

BIRSE COMMUNITY TRUST

Minutes of Board Meeting

17th September 2019

Trustees Present: Guy Haslam (Chair), Nancy Davidson, Alison Bell, Hedge Shand, John Hector, Toby Rider.

In Attendance: Eoghan Cameron (Manager), Rick Paul (Secretary to the Board), Sian Loftus (items 5.1 and 5.2 only)

Apologies: Jonathan Kitching, Jane Winton (Administrator).

1. Introduction

1.1 The agenda was confirmed and apologies noted.

2. Minutes of Previous Board Meetings

2.1 The minutes of meeting on 20th August 2019 were approved and will be signed at the next meeting.

3. Matters Arising

3.1 The smoke detector and emergency lighting checks for August 2019 were completed.

4. Administration

4.1 Solicitors: Trustees reviewed and signed the Letter of Engagement to continue using J and H Mitchell as the Trust's solicitors.

5. Properties and Projects

5.1 Old School AHF Bid: Report appended to these minutes. GH to set up a meeting before the next board meeting to discuss project phasing.

5.2 History and Heritage: The book is scheduled for 2-3 p.m. on 1st October, followed by a seminar for the Heritage Group at 5 p.m. and a public talk with Sir Geoff Palmer at 7 p.m.

5.3 e-bikes: On hold pending a response from a potential scheme manager.

5.4 Website: GH and EC have met with Sitecut. EC to e-mail trustees with wiring diagram. The next stage will be to populate it with images and information from the Strategy Document.

5.5 Broadband: RP to liaise with BT over the phone line quality prior to installing broadband.

5.6 Community Cider: EC and AB to visit a current producer in Cults to evaluate the viability of the project.

5.7 Open Doors: GH and AB reported that the weekend had been very successful at both The Old School and the Mills, with 91 folk visiting the Mills and around 60 visiting The Old School.

5.8 ETBK/BACA/BCT Annual Meeting: Trustees discussed the minutes from the meeting, noting that repairs to the belfry and the skewers are imminent, and that ETBK are looking for new Trustees.

6. Any Other Business

- 6.1 Signs: EC reported that feedback on the draft signs to be incorporated by Ellie Flather.
- 6.2 Flag: RP to take the flag to JW for repairs.
- 6.3 Slewdrum Track: GH to contact Doug Boyle to arrange flailing the broom on the track.
- 6.4 Balfour Track: TR reported that the new track is nearing completion.
- 6.5 P.A. Equipment: JH reported that the P.A. equipment at The Old school was outdated and of no use to BCT. EC to attempt to sell.
- 6.6 Remembrance: Amy Pierce has agreed to conduct the service. GH will concentrate his address on Francis Alexander Cochran, killed at Ypres in 1915 aged 20.
- 6.7 School Path. Funding is in place to extend the path into the school property. The contractor is Stan England.
- 6.8 Estates Meeting: GH to set up the annual meeting in November.

7. Meetings and Visits

- 7.1 Board Meetings: The next board meeting will be on 14th October. The final meeting for 2019 is moved to 26th November.

Signed.....

Date.....

Old School- Post-Project Viability Report

Background

The Old School Project Viability report was completed in PV report completed in May 2019.

In June 2019 BCT trustees appointed Sian Loftus to undertake a few days work to

- Ascertain whether the preferred project fits the criteria of key funders, including HES and NLHF (formerly IILF).
- To ascertain whether seeking grant for the Old School project was likely to reduce chances of grant for the Mills.
- To ascertain whether the key funders would require further information or reports to move forward with their grant application processes.
- To ascertain how funders feel about a holiday cottage or 'residencies' accommodation
- To review the costs in the PV Report and identify any scope for savings and/or phasing to reduce the overall ask on funders.

Meetings with funders

I met with both HES and NLHF to discuss the Old School report and aspirations for the Mills. Neither funder foresaw any issues that would prevent BCT seeking funding for both projects nor jeopardise grants for either, which they acknowledge to be quite different in their vision and funding requirements. The Old School is principally capital works, the Mills priority is traditional skills training. BCT own the Old School and have a project for its future identified. BCT does not own all the Mills, and arguably the most significant aspects of the Saw and Turning Mill site are in the ownership of the Duncan family. BCT is some way off seeking capital grant for any buildings at the Mills.

Furthermore the relationship between the mills and vision at the Old School arguably enhances project fit with both funders.

Both funders have broad criteria, with those around heritage and improving access most easily met by both projects. NLHF criteria around engaging more diverse audiences is an area that the Old School has more scope to meet than might initially seem, with the 'Aye, it wis aabody' project highlighting one aspect of the heritage that broadens appeal to funders (and audiences).

HES are comfortable that there is sufficient information of the PV report to enable an application at this time which, if successful, would see a provisional offer. That would give confidence to other funders.

NLHF filter applications through an initial enquiry process. Their criteria are broader than HES and this enquiry process might require some further project development with Tom and/or Douglas (not a lot, and subject to who leads on this for BCT and their experience).

Neither funder foresaw an issue with including a holiday/residency cottage in the project, where the profits were earned for community benefit. i.e. a proposal whereby the Soup Kitchen is adapted to residency/holiday accommodation would be eligible to apply for grant where the profits went back into supporting the community through the Old School provision.

Reviewing Costs

On reviewing the repair costs these are not unreasonable, given the scale and condition of the buildings and the wider site. On a £/m² rate the costs are well within what one would expect for conserving and adapting traditional buildings.

Repair costs are around £1300/m² for the Old School and the Soup Kitchen. Alterations, fees contingencies etc are £2400-2800/m².

Funders do not assess value for money on any commercial comparison. Funders exist to support projects that are not commercially viable and which deliver heritage/community benefits. Value for money to funders is measured in outputs against their grant criteria. The quote NHLF 'It costs what it costs'. What does it do for heritage and people?

Is it possible to reduce repair costs?

Funders will not grant aid repairs in inappropriate materials, or where there is no clear vision for the future of the building. The buildings suffer from water ingress, caused by cementitious harl on traditional breathing wall construction. Patching or repairing in cement harl will worsen the problem and make the building even less fit for purpose. Installing double glazing (whether or not part of a major fabric repair project) or uPVC windows will also worsen the situation.

Is it possible to phase the project to spread or reduce costs?

Yes. Elements such as dyke/garden wall repairs would lend themselves well to training activities, which could be delivered during or after a major capital works project on the main building/s.

The Soup Kitchen might be prioritised (to wind and water tight) to provide a space for object (Archive) conservation or to promote activities during the delivery of the main project.

Recommendations on the way forward

The purchase by BCT of the Old School site was one of a number of strategic acquisitions in its early years of operation. Some aspects of the initial use for the site have become increasingly redundant (office space) but there is still a need to house and enable access to the Community Archive. This is a core BCT purpose. Critically the Project Viability Report articulates the community's aspirations for the site, which compliments and supports BCT's heritage activities (built, natural and cultural) across the parish. These are core BCT purposes.

BCT should continue to support and promote the development of the project as identified in the Project Viability Report. BCT (or appointed consultant) should work with Tom Morton and Douglas Westwater to refine the project and costs, identify the most advantageous phasing, develop a detailed funding strategy and submit early applications and formal enquiries.

BCT should also share the report more widely with the community and feedback on the engagement done during the study.

Supporting 'mean-while' uses is really important, as is inviting people to take ownership of and developing some of the activities identified in the study. A walled garden (even temporary- which may need moving during major drainage works) could be achieved quite easily, as could supporting a 'men's shed' concept.