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FDT AGM Minutes

Financial Year to May 2024.

Held at Edinkillie Village Hall

on Tuesday 18th March 2025

1. **Welcome and Apologies.**

Present: Directors Karen Astill (KA) Chair), Stewart McCracken, Tony Pinner, Dawn Nicolson, Carol Bennett Buttaci, Sue Boulton, Alisdair Laing, Brian Higgs.

Development team: Rosemary Pannell (Community Engagement Officer).

Attendees. Cathel (The Long Partnership), Howard Davenport, Andy Munro, Jo Laing, Jay Evans.

Apologies: Ian Chorlton (Development Manager), Tim Slack.

2. **Chair Report**

CHAIR REPORT

I’m not going to read the trustees report verbatim, but I will highlight some key activities from 1st June 2023 to 31st May 2024 which is the period these accounts cover.

We’ve got out of sync with our AGMs in relation to the accounting period, so we’ll be talking about events which feel quite significantly in the past. However, I will bring you up to date with our priority projects and tell you how we plan to tackle this lag in AGM procedure later.

We started our financial year with a change in personnel as Jan McPherson moved on to pastures new and we offered Ian Chorlton, our Development Officer, the opportunity to step into the Development Manager role on a one-year secondment. He was happy to do this and has since taken over the role on a permanent basis.

Rather than backfill his DO role immediately, we decided to wait until we identified what we needed from that role and, in January last year, we employed Rosemary

Pannell as Community Engagement Officer, initially on an 8 month contract, in order to spread the word about our latest 5 year strategic plan and to generally improve our communication with the community. I'm pleased to share that, last September, we offered Rosemary a permanent role as Development Officer with a broader remit to support Ian but also keep up those channels of communication and share her findings with the board.

On this subject, we also contracted a PR professional to kickstart our social media presence and we now have a monthly newsletter which goes out in electronic and print versions with the aim of keeping our members as up to date as we can.

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

Our community facilities survey, sent out in early 2022, highlighted the need for affordable community transport and the trial, spearheaded by ECA in winter 2022, supported that. The results of that trial indicated that there was a preference for a scheduled service rather than a 'dial a bus' model and a sub-group was established with FDT directors and members of ECA to move this forward.

We purchased a minibus in June 2024 and applied for an S22 licence to enable a trial scheduled service to begin in September 2024. We have just completed a review of this service and have applied for changes to be made to the timetable (awaiting approval from the council). This was all aided by the appointment of Keith Ruston on a temporary contract basis to lend his experience to the project. We currently employ 2 drivers and also have a bank of volunteer drivers which we hope will support the expansion of this project in the future.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

During this accounting period (to the end of May 2024), things seemed to be progressing well, with architects Oberlanders being appointed and moving from RIBA stage 1 to stage 3 which enabled us to submit a planning application in March 2023.

Unfortunately, since then, we have come across numerous hurdles. Moray Council specified some changes to the plans which meant an extended consultation period. They also insisted on us agreeing to a developer's contribution which we felt was excessive, given that we are not commercial developers, and we are providing much needed affordable housing for our community.

The delays incurred by this, as well as a rise in the cost of materials and labour in the building industry, mean that the overall cost of this project has significantly increased. We have also found that the main funders for the project, the Rural Housing Fund, may only fund a smaller percentage of the costs than we were initially led to believe by Community Housing Trust.

All of this effectively means that we are struggling to bring this project in on a budget that makes it still viable for affordable housing.

We continue to work with the architects, designers, council and funders to combat this and will keep the community updated with progress on this legacy project.

R100 BROADBAND

During this financial period, FDT spent £10k on supporting a local company - External Reality - to access the Openreach network so that they could calculate prices to provide fibre Broadband to properties within Finderne that have either had R100 progress delayed or that have no other way of getting high speed internet.

ER successfully accessed the network and completed some repairs, identifying some properties where the voucher scheme can be used to improve their broadband provision. This wasn't as extensive as we'd hoped and BT, as usual, weren't very helpful with assisting our community in this regard.

The good news is that the threat of some competition seems to have increased the urgency with which BT Openreach planned to roll out R100 and there has been an awful lot of digging across the community over the last few months! Hopefully by our next AGM, we'll be able to report that the majority of our community has access to fibre broadband.

APPRENTICESHIPS AND LOCAL BUSINESS SUPPORT

Our aim as a trust has always been to support local businesses and initially, we did this through the Scottish Apprenticeships scheme. We successfully supported one apprentice through his entire apprenticeship with Greenleaf Design and build.

However, we accepted that there were limitations with this scheme and therefore introduced two new business support grants in Spring 2024 offering grants of up to £5k per application to support new employees or training. We have supported several businesses already with these grants, including Naturally Useful, Timeless and Love Mushrooms.

We continue to refine and promote these grants in order to best support the businesses in our community.

WINTER SUPPORT GRANT

This was initially introduced in December 2022 in reaction to the cost-of-living crisis hitting people that winter. As nothing fundamental seemed to have changed for winter 2023/24, we ran it again, changing the allowed amount to £400 per household in order to be able to help more people, and we again supported over 100 households through the winter.

EXISTING COMMUNITY FACILITIES

With the community facilities survey being clear that the community would rather we assist with the upgrading and promotion of existing facilities, rather than look at building new ones, we have been working with the committees of both village halls.

We funded the improvement of the toilets at Edinkillie Hall and some new chairs, as well as supporting them in their plans to extend and improve the car park. Rafford Village Hall are still working on their priorities, and we continue to work with them to affect these improvements.

MICRO PROJECTS FUND

We have always allocated a small amount of funds to assist with community events and projects that need a cash injection of up to £1K. Once Rosemary came on board last January, she made it her mission to ensure this fund was spent and we have subsequently funded a number of events at Altyre Clubroom, Logie School and RVH. I think this is the first year we have spent the full £5k allocated and I'm sure that Rosemary already has some projects in mind for the next financial year!

That concludes the summary of our priority projects for the accounting period of 2023/24. I will continue with the rest of the AGM business and, once we have that wrapped up, we can proceed onto further updates of projects and open things up to questions about the future.

For now, are there any questions or comments which you would like to be recorded about the projects ongoing for this accounting period?

3. ACCOUNTS

Our annual accounts until the end of May 2024 are available on our website. For those of you that have read them, if you have any questions, we would be happy to answer them.

4. DIRECTOR ELECTIONS

This is the part of the evening where we elect new directors if needed. I'm pleased to say that we have had a very stable board over the last year and the only person who is planning to step down at this year's AGM is me.

I've thoroughly enjoyed the 7 years I've spent on the board, including the last two years as chair, but feel like this is the right time to step down.

As we only have one vacancy this year and we had one person come forward to fill that spot, I have great pleasure in welcoming Jay Evans to the FDT board. I know he brings a wealth of experience and ideas and I'm excited to see him join the board.

QUESTIONS?

The AGM is primarily for us to feedback on our progress over the last accounting period but it's also an opportunity for you to ask any questions or put forward any suggestions for the future.

We were asked at last year's AGM why we are so far behind our accounting period. The truth is that a number of factors seem to have contributed to this, not least the

lockdowns of 2020 and 2021 which are still having an impact. To combat this, we've taken the decision to hold our next AGM early. It will be held in November this year so the delay between the end of the accounting year and the AGM will be reduced. We'll continue to move it back gradually until we're back in line with the earliest that the accounts are made available (generally September/October).

So, if you're considering becoming a director but missed the deadline for this AGM, you'll have another opportunity before the end of the year to step forward!

Questions on chairperson's report.

None

5. **Annual Accounts to 31st May 2024.**

KA and Cathel summarised the accounts and opened it to questions.

Howard Davenport asked if there were any funds remaining at the end of the year 2024.

Karen explained that a reserve must be retained to cover committed costs and potential liabilities.

Cathel advised that the balance on the balance sheet 31/5/24 was £342,000

Brian has spent time ensuring that the budget is carefully worked out, not all of these funds are available to spend.

Previously FDT funded the winter support grant with the underspend.

This year £67,000 has been spent on the minibus and drivers for the Community Transport project. This is largely upfront expenditure, but funds have also been set aside to complete the trial.

6. **Director Elections and Re-elections.**
    a. Karen will step down as Chair this year
    b. There is one vacancy to fill – welcome Jay Evans to the Board
    c. Stewart McCracken thanked Karen on behalf of the Trust for her contribution over 7 years. She will be missed.

Formal Agenda concluded 6.53pm.

Future Projects:

Finderne Footpaths Group has become a legacy project for FDT. Re-instating and establishing footpaths in Finderne. FDT will support with resources and funding where appropriate.

AGM Dates:

It was noted that we are working a long way in the past. To resolve this the next AGM will be held 25/11/2025.

Open to Questions:

New Chairperson: Jo Laing asked who the new Chair would be. Karen advised that the new Chairperson would be decided at the next Board meeting 2/4/25. Stewart is Vice Chair and will Chair that meeting.

Community Transport:

Sue Boulton had used the bus and found it a "joy and delight"

A survey had been sent out for the bus and had a good response. Changes have been made and should be in operation by May.

Stewart McCracken noted that the Community must be aware that the bus has to be used in order to keep it. The new timetable reflects the survey results.

Jo Laing noted how useful the community bus is to children and young people. It was noted that children have been withdrawn from the school because transport was withdrawn

Karen advised that school times have been closely considered. It is not a school bus and if parents are not there to collect children, they cannot be dropped off which causes a problem. Timings do not work well to incorporate school times. We are reviewing and updating the schedule as dynamically as possible.

Stewart - We continue to operate a scheduled service as this was requested by the community, but this could change in September depending on demand. It is very bureaucratic to change timetables and takes a long time.

Howard Davenport – Asked for elaboration on current Brockloch situation.

Karen advised project costs were re-evaluated last year and materials, developer contributions and planning costs have increased significantly. FDT have tried to negotiate a reduction in contribution costs but have not been successful. We are completing a section 75 to defer most of the developer costs.

Funding available from Rural Housing Fund is less than previously thought. FDT are still working on finding a solution. We do not have full planning consent so cannot go to next RIBA stage but have asked contractors for quotes to get a more accurate guide to costs.

It may be possible to apply to other funders.

Howard Davenport asked if the number of rental properties had changed. It was confirmed that at the moment four would be built for sale and the rest rental. Rural Housing Fund is higher for rentals than affordable sales and so it might be necessary to increase rentals to maximise funding. It was clarified that affordable housing is not Social Housing.

Carole B noted that the site needs to be maintained in the interim

Meeting Concluded 7:26pm