

Chair's Report 2020

We started out in April 2019 with a lot of ideas and £500 in the bank (from THC)! By the end of the month we had secured the offer of £13.4k from The Scottish Land Fund and the remaining £13,9k, to cover all the Stage 1 activities, from Struan Community Trust.

We promptly commissioned all the required survey work – topographical, archaeological and ground conditions – and all this was completed and reported back on by the end of June. No major obstacles to using the site emerged as a result of the survey work, but as the existence of a significant amount of peat was confirmed, further engineering work on this was recommended and fortunately the SLF agreed to fund the additional £1800 for this. These then provided input to the conceptual design and feasibility study.

In June our application to become a SCIO was accepted, so since the 12th June 2019 we have been a registered charity, with a board of Trustees. Our architects, Simpson & Brown, came to the Gala on the 29th, which gave people an opportunity to talk about ideas for the project directly with them.

July and August saw work on the conceptual design and feasibility study progressing, with several meetings between the Board, Steering Group and the architects to define the requirements for the centre and start to draft plans for it. This including incorporating all the feedback collected as part of the original community survey in 2017.

By September we had received the first draft plans from the architects and were working towards an agreed design. We had also carried out the necessary pre-sale legal investigations, requested costings for re-routing the power line across the site from SSEN and started work on the business planning.

In parallel with this, we continued to try to identify sources of funding to get the building out of the ground. Unfortunately a number of large funds closed before we were in a position to make an application, and many are now closed, and/or not due to reopen for another year or so.

In December we agreed that the design had now been developed as far as was practical, and met the requirements defined, so this was passed to a Quantity Surveyor to get cost estimates, including the option to phase the build in three stages (as it was already clear from the scale of the building that costs were going to be high) . These very preliminary indicative costs came back much higher than we had expected, ranging from nearly £5m for the initial development, plus £2.6m and £1.2m for the later phases. These included an estimate of nearly £700k for developing car parking, paths and access roads on the peat on the site.

In February we presented the output from the survey, design and feasibility study at an Open Day at the school, at which members of the community were asked to express their preferred options. The output of this survey was that, although 6 (out of a total of 40) requested that nothing further be done at all, 14 (33%) felt that we should do all or nothing.

However 33 (85%) still felt that we should do something, which reflected the results from the original survey in 2017.

So March found us with the corona virus crisis rapidly descending upon us, and no prospects of significant funding in the foreseeable future, so the Board decided on 16th to suspend work on the project indefinitely, which remains the case today. Until we can demonstrate that the tourism industry on the island has sustainably recovered, we cannot put together a credible business plan, and at the moment, the forecast for this is unknown. Hopefully within the next year or so we can bring the project back to life, albeit possibly in a slightly different form.

In the meantime, we still have funds in the bank to continue operating (thanks to the Trust) and carrying forward other activities, and a credit of several £1000s with the SLF to continue developing the business plan when this become practical again.

Our main activities going forward are currently to organise a community excavation (professionally supervised) on one of the new archaeological sites discovered during survey work last year, hopefully in autumn 2021, and once we can get skips from THC, to continue with beach cleaning activities. However, subject to further funding being available, if anyone within the community has suggestions for any other projects or activities that they feel we could get involved in, please let us know.

If anyone is interested in seeing copies of the archaeology report, or any other output from the survey work, let us know. Similarly, if anyone is interested in volunteering to be directly involved in the excavation, please get in touch.

Questions?

If they can't be answered now, we will get back to you in writing.