an option.
  + How does removing peat as part of turbine installation works make sense in the context of global climate change?
    - The project has a carbon balance spread over the operational life of the windfarm, to ensure at least net zero carbon emissions. Any removed peat can be factored into carbon credit calculations.
  + Agreements and planning applications are often decided before community benefits are agreed, and communities often have no input or say on community benefit arrangements. Will the Pairc Trust be consulted on relevant projects?
    - Pairc Trust will be consulted where appropriate. Community benefit arrangements are not material considerations for planning purposes, so legally have no impact on those proceedings regardless of when, or if, they are implemented – they are arranged via separate legal agreements with developers and CnES cannot take these into account when deciding whether or not to grant planning permission.

**9. Any Other Business**

* AN informed the meeting that another AGM would be held towards the end of the year or in the New Year, as the current AGM order is still disrupted due to the effects of the COVID pandemic.
* AN thanked directors and employees for all their work over the year towards the Trust, Pairc Church for the use of their hall, Ravenspoint for providing refreshments, CIM & CM for attending and presenting at the AGM, local councillors for their guidance and assistance over the year, and all attendees at the AGM.
* AN encouraged members present to contact the Pairc Trust if they, or someone they know, are interested in lending assistance as co-opted Directors – 2 positions are available.
* AN announced his resignation as a Director of the Pairc Trust. KK thanked AN as for his work as a Director and Vice-Chair of the Pairc Trust over the last several years and wished him all the best for the future.

AN closed the AGM proceedings.

**Chairman’s Report**

**This report will cover the financial year from April 2022 to March 2023 and then review Recent Developments since then.**

**April 2022 to March 2023**

In March 2023 Bridget Mallison accepted the temporary post of Administrator and the Trust were indebted to her completing this crucial role whilst it sought to appoint new staff. The role required an intense period of learning to perform it successfully and Bridget undertook this admirably. The Trust thanks Bridget for her willingness to help in a challenging situation and we wish her success in her supervisory post at Ravenspoint.

Much of the work undertaken between April and June focused on “keeping the lights on”, completing necessary crofting and factoring duties as the landowner and advertising for an Officer Manager. In June Emma Mackenzie was appointed to this full-time post and one of her first tasks involved completing an agreement with MOWI to lease land for siting signal repeater masts. This brought welcome income to the estate and affected Grazing’s committees.

The Trust supported Hebridean Childcare with operating from the Resource Centre by helping them complete a funding application for a lease.

September saw the Trust further add to their staffing and employed Abbé as a part-time Projects Manager, working four days a week. Abbé has since left the organisation to pursue new challenges and I wish to thank her for her hard work in the time she was with us and every success with her future endeavours. As you’ll see further on, she was a valuable asset to the organisation with her knowledge and understanding of challenges facing communities like Pairc.

The Youth Enablement Award has been a satisfying project for the Trust to deliver since its inception and this year was no different. Kayleigh Jacques from Habost was the winner by demonstrating that she would use the funding for her business ‘Habost Hound Hotel’ by purchasing new equipment for the dogs, and towards equipment for her croft in Gravir where she hopes to start planting crops. We were pleased to support Kayleigh with her entrepreneurial ambitions as well as encouraging young crofters to remain on the estate and use the land for their benefit.

The award is open for those aged 16-30 who are normally resident on the estate to apply to and has been set up to be as flexible as possible to support as wide a range of uses as it can. We are proud of the young people on our estate and are delighted that this continues to help them.

In November, the Trust began working on a housing project with Pairc Community Council and TIG to purchase the Tigh Ceilidh in Gravir and turn this into a family home, reversing depopulation and enhancing the school roll. The purchase was completed in June 2023 and the project is currently ongoing with plans to complete a feasibility study and initial designs on the right type of house later this year.

At the beginning of 2023 the Trust met with PCC and CNES Housing department to continue the discussions around housing in the district and were supportive of plans to build a development of affordable houses in Gravir, by HHP.

Abbé successfully applied to WHP Telecoms to fund our ‘Connecting Communities’ pilot project which aimed to ensure that all residents in the village of Orinsay had appropriate access to internet services. We extended an invitation to members of the wider community to let us know if there were other homes in the Pairc area that received poor, or even no 4G signal at all, and we thank those who responded.

The pilot encountered some challenges and wasn’t as successful to begin with as we had hoped. We had to ensure that this was resolved before being able to make a decision on further roll out and we hope to apply for funding in 2024 to advance some of the reported not spots and will be in touch with those who responded to update them.

The Pairc Trust received digital devices as part of the MPower agreement and fit bits were donated to the Health Walk Group, along with Amazon Echo Dots which were donated to families at Pairc School.

In March, a Pairc Community Engagement event was delivered in collaborating with the Pairc Trust, UHI and local artist Sandra Kennedy, looking at landscape change through art journalling.

The Trust also took part in the Pairc Strategic Area Review which was funded by HIE and organised via the Pairc Area Forum. The event was attended by various groups from the area such as CCnP, PCC, Pairc Historical Society, and our local councillors also took part. Abbé began looking at a joint project with Ravenspoint and the Resource Centre, discussing a net zero project with David Skene.

The Pairc Trust had an inaugural meeting with Eurowind Energy regarding the Uisenis Wind Farm, at the time of the public exhibitions in Ravenspoint, with initial discussions about community benefit. The Trust also met with CNES regarding the potential community benefit that will be available for the area.

Abbé drafted a Pairc Trust interim business plan for 2023-24 and this was approved and introduced to members at the AGM in June 2023.

**Recent Developments**

The Trust has been in negotiations to purchase the land next to the Habost Units which currently belong to Highlands and Islands Enterprise. There have been several challenges, but we are working with Graham & Sibbald (acting on behalf of HIE) to progress these. The land at Habost will be an important acquisition for us, and an important asset for us to maximise for the community.

Our building at The Resource Centre has seen changes in usage since April 2023 – unfortunately, Hebridean Childcare are no longer operating. Chante Batson is now using space for her Osteopathy Clinic, and we have regular community events and meetings which have increased in the last six months. We are committed to ensuring that the Resource Centre is very much a hub for the Community, working alongside Ravenspoint and the Co-Chomunn na Pairc. We have hosted Horticultural events, Dancing Classes, Arts and Craft sessions, and a variety of meetings; and we look forward to more events and activities hosted here. We are working closely with CCnP to explore making both The Resource Centre and Ravenspoint more environmentally friendly, aiming for net zero, with potential funding to apply for through CARES and Community Energy Scotland advising and supporting.

Following on from the Pairc Area Strategic Review, Pairc Trust and CCnP have now set up a working group and we recently had our first meeting. We look forward to working more closely with the CCnP and our first project together includes the upgrading of the shared septic tank, which is vital to the operation of the Resource Centre and Ravenspoint.

In 2023 we were pleased to support Martha Malcolm and Louise Wilson with our Youth Enablement Award. Both Martha and Louise have made good use of the funding in supporting their career progression, and we will feature more on the positive impact in the upcoming edition of our newsletter. The 2024 award applications will open soon, and we look forward to supporting more local young people with this award.

We continue to develop plans and proposals for the Tigh Ceilidh at Gravir, which we were able to purchase in 2023 from the Community Council. We are currently in discussions with TIG and progressing our funding application with the Rural Housing Fund.

We were pleased to secure funding from WHP Telecoms back in 2023 for a pilot project to connect homes to 4G in areas without signal, but the initial pilot in Orinsay has had mixed results but is overall successful – we have learned a great deal and are grateful to the residents who took part in the pilot for their patience and support. The next step now for us is to progress this pilot to more homes across the Estate with additional funding and we will update you on next steps as this develops.

A new project is currently in development which includes renovation of picnic sites, signage and creation of Heritage Trails; and this promises much needed investment in road signage, including correct location of “Welcome to Pairc” signs, as well as information signage and tourist advice notices. The Heritage Trails project is run by the Comhairle and looks to celebrate more of the history and culture of the footpaths across the islands, and we are keen to ensure that Pairc is part of this project. We have also begun dialogue with the RSPB to include nature signage at the picnic sites, and potentially bird hide facilities if appropriate. This is an exciting start to a collaborative project, and there will be more conversations needed to take this forward – as with all our projects, we welcome your feedback.

The environment of the Pairc Estate is a priority for us, whatever the usage or nature of the land. We are currently working with Community Land Outer Hebrides to manage Gunnera. Gunnera is an invasive species and causes a variety of problems with drainage and can take over land quite quickly. Please get in touch with us if you have any gunnera on your property or are aware of an outbreak of it.

The Trust are pleased to announce the formal launch of our Community Benefit Fund in collaboration with MOWI. We recently provided funding to allow 4 pupils from Pairc School to attend the Primary Engineer Awards Ceremony at Robert Gordon University. The pupils were successful in receiving awards after submitting ideas to the Scottish Engineering Leaders Award on the topic “If you were an engineer what would you do?” Congratulations to all involved and we were very happy to support the trip! Our aim with the fund is to be able to support individuals as well as organisations, please get in touch if you are interested in applying.

In February 2024, we welcomed Jenny McLaughlin and Donald Nicolson onto the board as co-opted directors. In the same month, Ralph Tonge also joined the Pairc Trust staff as Project Manager and a month later we welcomed Luke Crosland-Thomson as Administrator. Both staff are part time and based at the Resource Centre. We are also delighted to welcome a new director, Chris Coles, who has come forward onto our board of directors. His vast knowledge and experience will help to assist Pairc Trust with its aims and objectives.

I would like to thank all the directors and staff for all their work for the Trust over the year in contributing to the success of the Pairc Trust.