

Lismore Community Trust

Report of the Trustees for the year ended 30th April 2024

Governance

We have had some movement on the board over the last year, Roxanne McColl, resigned due to being appointed in a paid position, as Manager of Lismore Community Stores. Laura Savill stepped down from the Treasurer's role in December but stayed on the Board. Andy Hough resigned in January. Both Brona MacDougall and Andrew Livingstone, were appointed as Directors in February. This brings the Board composition to 8, including 1 co-opted member). Anita Bachuil remains as the Secretary.

Regular quorate meetings have been held to make decisions and discuss projects and ideas. Agendas and minutes continue to be posted on the Lismore website. There is capacity for 12 board members.

The conversion in September 2023, from a Company Limited by Guarantee to a Charitable Community Benefit Society was to enable the Trust to raise funds through community shares.

Under our new rules as a CBS, the maximum number of directors shall be 12, out of that number: no more than 7 shall be Community Directors; no more than 4 shall be Contributor Directors; no more than 3 shall be Co-opted Directors.

At any given time, the number of Community Directors in office must comprise more than half of the total number of directors in office at that time. The minimum number of directors shall be 4.

Projects

Affordable Housing Project

The creation of two 3-bedroom affordable homes at the end of Newfield Terrace has been progressing, although slower than we had anticipated during the latter part of last year. This is due mainly to the work the Directors needed to do, to convert to a Community Benefit Society and the purchase of the Lismore Community Stores.

However, since February this year, Andrew Livingstone has taken on the responsibility of taking the Affordable Houses forward. Julia Fayngruen continues in the role of part-time assistant project manager, to help ensure we get genuinely affordable quality homes and as a support to Andrew Livingstone. There are challenges, such as the water arrangements and funding support.

Pier at Achnacroish

We were granted funding to undertake a survey of the pier. The amount of work that is needed is considerable and the Board have chosen not to pursue this for the time being.

E – Bikes

We've now had the e-bikes for over a year. We have funded the renewal of the Tracker App, allowing individuals to see where the bikes are and to book them for their own use. Although the use of the bikes is good, we would encourage the wider community to access them.

Telephone Kiosks

The telephone kiosks are the only source of income that the Trust accesses for day-to-day use. It has been lessened this year by the unfortunate damage to the kiosk at Point. However, it is now being repaired and we are looking forward to it being reinstated shortly.

Lismore Community Stores and Post Office

This was an enormous undertaking by the Trust and more importantly the members who chose to buy shares and/or donate. The idea for purchasing the shop came about in June 2023, the owner wanted to sell the business, but no buyer had come forward. At the risk of losing the shop, the Trust proposed that we, as a community attempt to buy it.

A small group of committed individuals came together, under the umbrella of the Trust Board to form the Interim Management Board. This group undertook the background work to get us in a position to be able to realistically buy Lismore Stores and Post Office. It was recognised that we would need to sell Community Shares, to fund the purchase, and for this to happen the Trust would need to convert from a Ltd Company by Guarantee to a Community Benefit Society.

The Trust Members agreed by vote in August, to transfer over to a CBS. The purchase of the shop was achieved in November 2024. We, the Board are immensely grateful for the support we have received from Community Shares Scotland, Plunkett Foundation and DTAS (Development Trusts Association Scotland), who's expertise and knowledge have guided us through this process.

Once the purchase was completed and we opened, we experienced more publicity than we expected including the BBC, local, UK and some international newspapers which was excellent. This in turn led to offers of unsolicited discounts and donations for which we were grateful.

To date the Trust and the Management Board are pleased overall with the progress we have made. There have been hiccups and teething problems along the way, some we anticipated, others we didn't. Having achieved such a good level of funding and support from volunteers has however, allowed us to move forward positively. We bought a storage container, this was made possible as our vehicle costs were much lower than projected, thanks to Lismore Community Transport. This allows us to store non-perishables to free up space when we do the twice weekly Bookers run to Oban. Volunteers again have been key in the role of delivery drivers, prescription collections, the milk and bread runs plus numerous other day to day tasks.

The staffing of the shop is both paid and volunteers. This has allowed the shop to continue with the previous opening hours plus being able to open extra during the summer months. The Management Board has ensured that appropriate policies are in place and financial records and accounting are followed including VAT registration and PAYE. We have separate short reports on the overview of the finances and projections of Lismore Community Stores and Post Office

Conclusion

As we head into our second year of trading, we are planning for the shop to become profitable, first year trading has been, to a certain extent, trial and error. Learning from and identifying areas that can be improved, we anticipate stocking levels to be maintained to an appropriate level and improved where needed. We will produce a forecast and will monitor monthly the status of trading. We will continue to train and update skills of both staff and volunteers.

Whilst the Lismore Stores and Post Office take a considerable amount of Trust time, they are not our sole venture, we will be forging on with the house building of the houses in this coming year. With a Director in place who has both the knowledge and commitment to take this forward, we anticipate this to be a successful project in the coming months.

Lismore Community Trust, including Lismore Community Stores and Post Office are on the whole run by volunteers, using their expertise in accounting, management and other skills. All of us as a community have something to contribute, whether it be it time, skills or support, we'd welcome you on board.

