



**A meeting of NCDC was held on Wednesday, 26<sup>th</sup> March 2025, in the Club Room of the Hillswick Hall.**

**Present** – Bob McGeady, Margaret Roberts, Stephen Moore, Alistair Williamson, David Brown and Craig Johnson

**In Attendance** – Charlotte Anderson, Graham Mullay, Michel Tordoir and Craig Nicol

**1. Apologies:** John Alex Cromarty, James Titcomb, Bill Manson and Kelly Robertson

**2.** Previous minutes were approved by Margaret Roberts and seconded by Alistair Williamson.

### **3. Hillswick Shop**

RM welcomed everyone to the meeting and moved the shop to the top of the agenda. MT had prepared a note that was circulated to directors and CA had circulated information about social investment after a meeting with Just Enterprise. RM had also met with Jayne from A9. He said that auditors don't have a concern with NCDC putting money into the shop as it is clear it is a social investment but it needs to be properly documented. There are a number of potential options including but not limited to not do anymore and liquidate the company, but NCDC would need to put in the money to cover the remaining costs. He then passed over to MT to answer any questions NCDC directors may have.

MT said that if the shop were to close he should know the value in the next week after doing a full stock take. He said that local customer accounts were around £7k. MT added that it was strange for a company to run without any accountancy software so he was unable to look back to compare. MR asked if the prism system didn't give an idea. MT said that prism isn't as powerful and he had done some digging since he started so could get some reports. MR said that JAC had offered to help with reporting. MT said that one problem was that there were a lot of past mistakes on the system that made the reporting unreliable. He also said that there were over 10000 items of stock on the system and he wants to get the system cleaned up. The system says the opening stock balance is £70000 and sales are only £2000 which is wrong and needs to be corrected. Going forward MT suggests Sage for accounting and Prism for sales and customer accounts. MT said that the shop needs £60k to be able to pay all suppliers, MT has invested £12k himself to clear some of the debt. MT has worked to reduce wastage and fine tune ordering. He is also looking at current margins. Once he has finished putting last years invoices on sage he will be able to create a forecast. MR asked if footfall had been looked at as not enough customers was an issue. MT said numbers were increasing and he had a good idea of the good sellers. He added that he didn't have full staff on the floor. AW said that opening hours could be reduced. MT said that customers were asking for them to be extended. RM asked if there had been any change in the turnover. MT said that it had been around £1000 a day when he started and it was now around £1170. He said the Christmas voucher had been helpful and February had been good with March a bit lower. He added that customer feedback was the shop looked a lot better. MR agreed it looked much better. CJ said they needed to look ahead and whether the shop is viable. MT said he wasn't sure but if the shop closed it was impact a lot of people and it was an important asset to the community. He added that he was ready for the challenge. AW asked if anyone had checked to find the best deal for electricity. SM said there had been an out of the blue charge for £6800 which would need to be paid first. CJ asked if there was any battery storage, MT said no. CJ asked if the numbers grew over the summer. MT said yes and Sundays were already getting busier with tourists. MR asked what the average spend was. MT said £28. CJ asked what the thoughts about the lighthouse was. MT said generally staffing could be a problem. AW said that a lot of tourists don't go to Hillswick but head straight to Eshaness and there is a captive audience. MR added that stocking local arts and crafts are fairly low risk.



Northampton Community Development Company

RM asked if there was scope to franchise the shop such as Lonsdale or Spar and this would give more buying power. CA added that NYDC were keen to speak with other community owned shops to work together to give greater buying power. SM said this was definitely something that the shop board were looking into.

MR asked if the community understood the crisis the shop is in. GM said no. MR asked what drive can the shop do. AW said that COVID and tesco home deliveries had been detrimental. MR asked if folk still want a shop in Hillswick. AW said that older residents used the shop, but new folk used tesco. MR said that was problem that the shop board needed to resolve.

MT said that the building is not inviting. RM agreed but said this would be a later phase. AW added there needed to be better signage especially for tourists.

The NCDC board thanked the shop board for attending – MT, GM and CN left the meeting at 20.20.

RM said that the business losses were unsustainable and NCDC had already put money in. He said that MT is asking for £45k but the shop will probably need more however there was the social consideration. RM said that for some members of the community, it was their only social interaction. The shop does fulfil and function but there has been a gradual decline in users. AW said that the shop board don't advertise enough. MR asked whether the community are bothered she added that it was difficult to determine anything with no business plan or figures presented and that there should be a way to do a quick analysis. She also asked what turnover is needed to sustain staff. CJ added how many staff are needed. SM said that more of the staff work part time on specific days which leads to needing more staff. He added that staff costs were around £6000 a month.

DB said there was some criticism in the community of NCDC around the shop. He added that if NCDC invested money there would need to be a time limit on when it needed to turn it around.

RM said from the discussion NCDC directors were in favour of doing something and there was a lot of faith in MT. It was decided to invest £32k upfront and consider further investment if the shop provided a business plan. It was also suggested to freeze rent payments for 6 months.

#### **4. Nortenergy update**

MH is currently off ill and staff are extremely busy with it being the year end MR was unable to give an update.

#### **5. Financial update**

BM was not able to attend

#### **6. Bruckland**

No update

#### **7. Housing**

Information about DM Joinery modular chalets had been circulated before the meeting. Directors wondered why there was no EPC rating given.

**Action:** email DM Joinery for more information.

Lynsey Hall had contacted CA to say that she and Mark Ratter had had a positive meeting with Anita Jamieson about the future of community led housing. CA said that Fair Isle had also not been supported for RHIF funding by SIC Housing. There was a discussion about next steps.

**Action:** RM and CA to meet with SIC estates and work on business plan.

#### **8. Tourism**

**Eshaness Lighthouse** - CA still working on planning application for a change of use.



Northmavine Community Development Company

**Jonnie Notions** - Short term license has been granted. Hoping to get it open by the end of May.

**Northmavine Way**- RM thanked CJ for the work he had put into mapping routes. CJ said that he wanted to walk a section for Mavis Grind to Hillswick to check the best route. He thanked directors for the input about interesting points to see along the routes. He highlighted the problem of accommodation with most Airbnbs in Northmavine requiring a 3-night minimum stay. CA suggested the croft camping scheme that runs in Tiree as a potential solution.

#### **9. R100**

CJ had circulated an email prior to the meeting about the next phase that would be going out for tender shortly, however Eshaness was being excluded. MR asked if NCDC should contact Beatrice Wishart to highlight concern for the community. Kenneth Stuart a resident from Eshaness had also been in contact and CJ had been corresponding with him.

#### **10. Matters arising**

**Stucca** - no update

**Youth Board** - working with Keiba Clubb to create documentary about Up Helly Aa. Also getting a housing questionnaire ready for young people.

**Business Ring** - no update

#### **11. Growing Local**

MR said that Kev and Luke are powering on with the big poly getting it planted up but there wasn't many volunteers involved so far. CJ asked if the Hillswick Shop wastage would be used for the compost. CA said that Kev had spoken to both shops, the Brae Co-op, St Magnus Bay Hotel and Braewick Café. MR added that there is potential for using the chicken manure from Hensington Palace too for brown waste.

#### **12. AOCB**

DB said that there is an issue with waste product nets in the aquaculture industry across Shetland. Prior to Brexit these were sent to Lithuania and there is nobody in Scotland that recycle them. There are examples of the nets being made into flower pots, etc. He said that in the next few years around 200 nets will end up in landfill if an alternative use isn't found. MR suggested looking at a postgraduate project. CA added that there are innovation voucher schemes that could have potential.

**Action:** CA to investigate further.

Date of the next meeting: 7<sup>th</sup> May 2025