

## **Notes from the public meeting chaired by Lismore Community Council on 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2022 in Lismore Community Hall concerning the future of Lismore Parish church**

### **Present**

Three LCC councillors, four church elders, The Rev Duguld Cameron (DC), 19 members of the public including representatives of the Lismore Heritage Centre and the Community Trust. Rosemary Barry attended as LCC minute taker.

DC handed out a fact sheet he had compiled outlining the current situation.

Archie MacGillivray (AM) LCC convener thanked everyone for coming and explained that the reason for the meeting was to discuss the future of the church on Lismore – both building and congregation. He then handed over to DC.

DC made it clear that what was proposed for the island was part of a Scotland wide initiative by the Church of Scotland but that there was a particular challenge in our case because of the state of the structure of the building. Each region of the country has to draw up a plan regarding both buildings and the distribution of ministers.. He explained that the pandemic had hit the church hard financially due to long periods when no services could be held. Apart from this financial issue there was also a demographic issue with ministers retiring and fewer replacements available. He emphasised that the Church of Scotland had no property portfolio apart from the churches and manses and no huge reserves of money as was thought by some. He emphasised that the church was not the spiritual wing of the National Trust and to be provocative people had to come first. It was essential to look to the future of the sustainability of the church here as the Kirk Session was unable to do what was necessary. He warned that if nothing was done it might have to be closed at short notice for Health and Safety reasons. It was he felt better to put a date on it (the end of December 2023) in order to try and move on so the church building could be maintained and restored The idea was for an incorporated island body to take this on with reference to the Kirk Session and the role of the congregation and ultimately the National Trustees. He concluded that the point of the meeting was to answer any questions. He made it clear that the congregation would pay rent to whoever the trustee body was. The big question was ‘How do we get there?’ He felt it was better to be proactive.

**Mandie Currie (MC)** LCC Secretary queried the position of the Church House.

**DC** explained that its future was up to the Kirk session although Head office could overrule and that the General Trustees have a legal obligation as the Church House is currently a church asset. It could be a revenue earner but there needed to be a corporate body to negotiate ideally made up of a representative group of islanders. The issues could be explored – it was part of a process.

### **Questions and discussion from the floor then followed**

**Q** querying availability of money held by church that could be utilised.

**Mary MacDougall (MM)** Kirk Session Clerk explained that they had been working on the issue for some time but had been limited by having to use a Church of Scotland approved architect which had been expensive at £1,000 a visit. Going forward this wouldn't be necessary.

**MC** said that she felt that it was important to link the church and the house and there shouldn't be limitations on possible uses.

**DC** said that there was no particular ban on any activities as far as the church was concerned and he felt people would be sensible as to what might be suitable usage.

**Q** Was there a history available re previous maintenance etc?

**MM** There had been a quinquennial review in 2014 and a Property Survey in 2016 by a Church of Scotland architect.

**Q** concerning how much money might be available from the church.

**MM/DC** This could be disclosed when the committee had been formed but funds were limited to grants and donations specifically for use on the church building but that the Church of Scotland was not set up to restore buildings.

**Q** Could the fabric fund money be given to the committee?

**DC** He didn't feel that this would be allowed under charity law. Any payment over £15,000 had to be agreed by the Argyll Presbytery.

**Q** re the link with Appin

**DC** This was complicated as the intention was for Lismore, Appin and North Connel and possibly other parishes to be united under one Kirk Session but that this proposal was a few years away. Instead of being a Linked church it would become a Union. The aim is to continue worship in individual places but the parish would expand to take in a wider area.

**MC** What sort of money are we looking at?

**MM** Five years ago the estimate was £350,000 to make the building water tight. (Likely to be more now)

**DC** If shown that can raise a percentage some bodies will give money eg Historic Scotland likely to be interested. He emphasised that it was easier to get funding for a non religious group.

**MM** queried the Glebeland.

**DC** This was up to the Kirk Session

**DC** then emphasised that he didn't want events to take over and the building to be closed.

**MC** stated that fund raising takes a long time and there was a need to agree the next step eg a working group to be convened to take the issue forward.

**Comment** There needed to be a lead body

**MC** This could be agreed at the first meeting. There needed to be someone who knew the island. She queried whether there needs to be a separate body or whether the existing Community Trust could be utilised.

**Comment** The working group should report back to the community but there was a need to get on with exploring the options.

**MC** The LCC was prepared to set up a meeting and pay for the Hall but there was a need for an independent person to take the chair.

**Andy Hough (AH)** from the Community Trust said he was prepared to take the initiative and chair the first meeting but he emphasised the need for a representative mixture of individuals and for the first meeting to be held within the next fortnight.

**MC** queried how people would be invited plus the need for wider publication including using Facebook.

**Thursday July 7<sup>th</sup> was suggested and agreed on.**

**Q** It was queried as to whether there was a person from the Church of Scotland whose role was officially to oversee the transfer.

**DC** explained that two churches had already gone into community ownership. He went on to thank everyone and ask if there were any more questions.

**Q** If the question is ½ million. How do we get there?

**Comment** Likely to be a lot more now.

**Q** Could some at least of the work be done by volunteers?

**DC** Insurance would be a problem. It is already very high.

The meeting was brought to a close.

**Note – subsequent to the end of the meeting it was discovered that the 7<sup>th</sup> July was already booked at the hall so 14<sup>th</sup> July was suggested and agreed on instead.**