

Applecross Trust: Community Consultation Update - 27th May 2017

The Applecross Trust owns and manages the Applecross Estate. In January 2016 they commissioned Strath Caulaiddh Ltd (SCL) to prepare a new 10-year estate plan.

As part of the estate planning process, SCL undertook a wide-ranging consultation in Feb/Mar '16 with the local community and stakeholders. The early consultation work showed there was scope for the Trust to communicate more effectively and provide more support to the community. This finding was reported back to the Trustees in Apr/May 2016 as part of a wider strategic review that SCL undertook of the estate.

The Trustees discussed the findings of the strategic review in Jul/Aug '16 and concluded that they needed to seek more detailed feedback from the community. The Trust extended the period of consultation, following a public meeting in Applecross in Sept '16, to obtain feedback on two key proposals:

- ✓ 'SHARED VISION' OF APPLECROSS: with SCL's help could the community get together and produce a short document that describes its collective aspirations, envisaging how the future might ideally look if key parties are able to work together towards a set of common goals. The document could become a reference point for all organisations operating in the Applecross area when making decisions that affect the community.
- ✓ FORUM FOR ONGOING COMMUNICATION: with SCL's help, could a new discussion forum be created to enable the community, the Trust and other key organisations to hold a constructive and balanced debate on issues relating to community sustainability & development? The group would meet regularly to identify ways to deliver the Shared Vision via a process of improved communication, deliberation, co-ordination and collaboration.

SCL undertook further consultation work in Dec '16 at five workshops, to gather information that could be used to develop the Shared Vision. We gauged views on community priorities, and on a range of interesting and exciting initiatives put forward by community members. It was concluded that some of these initiatives could play a significant role in securing a more sustainable and prosperous future for the community if ways could be found to deliver them.

At a follow-on public meeting in the community hall in Feb '17, SCL suggested that a temporary Working Group was formed from a representative cross-section of community members. The aims of the group, operating from Mar-Jun '17, would be to:

- ✓ Help SCL produce a draft Shared Vision, based on the Dec '16 consultation responses, then put it out to the wider community for feedback.
- ✓ Help SCL develop a proposal for how a new discussion forum might best be formed and would operate, then put it out for wider community feedback
- ✓ Provide SCL with feedback on an early version of the new estate plan, once available, in advance of it being put out for wider consultation with community organisations and stakeholders.

Eighteen local people responded in early Mar '17 to the request, and the Working Group was duly formed. It met 4 times in Mar '17 to produce an Interim Statement to send to the Trust. The Interim Statement (see Appendix 1) included 12 queries the Group sought clarification on in advance of preparing the draft Shared Vision.

A positive and productive meeting was held with the Trust in early May '17. Rodger Harvey-Jamieson expanded upon the initial Trust written response to the Working Group. Next steps in the consultation process were discussed. The most important outcome was an agreement that, in future, Trust representatives will take part in the proposed Discussion Forum and community representatives will attend Trust meetings.

NEXT STEPS

The members of the Working Group are now keen to report back to the community on its activities to date, and its proposed next steps:

- ✓ **SHARED VISION:** The group is currently working on a draft Shared Vision document that will be completed by late Jun '17. The draft Shared Vision document will be sent out to the wider community for feedback in Jul '17. The Working Group will finalise the document in Aug '17 and then hand it over to the new forum in Sept '17 for use.
- ✓ **ONGOING COMMUNICATION:** The Working Group is drafting a proposal for how the new discussion forum will operate, and feedback on this will be sought from the wider community in Jul '17. It is expected the forum will operate from Sept '17 onwards. The Working Group proposes the Applecross Community Council invites the formation of the forum - it will therefore be a permanent Community Consultative Forum, providing a 'recognised consultative mechanism' in order to validate the views of the Community Council and to secure greater involvement by all sectors of the community. The matter will be progressed by the Applecross Community Council in consultation with the local authority.
- ✓ **ESTATE PLAN:** The Trust is currently working on outline estate plan proposals, and expects to have these available for review by late June. The Working Group will review the proposals in Jul '17 and provide feedback to the Trust by the end of Jul '17. The estate plan will be drafted in Aug '17 and consulted on in Sept '17 before being finalised and handed over to the new forum for reference.

The Working Group is keen to hear the views of the wider community on its progress to date, and its planned next steps, via e-mail to: douglas.campbell@strathcaulaidh.com

The Working Group is also keen to compile an **e-mail distribution list** so that they, and in turn the proposed forum, can provide regular updates to the wider community. If you wish to be on this distribution list please send your contact details to Dougie Campbell.



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APPENDIX 1 - WORKING GROUP STATEMENT SENT TO APPLECROSS TRUST

Applecross Community Working Group - Interim Statement 29th March 2017

THE WORKING GROUP

We recently formed a group of eighteen volunteers, to work on behalf of the wider Applecross community. The group includes representation from all key community organisations. We aim to provide a balanced and objective assessment of the current needs, and broad future aspirations, of the Applecross community.

The Working Group welcomes the Trust's ongoing process of consultation with the local community over a new estate plan, and in particular the recent related initiative to help create a Community Shared Vision. We believe that a stronger and more progressive relationship between the community and the Trust could be very beneficial for both parties.

The Working Group met four times in March. This resulting interim statement and the eventual Community Shared Vision document will be made available to the wider community for comment.

OVERVIEW OF DISCUSSIONS

The Working Group meetings have been dominated by two key issues: "Better Communication" and "Access to Land".

BETTER COMMUNICATION

The Working Group believes that the new Community Shared Vision will only be delivered if there is greatly improved communication between the community and the Trust. The Working Group is keen to see improved communication between all the key organisations in the community for the same reasons.

The Working Group would also like to increase Trust awareness of activities and capacity/ambitions within the community. In turn, the group would welcome a similar approach from the Trust.

ACCESS TO LAND

The Applecross community stands at a critical juncture. There is a widely held feeling, and hard evidence to support it, that the Applecross community is slowly losing vitality and viability. We have a population skewed heavily towards people aged 60 and over, with a small number of working-age residents. The Primary School roll at 8 has reached an all-time low. Homes being sold are generally beyond the budget of community members and bought by non-residents, hence the percentage of holiday homes continues to rise.

In the face of this, the Working Group believes we need to create additional high-quality employment opportunities and more options for affordable homes for full-time

residents. New affordable housing requires suitable land on which to develop - the Trust has a role to play here. A number of employment opportunities could be created, and we believe the Trust could help us in various ways. In particular, new business premises are likely to form a core part of a future employment strategy - access to suitable land and buildings will be crucial.

Severe pressures on funding mean local authorities and the national government are looking for remote communities to deliver local services themselves. The public toilets, the petrol pumps and the broadband provision are already provided by the Applecross Community Company, and the proposed development of housing for the elderly on NHS land beside the GP's surgery provides another example. In the future we may have to deliver additional projects like these, and we typically need to access grant funds directly as part of the process. Community ownership of assets/land is increasingly becoming a precondition for accessing central government grant funding and there is currently the opportunity to acquire land at commercial value. In tandem with housing solutions, owning land would allow the Applecross community to adapt and evolve with change and increase its resilience while shaping and aspiring to an economically sustainable future.

THE NEXT STEPS

The Working Group recognises that the issues will take time to resolve, through discussions between all key stakeholder organisations, and that new issues will continually present themselves. However, the group is also clear that we must make positive progress in the next few months to keep up the momentum.

The Working Group plans to work towards a Community Shared Vision and will also provide the Trust with feedback on an early version of the new estate plan, once it has been drafted. In addition the group will spend time considering how to form a more permanent discussion forum.

FEEDBACK FROM THE TRUST

It would be very helpful if the Trust could respond at this stage to our Interim Statement, and also reply to the questions listed at the end of this statement.

Prepared by: Applecross Community Working Group

Date: 29th March 2017

WG Members: Gordon Cameron, Iain Cameron, Tim Daplyn(*), Duncan Fraser, Jon Glover, Sue Grocock, Valerie Hodgkinson, Owen Kilbride, Jacqui Liuba, Duncan McCowan, Fiona MacKenzie, Ally Macleod, Gerry McPartlin, Jack Marris, Aron Paramor, Sarah Paramor, Henry Robertson, Jess Whistance

*Joined May 2017

Communication

FORUM: We want our temporary Working Group to develop into a permanent Discussion Forum for Applecross, at which challenges facing the community can be discussed and potential solutions identified. Would one of the Trustees be willing to become a member of this forum alongside other key stakeholders?

Trust response: Yes, a member of the Trustee board will be available to attend, as will the Trust Administrator.

LOCAL REPRESENTATION: Is the Trust willing to allow a member of the proposed Discussion Forum to attend Trustee meetings and play a role in feeding in the views of the community, and reporting back to them?

Trust response: Yes, a member of the new Discussion Forum will be invited to attend Trustee meetings for the whole duration of business covering all matters of community interest or concern (other sections of the meetings will deal with any commercially sensitive issues and general Trust administration only).

MEETING TRANSPARENCY: Could the Trust publish the minutes of its Trustee meetings so that the community understands more about how it makes decisions? We will encourage community organisations to do likewise for the Trust.

Trust response: In principle this is possible. However, we would first like to discuss the issue with the new Forum once it is set up. In part, this is because there would be a need to remove reference to commercially sensitive material, and this would require the use of additional Trust resources. However it is also our hope the much higher level of transparency arising from the proposed reciprocal representation at Trust and Forum meetings and subsequent reporting back may satisfy the need for public disclosure.

TIMELINES FOR DECISIONS: Could the Trust consider ways to streamline and speed up decision-making in relation to community matters, and set out clear timelines for Trustee responses, to help us deliver our Community Shared Vision?

Trust response: Yes, we plan to give Archie McLellan executive authority to make a wide range of day-to-day decisions on behalf of the board guided by a set of new policies we will be preparing later in 2017 as part of our new estate plan. Moreover, we plan to change the way Trustees operate by trying wherever possible to conduct business by teleconference / e-mail to speed up decision-making at board level. We are also progressing with a draft of the new estate plan, which will go out to consultation in early summer. This will act as our strategic roadmap and, having been well thought through, should help enable faster decisions to be made at board level.

TRUST STRUCTURE/GOVERNANCE/OPERATIONS: Could the Trust advise the community in advance of any noteworthy changes to structure, governance or operations it is proposing to make? We will encourage community organisations to do likewise for the Trust.

Trust response: Yes, and we hope that this will happen via the new Forum and via representation at Trustee meetings. You will appreciate that in the interim period we have been forced to make significant decisions without consulting the community in order to ensure a smooth, orderly and speedy transition to the new Chair, Rodger Harvey-Jamieson.

He and his fellow Trustees are committed to ensure that future decisions of this nature are properly intimated to the Forum, once it is up and running.

TRUST MEMBERSHIP: Is it possible, *in principle*, for local residents to become members of the Applecross Trust?

Trust response: Yes, in principle it is. However, currently the only members are the Trustees, who carry personal and financial responsibilities for their actions. The Trustees decide on membership after identifying the particular skills which are in demand and which an individual can bring to the Trust. We are close to appointing another Trustee, who is Wester-Ross based, which will expand our numbers and enable us to draw from a broader range of experience. In the immediate future we have no plan to change this approach, but as we move forward this does not exclude consideration of a local Trustee with the requisite skills and experience.

LEGAL POSITION - OBJECTS: Is it possible for the Trust's objects to be amended (e.g. to include reference to helping support community development)?

Trust response: It might appear easy to provide a simple "yes" or "no" answer, but a lot lies behind it and it was the hope of the Trustees that this might have been a topic for debate within the Forum, once it is in place as an element of the overall framework for effective two way communication. As intimated at the Public Meeting in September last year, it is possible to seek authority to make amendments to the Trusts formal objects. However for a charity such amendments need to be carefully considered and shown to be justified and appropriate in all the circumstances. The main reason for caution in the response to the question is that the Trust's own resources are not unlimited, and if additional objects are to be added, then care has to be taken to ensure that all can be sustained in the long term. For this reason the Trustees would welcome debate within the community Forum, once it is in place.

Land

LEGAL POSITION - LAND: Are there legal restrictions on the Trust selling land or buildings to community organisations or local businesses to help deliver the Community Shared Vision?

Trust response: The Trust has to manage its assets in a way that does not compromise its fulfilling its objects as a charity. This does not preclude a sale, but a natural preference in many situations would be a long-term lease, provided that the terms proposed will still satisfy the legitimate wishes and aspirations of the local partners in the proposed enterprise.

LAND ACCESS FOR COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS - Could the Trust confirm that it is willing to engage with the relevant agencies with a view to selling land to provide a community asset base for future community projects?

Trust response: In principle this is possible. As mentioned above, any decision would in the end depend on ensuring the objects of the Trust are not compromised. In addition, any sale would need to have strong support from the new Forum and be in line with the proposed Community Shared Vision.

LAND SALES REGISTER - Could the Trust produce a register of plots of land it is currently (or in the future) thinking about selling for business or residential development, to enable local organisations and people to explore future potential?

Trust response: In principle yes, but the Trust currently has no register of this nature. The hope is that the need and nature of such a register could become more apparent as part of the process of reciprocal representation, under which a member of the future Forum will be invited to attend Trustee meetings and play a role in feeding in the views of the community and reporting back, and a Trust representative will be invited to participate in Forum meetings. If that system works as it should, then it may be that sufficient transparency and clarity is established in this regard to mutual satisfaction.

BUSINESS ASSET REGISTER: Could the Trust produce a register of all buildings currently leased (or planned for leasing in the future) to businesses and confirm lease expiry dates, to help local business and community organisations understand the potential for premises to become available in the future?

Trust response: The Trustees accept that there may be a need for greater transparency and clarity in this area, but the members of the Working Group will no doubt recognise the need for a degree of confidentiality as to the commercial terms under which some buildings are currently leased. The Trustees also suggest that the scope, content and purpose of such a register should be examined in further detail as part of the process of reciprocal representation and at Forum and Trustee meetings, and in the light of the Shared Community Vision which is yet to be developed and agreed. The Trust remains open to discussion on this as part of the fulfilment of an overall policy developed to ensure mutual benefit and long-term sustainability based on the needs of the community. An example of the range of possibilities was mentioned to the Working Group on 3 May in relation to the future use of the Farm Steading at Applecross.

HOUSING POLICY: Could the Trust produce a written policy on housing, describing the process by which people apply to become tenants of Trust property and how decisions are made on who gets a lease and for how long? Also, as part of this, could it confirm if rental property is likely to be sold in future as it currently forms a crucial element of the rental stock for working age people and families?

Trust response: The Trustees recognise that the past practice in relation to housing has been relatively informal. Current day requirements do necessitate a different approach, and one that can be shown to be both fair and consistent. The Trustees would not wish to provide an instant response without due reflection and consideration, and at the risk of repetition, they believe that the hopes and aspirations of the whole community might best be served by producing a draft for debate and discussion within the Forum, once it is in place, and then adoption by the Trust. The Trustees do appreciate and understand that all of these issues are important topics for the community, and for that reason it is suggested that they should be included as standing agenda items at both Trust and Forum meetings, so as to allow for regular updating and to allow for changes through time. As noted above, such a proposal may assist in shaping future discussion in the light of a Community Shared Vision expanding upon and complementing the elements identified by the Trustees in their first written response to the Working Group's Interim Statement.