

**MINUTES OF THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF
THE DORNOCH HERITAGE SCOTTISH CHARITABLE INCORPORATED ORGANISATION
(DHSCIO)
HELD ON 17TH OCTOBER 2024**

- 1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS:** Alison Davies welcomed everyone to the meeting.
- 2. MEMBERS PRESENT:** John Barnes, Jerry Bishop (Treasurer), Anne Coombes, Alison Davies (Co-Chair), Sue Gardiner, Richard Hickson, Bryan Jones, Andy Kirby, Gordon Lawson, Kate Lawson, Jim McGillivray, Fiona McKinlay, Jimmy Melville, Heather Murray, Patrick Murray, Laura Smart, Lesley Smart, Peter Wild. In attendance: Lynne Mahoney (Historylinks Museum Curator).
- 3. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Joan Bishop, Gordon Davies, Fiona and Neil Hampton, Eilidh Paterson, Andrew Senior, Sally Wild.
- 4. MINUTES OF ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING HELD ON 12TH OCTOBER 2023:** The minutes were proposed, seconded and accepted as a correct record of the meeting. There were no matters arising.
- 5. BOARD MEMBERSHIP:** In accordance with the SCIO's constitution, Fiona McKinlay and Richard Hickson retired as Elected Charity Trustees but were standing for re-election. One new Board member, Fiona Hampton, Director of Inverness Castle Project and Events, was proposed and subsequently elected by the meeting, as were those standing for re-election.

The Board is looking for additional members. The meeting was advised that anyone interested should approach a member of the Board.

- 6. ANNUAL REPORT 2023/24 and CHAIR'S UPDATE:** Alison Davies informed the meeting that the annual report dating to 31/3/24 would be submitted shortly when the accounts are ready. Much has happened in the six months since.

The Heritage Hub extension opened on 21st September 2024. This was a 'soft' opening with an official opening planned for the spring of 2025, an important event that will recognise the project funders. The Board is currently trying to identify a suitable celebrity to perform the opening ceremony. The range of new exhibits is excellent, all designed and curated by our fantastic staff and volunteers. The entrance to the original museum has also been given a makeover with a new reception area, retail space, the Royal Charter and Golf exhibition rooms, and displays of Dornoch's shops and the town's role as a much-loved holiday destination. This project has been a brilliant team effort, but particular credit must be given to those in lead roles: - to Jerry Bishop for bringing the project in on time and on budget which is a significant achievement; to Peter Wild and Stuart Gardiner, and to Lynne Mahoney and Caroline Seymour. The final stage of the project is an activity programme that will work with eight local groups over the next twelve months with the aim of engaging with those who may not have had access to heritage before, and to widen our reach to new participants.

The accreditation documents have been submitted to Museums Galleries Scotland. This is an important process that is carried out every 5 years to ensure that the museum maintains its

standards and its status as an accredited museum. The submission is the product of a significant amount of work by Lynne Mahoney, our curator.

The Archive Team, under John Barnes' leadership, were thanked for their commitment and the developments that have improved the Historylinks Archive. The Board and the two sub committees were also thanked for the vital work they perform behind the scenes.

The museum held an Open Day last weekend which resulted in possibly the highest number of visitors (100+) through our doors in one day which bodes well for community interest in our work. The focus was a display created by an ARCH project that had been working with local residents over the winter months.

The Board has been reviewing the governance of the charity with the help of independent consultants to meet the requirements of the charity regulator. A report has been produced that makes several recommendations. These include acquiring more trustees with specific skills, the reorganisation of the roles of the Board and sub committees, and looking at communication at all levels of the organisation. The overall conclusion of the report is that we are working effectively and in line with requirements.

We will shortly begin scoping out exciting new projects for 2025 and 2026. Members will be informed of these through the newsletters. A business planning process will look at how we can become as sustainable as possible, e.g. by maximising our income and engaging with new groups of visitors such as cruise ship passengers.

7. **MUSEUM SUB COMMITTEE REPORT:** Alison Davies advised that this sub committee meets regularly every two months. Its remit is to support and advise the Curator on the overall work of the museum, its exhibits and operational matters, including monitoring Museum income and expenditure. Dr Jim McPherson of the UHI has recently been welcomed as a new member of this committee.

The dominant themes for discussion over the last year have been the design and subject matter for the new Heritage Hub extension, and the accreditation process which involves introducing new policies and revising existing policies and the Museum Forward Plan. A regular task is the Acquisitions Process which is a formal requirement. Many documents and artifacts are donated or loaned to the museum and all must be considered and accepted as appropriate. The Chair thanked her fellow Committee members for their input which has made a major contribution to the success of Historylinks.

8. **DORNOCH HERITAGE SOCIETY REPORT:** Written report attached. Peter Wild announced that the Society has 268 members as of 16th October 2024. He thanked all his committee members and volunteers at fundraising events for their hard work.

9. **FINANCIAL REPORTS:**

- a) **Review of 2023/24 Accounts:** the accounts are in the process of being finalised. Report attached.
- b) **Appointment of Independent Examiner:** Jerry Bishop (Treasurer) explained that Voluntary Groups Sutherland (VGS) are unable to act as the Independent Examiner of the SCIO's

accounts for 2023/24 accounts due to the high turnover involved in the funding of the extension project. The firm of Goldwell's in Tain have been appointed at a much-reduced fee of £100 + V.A.T.

- c) **Review of Heritage Hub Project to date:** Jerry thanked Peter Wild and Stuart Gardiner for their help in keeping the Heritage Hub extension project on track and reported that a small surplus is expected once the contract accounts have been finalised.
- d) **Annual Subscriptions:** the Board proposes to maintain the subscription fee at £20 for 2023/24 and this was approved by the meeting.

In closing, Jerry announced that he will be standing down from his position as DH SCIO Treasurer and as a Trustee at the next AGM by which time he will have served 10 years.

10. AOCB and CLOSING REMARKS: As there was no other business, Alison Davies concluded by thanking members for their attendance and closed the meeting.

OPEN FORUM: The floor was opened to questions after the AGM was closed.

- i) Bryan Jones asked if admission fees would be raised when the museum reopens in 2025. Jerry Bishop informed him that this has yet to be agreed but there will probably be a 20% increase. He explained the changes made to admission fees this year in relation to Gift Aid, whereby there is an option to pay with or without a donation. The museum sub committee will discuss this issue.
- ii) Sue Gardiner asked for an update on the arrival of the tapestries. Lynne Mahoney replied that the tapestries are now in Inverness and that it is proposed to open the museum on Fridays and Saturdays during November and December to attract visitors to see them. Complementary workshops are also being considered.