



**A meeting of NCDC was held on: Wednesday, 27 November 2024, at 7:30pm, in the Ollaberry Hall**

**Present** – Bob McGeady, Stephen Moore, Margaret Roberts (online), Alistair Williamson, Bill Manson, James Titcomb, Craig Johnson, John Alex Cromarty

**1. Apologies:** David Brown

In Attendance – Charlotte Anderson & Karlyn Garrick

**2.** Previous minutes were approved by Alistair Williamson and seconded by Stephen Moore.

**3.** Nortenergy update – MR updated the board that Nortenergy has appointed Douglas Irvine as a new director, who has a long history in economic development. Projected distribution figure for 23/24 is around £150k. MR asked about the accounts and what stage they were at and if they were ready to be signed off. WM said that they [A9] are keen for a meeting to finalise them. MR said that Maree Hay is looking to get the figures so as they know how much they can pay over at the end of the year especially with businesses closing for the Christmas period. The bank account is sitting at around £280k but this will reduce, as they are coming into their quieter time of year where expenditure exceeds sales. Should the whole distribution amount be paid to NCDC they should end the year with £100k in the bank. They don't expect to buy much more materials in 2024 based on current sales in the system. Current financial projections means Nortenergy doesn't need to seek any funding support from Scotland. The English market is different to the Scottish market however the distribution hub sales are exceeding the cost of running them. From April to November 2023 turnover was £922,872, compared to April to November 2024 £867,359. Although Polycrub are facing several copycat firms, some who can supply and build the polycrubs, their costs are higher than Polycrub themselves. Polycrub is battling to provide a supply and install package on the mainland, though they are beginning to look at builders and working with people who want to buy polycrubs.

Nortenergy is working on their Mission & Vision, a business plan as well as looking at their information on Companies House following the DTAS Strategy Day held earlier in the week. James Titcomb said that horticulture sales have been down across the country this year due to the weather.

**4.** Growing Local update – MR spoke with Kev Forth, Kev & Luke have been making plans on the layout for the big poly. One end of the polycrub will have wheelchair access, though this means the paths between the raised beds in the middle will not be wheelchair accessible, as this would cut into growing space. RM said that we will have to do the best we can. One end will have pots that can be moved around, with raised beds in the middle, and a workstation suitable for wheelchair users at the other end. Kev Forth has ordered metal frames for the raised beds as this would be cheaper than the wood, however MR is unsure if this may get too hot. JT was unsure of the quality of the metal and how long it would last. MR said Kev has done a sterling job of getting to understand how 'Big Hanna' works, and it is now turning; however, they need Jim Duncan Feather to look at the electrics of the heater in compost machine as it's not working. MR suggested getting a smart meter installed to look at how much it costs to run 'Big Hanna' which MR worries will be quite expensive. Kev & Luke have been helping up at the Nort Trow Garden, but MR is worried that the Nort Trow Garden will become too dependent on Kev & Luke. Kev & Luke are nearly finished Nancy's plots up at Eshaness, Stucca isn't anywhere near ready but needing strimmed and prepped. There is topsoil coming from Nortenergy, and they have 3 weeks to move the topsoil, Charlotte says Grant will help move it next week when he comes home. Kev & Luke will need PVGs for working with school children. CJ asked if the gardeners have come up with a project plan, which MR replied she has been asking them to provide a plan.

**Action: MR to speak to Kev about smart meters**

**MR to send around Big Poly Planned Layout**

**MR to speak to Kev & Luke about project plan**  
**CA to organise PVGs**

5. Financial update – WM said that the wages have jumped up in the last 3 months, with the 3 new employees. WM thinks that the Kev & Luke's wages should be charged to the Growing Local project costs rather than the core wage costs, as there is funding coming in from elsewhere to cover this. He's hoping to tie up the reserve money of £250,000 in a year's deposit to get a better rate, but we might not get as good a rate. RM said it is better to tie up this money where it would be safe as NCDC has not got any big projects over this next year.
6. Hillswick Shop – Stephen Moore said that the shop was working on reducing the debt, it was now down to £51k, with Hughsons & J W Grays having the biggest outlays, as well as the accountancy fees needing paid. There is a payment agreement in place with Hughsons which is already being reduced and both parties are generally happy with how it's going. There have been 3 staff leave in the last month, 2 resignations and 1 retirement. SM had asked Michel Tordoir if they needed to recruit more staff as MT is covering the shop floor as well as managerial duties, MT is happy to carry on with this as a member of staff that has been off on sick leave should return in January. SM spoke of the DTAS director training and how beneficial it had been for himself, and the two shop directors that attended. There has been one HR issue with MT, but this had been resolved. WM asked if this could become more of a problem, but SM says MT is aware of the way he works and how he has worked in the past. SM has told MT he needs to understand the shop role in the small community and its customers with a variety of needs. JAC asked about the accounts, last year the shop was down £20k, it was down £80k the year before. RM said that NCDC can't keep putting money into the shop, but following the DTAS Strategy Day earlier in the week DTAS can offer legal advice on the matter. RM is keen to explore the idea that any money going into the shop is for a social return. MR is worried that it seen as favouring 1 out of 2 shops in Northmavine. CJ asked now MT had been in the job for 9 weeks is there anything he sees that could change, SM replied that he's looking at the ordering process, and how expensive Hughsons & Grays can be. WM said he knows MT can be a good businessman, but can he be a good shopkeeper. WM suggested a day that the board could focus on the shop with what could be changed. SM said MT has lots of ideas, but he is aware of where the Hillswick Shop is at as a business, as there have been some rough phone calls with suppliers about payment, and prioritising who gets paid first. CA said that the funding from Shetland Rural Retail Services Scheme has come through for the new chill, and this will be fitted on the 4<sup>th</sup> of December. SM commended how quick the process has been for getting the funding application in and the news of approval.
7. Bruckland update- CA said that Bruckland is still ticking along fine, Una has been looking at shed prices but she has been signed off for 2 weeks. Last day for opening will be the 17<sup>th</sup> December.
8. Weaving Shed – CA said that there has been a couple of guests in the flat and bookings are quiet but that is the usual for this time of year. CA said that Margaret Roberts, Maree Hay, Karlyn Garrick, Geoff Jukes, and Paula and herself are meeting on Friday. CA said that the amount of staff time that is spent on the Weaving Shed currently is over what NCDC receives in admin fees. RM said that the board fully supports the decision for NCDC to walk away from managing the Weaving Shed.
9. Old Urafirth School – RM said that the grant application had been refused as the local authority wouldn't support NCDC. He has since met with Brian Leask from Hjaltland Housing Association. One of their performance indicators that they now have is that they assist community organisations to meet their objectives. RM said Brian Leask has done some research and he has discovered that Shetland has never received money from the Rural Housing Fund. BL has been in touch with Luke & Davie in Orkney who have done similar projects to what NCDC is looking to do. They are prepared to help in 2 ways; they would be

a critical friend for the application, and if NCDC gets the money, we should follow their procurement model which is appointing our own design team, this would be Suzanne Malcolmson who has already done plans for NCDC in the early stages of the Old Urafirth School project. RM suggested a publicity campaign, he asked the board if they still want to pursue the Old Urafirth School project. MR asked what the difference for this application is from the first one, RM is hopeful that we would have physical evidence to show the council that housing is needed in Northmavine. CJ said that the survey needs to assure everyone that the houses that will be built will be of high quality for the cost of living. JT asked if we were just building for locals or was it for anybody, he suggested that a post on the 'Soothmoother's Facebook page might be an idea. CA said she has 3 people who have contacted NCDC looking for houses in Northmavine, with 1 couple looking to rent elsewhere in Northmavine than their current residence. MR said she had 2 families interested in her property that she rents out. WM said that the new application will hopefully have more support from the appropriate authorities. CJ is concerned about the numbers, in Walls the houses cost £1m on 4 houses, he is worried about the percentage of return for NCDC.

**ACTION: CA & RM to rework application**

10. R100 – CJ said that in the email trail from Robert Thorton there was a funding gap of £30-40k, CJ said this was achievable for NCDC, and replied back to RT about R100 plans etc however RT started to back track. He had suggested doing the project privately for £130k, through Openreach it would £850k. CJ phoned Marvin Smith from Shetland Telecom, who has dealt with Robert Thorton before. CJ said to MS that the £130k was still doable for NCDC though they would need their own exchange, and the users would need to pay. MS said this would be difficult and costly, so he suggested CJ speak to Shetland Broadband. Shetland Broadband have case studies in Fetlar taking a line of sight from Yell & West Burrafirth taking a line of sight from Bressay. Shetland Broadband thinks there's potential for taking a line of sight from Sellaness to Ollaberry as a pilot project (which was previously done for Glusstonberry in 2013) this could then lead on to looking at ways to get the rest of Northmavine connected. The board replied that this is looking hopeful. Shetland Telecoms is willing to help NCDC but the SIC has withdrawn the money that ST makes to use for the wider council, the idea of Shetland Telecoms was to benefit the whole of Shetland, it was suggested that NCDC should speak to the local councillors to ask why Shetland Telecoms has ground to a halt and work with Shetland Broadband on a standalone system. RM thought NCDC would get support from the Northmavine Community Council. JT asked how it would be distributed in Ollaberry, CJ said that Shetland Broadband has to find a point in Ollaberry where it can see the majority of houses in the area.

**ACTION: CJ to continue conversations with Shetland Telecom & Shetland Broadband**

11. Insurance – CA updated that the insurance was up for renewal, NFU has gone up by £300 so it is now £2600. She had asked T L Dallas to see if they could provide a quote, but they were more expensive at £3200. CA is unsure if directors' insurance is included in the NFU policy which was discussed at the DTAS Strategy Day but will double check. She said we do get a discount for having been a loyal customer over the years. MR is keen for the board to look at an insurance review for next year.

**ACTION: CA to confirm if directors' insurance is included with NFU**

## 12. Matters Arising –

- a. Johnnie Notions – still waiting for registration, hopefully up and running by next year
- b. Stucca – no update.
- c. Youth Board – they want to do a project around Up Helly Aa for next year, as it's the 50<sup>th</sup> year of the Northmavine Up Helly Aa, they want to speak to previous jarls. They also want to work with Tangwick Haa and get the upstairs videoed so that anybody who can't get upstairs can watch the video. They are also coming to help set up for the dinner dance on Friday afternoon as well as serving the dinner on Saturday. RM asked if they need any budget, but CA said not at the minute, NCDC got funding from the NCC earlier in the year to get a voice recorder. CA said that camera

phones are as good as anything these days, and we can also borrow equipment from Shetland Arts.

- d. Business Ring – no update, T L Dallas said they would only be able to offer a discount across the whole of Shetland rather than just Northmavine.
- e. NCDC 20<sup>th</sup> Birthday – CA said that there are about 70 people hoping to attend the meal.
- f. Eshaness Lighthouse – CJ said it was very impressive. It has 2 workshops, with a store between the two. The garage has potential to be something else, and the house has huge potential. RM said we wouldn't be looking to use the house as a let as it wouldn't reach the standards, there's also the element of risk for families at a property on top of a cliff. RM is worried how we staff it. CA has spoken with the Isle of Mull; they have a part time manager and the crafters themselves take turns to volunteer in the shop with a reduction on the commission rate they pay. RM asked CA if there were any funding available for this to cover a part time manager. CA is hopeful that the time that has been spent on the Weaving Shed would be focused on the Lighthouse. CJ said the workshops would need cleared and painted, and the house needs a spruce up including new carpets, possible new heating scheme. CJ asked if it could be an artist in residence space, though it would need a short-term licence. JAC asked if it could become a bod, but a short-term licence is still needed as the lighthouse is close to the road. RM says legislation is changing in 3 years' time. WM said that the artist in residence would be feasible but could offer it to the general public. WM also said we would need to make sure we have the staffing both voluntary and paid. RM keen to explore the artist in residence programme. MR reminded that board as discussed on the DTAS day about having the Lighthouse as an extension of the Hillswick Shop to increase turnover in the shop. JT suggested the house being adapted for several workshop spaces. CJ said that the 3 years lease from the Amenity Trust would be the decision maker to know if it can be successful or not.

**ACTION: CA to look in to Change of Use licence and contact the Amenity Trust**

### 13. AOCB

Ronas Voe Fish Factory – CA said that Michael had been along Bruckland to offer the Fish Factory. Michael had said NCDC wouldn't have to pay rent, just the electric bill. He said the factory floor could be turned into self-storage units, there's also large walk-in chillers, a canteen, and office space. JT suggested Hydroponic growing, MR agreed if this could be cost effective, RM asked if it would be part of the Growing Local project, MR agreed that it could be, but it would need to be large scale. CJ said the offices would be good for NCDC, CA & RM both agree that the NCDC presence would need to be at the Hillswick junction as it's central for all. MR suggested Growing Local could potentially look at a feasibility study for a large-scale hydroponic space. CA said the current lease ends in July 2025.

CJ said there was huge demand for getting inside storage.

**Action: CA to speak to Michael again about the conditions of let  
MR to look at feasibility study for hydroponic growing**

Meeting ended at 21:00