

Hillswick Hall EGM

Wednesday 25th March 2026

Hillswick Hall

Present: Margaret Roberts(acting chair), Stephen Thomason, Michel Tordoir (shop manager), Graham Mullay, Eileen Mullay, Julie Toulson, John Parry, Liz Parry, Daniel Jamieson, Ivor Arthur, Leanne Hamilton, Gail Hughson, John Hughson, Alison Hughson, John Jamieson, Cynthia Tulloch, Alan MacDonald, Alistair Williamson, Maree Hay, Kevin Forth, Pete Bevington, Dorothy Sinclair, James Titcomb, Charlotte Anderson (secretary)

Meeting start: 19.31

1. Welcome & Apologies

Margaret Roberts welcomed all those in attendance. She briefly explained that Robert McGeady was unable to attend so she would chair the meeting in his absence.

One Apology had been received from RM.

2. Appoint Directors

MR asked current shop directors if they were willing to continue. Graham Mullay, Leanne Hamilton and James Titcomb agreed to continue. Having not received any indication otherwise, it was agreed Aileen Robertson would continue on the board. RM stood down via email. MR said she would stay on the board until there was a chair appointed.

Since the last public meeting there had been four members of the community who had come forward to join the board. MR proposed each and asked those present to second.

Alan MacDonald – seconded by Pete Bevington

Pete Bevington - seconded by Eileen Mullay

Erik Sinclair - seconded by Gail Hughson

Ivor Arthur – seconded by James Titcomb

Maree Hay asked for the “try before you buy” option - seconded by Alan MacDonald

3. Manager’s Report

Michel Tordoir gave an in-depth report looking at the income and expenditure of the shop over the last 5 years highlighting that although the shop was in profit in 2020 this was due to grants received due to COVID and in 2021 the sale of the shop van. The shop had continued to lose money over the last few years with a forecasted loss of around £36K for 2025/2026 financial year.

Looking at the gross profit, purchase costs have increased significantly over recent years, but the margin wasn't increased in line with this. MT has now got this back on track. Looking at the shop costs, NCDC hasn't collected rent for over a year, MT has shopped around for a better deal on electricity which has decreased the cost slightly but battery storage to work with the solar panels would probably be an option to decrease this more. MT has taken a lot of the bookkeeping/ accountancy work in house reducing the fee from around £12k to £4k. However, due to the business needing to be audited it is unlikely that the cost can be reduced further. MT has taken out a new contract for the card machine reducing the percentage taken for every payment. Insurance is also unlikely to come down in cost either. Wages have gone up in line with minimum wage. Before MT was appointed the shop was losing money and had no manager. Now although the shop is still losing money, there is a far better understanding of the finances. MT highlighted that he can't reduce the wages and can't increase the margins, so the only solution is to get more customers spending in the shop.

Looking at the footfall, the number of customers is less on average than the previous year. MT reported there has been a slight increase in customers since the public meeting in February 2026 and there had been new faces, MT hoped they continued to come back. To break even the shop would need on average 25 more customers a day.

One idea that has been proposed is to reduce the shop opening hours which would reduce the wage bill but if the customer numbers continue to decline the shop would still be in the same position. MT said he hoped the new directors will have new ideas.

MT said that Ondine MacDonald has been running the Facebook page over the last few weeks sharing what is in the shop and how it works. MT said it was great and a useful way to communicate with the community. MT added another idea was to create a leaflet for nearby self catering properties highlighting what can be ordered and when.

Looking at what generates profit in the shop, MT showed that 1/3 of sales come from local produce – milk, fish, meat etc. However, due to the small margin on these products they make up a much smaller percentage of the profit. However, these products cost the same across the whole of Shetland and if more folk did a full week's shop, it might not be much more expensive that going elsewhere.

MR thanked MT for his report and opened the floor for any questions or suggestions.

4. Discussion and questions from members

The group discussed progress since the last public meeting and noted a small increase in customer numbers and some new faces, which was viewed positively, though it was stressed that repeat custom over the coming months is essential to sustain the improvement. It was agreed that the shop has been brought more clearly into local focus, but that footfall remains a key challenge and needs continued attention.

The impact of recent increases in the minimum hourly rate on the wage bill was highlighted, with confirmation that all staff other than the manager are on the minimum living wage and that this will rise again in April, while the manager has not taken a pay increase for the past two years. Concerns were raised about the perception that prices in the shop, including fuel, are high compared to other outlets, although it was noted that recent comparisons showed the price difference in fuel was smaller than reported at the last meeting and can fluctuate between being higher and lower than other locations depending on deliveries.

There was broad agreement that more marketing and promotion are needed to attract customers, including options such as repainting the exterior to make it more inviting, improving social media promotion, and developing a leaflet to reach those not using social media and to highlight offers such as coffee and existing delivery options. The possibility of expanding delivery services, better communicating current delivery arrangements, and exploring loyalty schemes, targeted deals and reduced prices on certain lines were all raised as ways to encourage more regular use of the shop.

Participants suggested improving physical and digital visibility, including signage at key junctions, highlighting that fuel is available, and regularly promoting wholesaler deals and special offers. It was also suggested that staff and directors visit other shops to learn from their approaches and identify a clear niche, that the shop tap more into tourist trade (e.g. packed lunches, local crafts, meal packs with recipes), and that the internal layout be reviewed (for example, repositioning confectionery and rationalising certain product lines).

The meeting recognised that many ideas were emerging at a time when new directors are joining the board, and there was discussion about how these ideas would be implemented without placing all responsibility on the manager. It was proposed that the new board consider sub-groups or co-opting interested community members to lead on specific areas, and that there should be ongoing engagement with the community to understand why people do or do not use the shop and to show that their contributions lead to visible change.

There was strong support for regular communication with households via periodic leaflets, and for considering additional roles for the shop such as acting as a delivery point for parcels. Attendees also emphasised the importance of recognising the efforts of staff in improving the appearance and cleanliness of the shop, and reiterated that while tourists are important, local residents are the core customer base and should remain central to planning. The idea of holding regular public meetings to maintain community engagement was welcomed, alongside encouragement for individuals to contribute in whatever ways they can, such as volunteering in the shop.

Actions to be discussed at next board meeting

- Arrange for a leaflet to be drafted and distributed locally, highlighting shop services (including coffee and delivery options), offers and how to order.
- Explore repainting and minor external improvements to make the shop more visually inviting.
- Review and improve signage at key junctions and near the shop, including information that fuel is available.
- Develop a simple marketing and promotions plan (including social media, in-shop deals and potential loyalty offers).
- New board to discuss formation of sub-committees or task groups, and options to co-opt interested community members to support specific projects.
- Plan staff/director visits to other local shops to gather ideas on layout, niche offers and community engagement practices.
- Consider scheduling further public meetings on a regular basis to update the community and gather ongoing feedback.

5. AOCB

MR asked if there was any other competent business. Signage was again discussed as well as the noticeboard in the shop.

6. Close of meeting

MR thanked everyone for attending the meeting and thanked the new directors for coming on to the board, and existing directors for their continued service. She added that continuing the public meetings on a regular basis was also a great idea. She felt the shop had a real fighting chance and thanked MT for all the work he has done. She finished by saying the minutes would be circulated once completed and a date set for the board meeting where office bearers would be decided.

Meeting closed: 20.33