TGDT Open Meeting – Minutes
Ex-serviceman's Hall, Kirkmichael
27th March 2024 7:30pm
Held in-person in Kirkmichael

Attending members: Tilly Smith (TGDT Director & Chair), Sam Robinson (TGDT Director), Alastair Sharp (TGDT Director), Robert Mintram (TGDT Director), Chloe Clay (TGDT Director), Ellie Richardson (TGDT Director), Linda Morris (TGDT Director), John King, Andrea Campbell, Sean Green, Tracy Green, Martin Richardson, Karen White, Tony Birchall, Tony Thompson, Linda Morris, Tricia Lawson, Phil Roger, John Shewan (GICA Chair), Alyson Shewan, Charlie Ironside, Dru Macpherson.

Apologies: David Toovey (TGDT Director & Treasurer)

In attendance: Oli Giles (TGDT staff), Lydia Fisher (TGDT staff), Claire Filer (TGDT staff)

1. **Heritage ranger update**

Lydia Fisher (LF) gave the following update:

There have been many Dark Skies events hosted since August which have been shared on social media to bolster aspirational tourism. The Stories and Stars event, in particular, was well-attended in the Braes Public Hall. The Dark Skies Business Development Plan has highlighted the needs of the Dark Skies project. International Dark Skies Week is next week which will involve a range of events. Also, with Sam Robinson (SR), we have been working on our annual report on sky quality, working with Glenlivet Estate, Crown Estate Scotland (CES) on stockade. We aim to have domestic lighting at 90% compliance, we are currently at 84%. We are currently involving CES and the local distilleries who have also upgraded lights.

Heritage ranger walks have just recently restarted.

LF opened to the members for questions.

John Shewan (JS) asked how long the area has to comply with the lighting goals. SR answered that the annual report was due at the end of January but we have a longer as we are tackling mostly private properties. We have to comply fully by 2028. SR added that the project needs to keep making progress. JS asked whether they could take our Dark Skies status. SR answered that if progress stalls, they could put our status on hold. Chloe

Clay (CC) added that we should be at 90% by now but the ultimate goal is 100%. LF added that they are working closely with Moray Council planning to ensure no non-compliant lights are installed on new builds.

Tony Thompson (TT) asked who is paying for the work. LF answered that CES is paying for the survey. OG added that we have Dorenell Community Benefit Fund funding for LF's role. TT commented that were hoping to get an observatory at start of the project. OG answered that the Tomintoul & Glenlivet Landscape Partnership and the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) pulled away from that project due to increased costs. SR added that the Heritage Lottery Fund also dropped out.

Malcolm asked whether all the distilleries cooperating. LF answered that they are. TS added that there is a huge amount of processing that goes into replacing one light in Tomintoul due to old wiring and safety precautions. SR commented that it is an ongoing process. Karen White (KW) asked what is holding up the project; is it domestic properties or is it funding? SR answered that an electrician is being organised. Mark Johnston (CES) had put the contract out to tender but received few replies therefore we are going to go back to Tomintoul Distillery's electrician who is enthusiastic about the project. SR added that second homes are an issue and still have a lot of work to do with farms, but a start was made when the project was set up.

2. **Development officer update**

Claire Filer (CF) gave the following update:

There have been a few big projects which have made big jumps forward since August.

We have been very involved in particular with the Glenlivet Public Hall on various projects.

We were successful in our funding application to Dorenell Community Benefit Fund for a feasibility study on the Hall investigate what improvements to the building can be made. This is now out to tender and the contract will be awarded in the coming weeks.

We were also successful in our funding application for a mower for the grounds of the hall. This will make a big difference to the hall's appearance. The committee is looking at buying a robotic electric mower to reduce the need for volunteers and health & safety training.

CF has also helped the hall put a proposal for a new website which is currently under construction.

Lastly, TGDT has set up a licensed bar at Glenlivet Hall every Saturday which are also hosting a quiz next Saturday.

The Braes Hall has applied for their charity status and this is currently sitting with OSCR.

We had successful NEAT performances over the Christmas period, a Vikings puppet show and Christmas sing-a-long carols. We hope that our licensing of the bar at Glenlivet Hall will bolster numbers.

CF has along been working on restarting a community newspaper since Thistledown and the Touler have wrapped up. We have a four people on the committee but need a couple more people to make it sustainable.

OG updated the members on the Dorenell Paths project which the trust is participating in by holding the contract for a paths officer. They will put into action the plans detailed in a feasibility study that was completed by a consultant.

CF gave details about the upcoming Create & Connect event.

Lastly, we are currently brainstorming with Tricia Lawson (TS) about the Inveravon Church which is being sold off by the Church of Scotland. Recently CF attended a learning exchange to Stuart Community Company who are in the same situation with their church and changing it into a community centre. CF asked members to come forward with any ideas.

Finally, CF gave dates for upcoming events:

- Tea in the Park planning meeting 3rd April Glenlivet Hall 1800
- NEAT performance: Arthur Coates and Kerren Cotterell Glenlivet Hall 27th April
- NEAT performance: Behold Ye Ramblers Braes Public Hall 26th May

TS opened to members for questions.

Members asked for clarification of what the paths officer would do. OG answered that they would help to connect the Dorenell area's paths networks. TS clarified that includes Glenrinnes, Glenlivet, Dufftown and the Cabrach. OG added that TGDT was the only organisation in these areas who has the capacity to hold the contract.

Members asked for clarification of what area the community newspaper would cover. CF commented that that would be for a committee to decide, as would the name, but suggested that it would make more sense for it cover the AB37 9 postcode so the pool of resources is larger. CF added that they will handle the administration of the newspaper (software and organising meetings). Members of the committee would handle editing the newspaper and sponsorships.

JS commented, on Inveravon Church, that Inveravon does need a community space. CF added that it could be a physical distillation of the digital archive (a historical archive of pictures and sound recordings) but it is just in the beginning stages. CF added that main concern is not to lose the pictish stones on site which could happen if the church is sold for private use.

Members asked for more details about the Create & Connect sessions which CF gave.

3. Operations manager update

Oli Giles (OG) gave the following operations manager update.

Campsite

Our proposal for a community run campsite in front of the Crown Estate Scotland Units on Conglass Lane has been delayed due to delays in funding decision. In November 2023 we were one of only two projects in Moray to be invited to apply for Scottish Government Regeneration Capital Grant Funding (RCGF). We expected to hear the outcome of the application in January 2024 but the announcement has been delayed.

The impact of the delayed announcement is that we will not complete the project in time for the 2024 season, but we remain optimistic about the likelihood of a positive decision and completing the project by the beginning of the 2025 season.

The campsite project was a key deliverable in our 2018 – 2022 community development plan and will provide a much-needed service in the area. It is intended to support local businesses by adding overnight capacity to the area and provide fully serviced camping facilities for touring campervans and caravans.

Affordable Housing

We are one year on from completion and occupation of our affordable housing development and although there have been bumps along the road we're confident the issues some residents have are being resolved.

Richard Lochhead has been working on our behalf to resolve the meter / account mix up resulting from EDF's mishandling of our meter registration. This has been a long and often painful process with many wasted hours on the phone to EDF but thanks to Richards intervention we are now seeing some resolution.

Locogen Consulting have been commissioned to undertake a review of the energy system installation and have been onsite and speaking to the manufacturers of each piece of equipment to ensure it's been installed safely and in the most efficient way possible. We're awaiting the outcome of this piece of work. TGDT and Community Housing Trust continue to put pressure on the main contractor Alpha Projects to return to site and complete the defects and snagging.

The Smugglers Hostel

The Smugglers Hostel continues to be one of TGDT's key sources of income generation and in the financial year ending 31 March 2023 it returned over £16k to TGDT in management fee's, rent and commission. The hostel also fills an important space in the visitor accommodation market in our area proving budget self catering accommodation

for individuals and small groups. This winter we've experimented with opening dorm beds during peak times and have seen some uptake. The group booking market still dominates hostel bookings in the winter and this provides a valuable source of revenue during the quieter months.

Discovery Centre and Post Office

This winter has been the second year our Discovery Centre has remained open throughout the year. This has only been possible thanks to the support from our Post Office customers and amazing staff. We're grateful for everyone who has supported the Post Office and Discovery Centre and are delighted to have kept these vital services operational at a time when rural services are under increasing pressure and being cut.

Following an offer to help at the Discovery Centre from a local heritage volunteer we're starting a series of guided walks around Tomintoul. Every Saturday you'll have the opportunity to join John King on a 2km walk around the village hearing about the wildlife and history of our area. Meet at the Discovery Centre at 10am every Saturday from April – October. Please pass this on to your guests / visitors to support this great initiative.

4. Open session

JS asked about the accommodation above the discovery centre. TS answered that these are offices and there is an opportunity to hotspot. JS commented that this could be an income stream to tap into. TS commented that this was an encouraging idea.

TT brought to the members attention that the Community Development comments on the need for a community hub. They added that the trust needs a someone at the Discovery Centre to answer questions. TS answered that it is unrealistic for staff to constantly available. Andrea Campbell (AC) suggested surgery session. TS answered that we have tried them before and they were not well attended. Karen White (KW) commented on the need for the area to know what projects are going on. SR suggested putting more up in the window of the Discovery Centre. AC commented that members need to be able to have conversations with the trust. TS added that directors and staff are contactable by appointment. TT asked whether the trust could employ a secretary posted at the Discovery Centre. TS answered that this is not affordable. AC commented that is hard to get a reply from the trust. TS apologised for the length of time between open meetings. AC stressed the importance for updates.

JS asked where notification of the meetings was posted. OG answered that they are in the discovery centre and noticeboards in the area. JS added that there were none in Cragganmore.

PR asked about whether Highlands & Islands Enterprise (HIE) has extended their commitment for core cost funding. OG updated that HIE have agreed to funding for a

further 4.8 months and the trust is waiting for Scottish Government response for the rest of the money.

PR asked, on the housing development issues, if the contractor doesn't complete the remedial work, is there provision for the trust to fund the work. OG answered that the contractor has to complete the work within the retention period. PR clarified that the trust doesn't have the funds to complete the work. OG answered that the current contract is the best route to get the development completed. PR commented that residents believe that the contractor is reluctant to fix issues. JS asked whether they have given a guarantee. PR commented that the contractor won't don't cover items that are not compliant. JS commented that Moray Council did sign it off as compliant.

Dru Macpherson (DM) gave the following comments:

DM stated he believes that the completion documents have been falsified on behalf of TGDT. Moray Council are liable as they signed the documents. Communities Housing Trust (CHT) needs to deal with structural issues and the community needs to guard itself for legal battle. DM recommends that TGDT distance itself from its subcontractors as the issue is becoming complex. DM expressed his non-belief in ALPHA in completing the large projects. DM stated that TGDT have been misled, misinformed, mis-guarded and that the community is in a dangerous position that there won't be a resolution.

TS thanked DM for his comments and added that the trust can't make a comment on the relationship between CHT and ALPHA. The trust is confident the issues will be resolved.

TT asked whether the Moray Council is going to be adopting the pavements on the affordable housing site. Ellie Richardson (ER) answered that the one from the school into the school has. PR added that it is not on the Moray Council's system yet. TT asked what happens if something goes wrong with the pavements. OG answered for the pavements on site, after a year, the trust is responsible.

TT commented that there is nothing on the website about the plans for the campsite development. They questioned the board minutes which state that a warden will not be needed. TS clarified that plan is not to have a warden living on site but to employ someone to manage all of the trust's assets. AC commented that this cannot be done by the one person that is currently runs the hostel and discovery centre. OG commented that this isn't managed by just one person. AC asked how the trust has got funding for a project without planning permission. OG answered that the trust has got planning permission. ER clarified that AC's comment deals with concerns about the water board. TS answered that the order that the project has been progressed is normal. AC commented that they have had conversations with the water board who will need to do work for the capacity of the campsite. SR answered that the trust cannot go to the water board with out funding.

AC asked where visitors to the campsite are going to go. KW encouraged the trust to promote businesses in the area. TS answered that the Landscape Partnership Businesses website is still funded. KW asked the trust to contact BID as the area needs new business. PR commented that the caravan site will bring visitors which will foster business. KW voiced concerns that this is not sustainable. JS added that no one can predict the positive impact of the campsite on businesses. PR confirmed that the Landscape Partnership Business Website is live and can be refreshed. Members had further discussion about businesses in the area.

TT commented on the rubbish outside the Smugglers Hostel which leaves a bad impression. They also added that the food bank is messy. OG answered that environmental health have looked at it and raised no concerns. SR asked if community still wants the provision of a foodbank. JS asked whether it is well used. ER answered that it is. TS commented that volunteers to tackle these issues are hard to get but the trust will aim to do better.

KW commented that Richmond Memorial Hall's AGM was not well attended and asked the trust what they are doing to support them. OG replied that the trust supported the hall by funding new windows and ventilation in the past. KW asked whether the trust would take on the chairperson role. Robert Mintram (RM) has approached the committee to see how the trust can help. JS commented that GICA took over Glenlivet Hall commented temporarily in the 90s to help.

AC asked whether there is a certificate from Environmental Health about the food bank. OG stated that there is nothing in writing but an inspection has been completed. CC suggested that the trust get something in writing.

JS asked whether the trust could give the Ex-servicemen's Hall funding for the leaks. Linda Morris (LM) commented that the plumber was coming back to finish the job.

KW spoke passionately about the development trust, raising concerns that its visions and aims have been lost and relationships with the wider communities have been fractured . The vision and aims must be reestablished with more open and effective working with the community and community organisations.

TS asked for clarification about whether this was the view of KaTCA. KW answered that it was the view of members of the community.

JS commented that GICA have a very good relationship with TGDT. AS also gave a supportive statement. ER commented that the trust was undergoing a learning curve with communication. TT gave a statement of support but highlighted the problem with lack of transparency.

TS called the open meeting to a close.