



NOTES OF THE ZOOM MEETING 7 - 8.30p.m. 24 January 2022.

25 people attended.

1. Andy welcomed all to the meeting and for support ongoing.
2. Pauline gave an overview of funding applications made to date for Phase I, the 2-storey block. The underlying rationale is that the structural defects are not as deep-seated as indicated in the 2018 report which led to the closure of the main Hall and subsequent shutting down of the two-storey block because of resulting fire security recommendations from HC. Covid brought everything to a grinding halt but it was very clear, at the public meeting last October, that the community did not wish the Trust to be dissolved and the assets disposed of, but did want the Hall to be reopened for public use.

Having looked at a range of funding possibilities, there are a number for which we are not eligible until we become a charity - SCIO - which can take up to 6 months. However, with one useful-looking deadline last week, Fee and Pauline decided to put together a package of related applications with the aim of getting the 2-storey block up and running - no frills. Until anyone comes up with something better, the project is 'Aultbea Hall Revival!'.

Quotations have been obtained for fire doors & other fire security installations and the refurbishment of gents and ladies toilets to make a bid (c.£8K - 10% of available funds) to the Place-based Investment Fund (decided by a panel of county councillors), aimed at Lochalsh, Wester Ross and Strathpeffer. We should hear the outcome by mid-February. Using some quotations and some ballpark estimates, we've also put in a bid to Awards for All (National Lottery), c.£10K, for ceiling and window repairs, electrical work and internal paint. It's likely to be end April before we know on that one. We are also intending to ask for £1K from the North Highland Initiative to repair external fencing, replace the Hall sign and buy refuse bins, and expect a quick response. We've asked, but HC won't let us take away the safety railings at the moment, so we will use them for banners to show that there's something happening - and encourage donations! Finally, for this batch, once we've got proper figures, we are going to put in an application to Highland Council's Ward Discretionary Fund for legal fees and water and electric reconnection costs, another quick decision. We hope that community fund-raising will get us about £3K match-funding in the next few months for Phase I. There will be a donate button on the website which is being set up.

Mike raised the issue of the importance of community consultation about the longer-term possible ways forward. Fee explained that ongoing Covid restrictions had hampered our plans to have a meeting end December and nothing has been ruled in or out. We have tried to keep people informed about the immediate priorities, as we see them, via Aultbea CC and GDT and sent

updates to those signed up. We are encouraging discussion every way we can. The trustees have met with ARC who support the reopening of the Hall so that it can be a base for future fund-raising for whatever longer-term plans are set out. There are two meetings being planned (see below) for community input.

3. Jonathon Jury, who works with steel structures in the oil and gas industries, explained in detail the technical testing he had undertaken on the steel supports in the Hall (there were no measurements in the 2018 Report), with a view to assessing whether their life could be extended. Whilst there is some corrosion, his conclusions are that the damage is limited, the defects are not rendering the structure dangerous and repairs can be undertaken cost-effectively. In short, the life and use of the Hall can be prolonged for decades, given appropriate maintenance. The roof might blow off in the most extreme winds - but is no more vulnerable than other buildings in such conditions. Highland Council Building Control have been informed of the ongoing assessments.
4. The following volunteers have agreed to be the first point of contact, for the time being at least, for some of the different tasks that need to get started:
Martin: treasurer
Jean: coordinate volunteering and ensure risk assessments are in order
Colin: task force commander for clearing the Hall
Mike: community fund-raising
Lyle and Jen (Turner): new website and social media. (This is already in preparation.)

We will ask Lyle to offer a session to help familiarise those who need it with 'Slack' as our common way of communicating with each other. But we must also keep in mind that not everyone uses email / IT and continue to keep information circulating in every way possible.

5. Robin Haddow joined the meeting. He has produced architectural plans which show how the building might be improved, over and beyond basic repairs, should that be the way forward decided. One significant improvement would be external insulation for our more energy-conscious time. His plans will be on display at the 'drop-in' community session.
6. Other points arising:
 - ❖ Provisional dates for the diary: Thursday 24 February: community 'drop-in' sessions
Thursday 7 April: Aultbea Hall Trust AGM
Week-end 3-6 June: 'Not the Raft Race' + Platinum Jubilee.
 - ❖ The interim trustees have started to plan the necessary repair work on the Hall given the views so strongly expressed at the October public meeting, and in many conversations since, that the school, nursery and community want a space where they can be active and socialise. We stress that this in no way pre-empts any longer-term decisions about the desirability of a new building, with or without the old hall continuing to give service.
 - ❖ Katie (Grant), as project officer for Aultbea Stories, is very supportive of incorporating the Hall into her storylines and would welcome photos, memories and ideas. She offered to endorse the Aultbea Hall Revival! project in any funding applications.
 - ❖ Andy is exploring to see if there is any possibility for Aultbea Hall to become the location for alternative post office provision for the village once the current operation ceases next month.