

Strathnairn Development Company (SDC) AGM

Minutes

24.3.25



Present: Ian Robinson (IR), Doug Meiklejohn (DM), Maggie Meiklejohn (MM), Ian Hunt (IH), Paul Robinson (PR), Phil MacKintosh (PM), Audrey Bessell (AB), Elna Harvey (EH), Scott MacDonald (SM), Raghnaid Sandilands (RS), Megan Bee (MB), Kirsty Adam (KA), Jillian MacLennan (JM), Gus Routledge (GR), Darren Read (DR), Donna Haldane (DH), Beth Rose (BR), Isla MacLeod (IslaM), Thomas Lacroix (TLC), Hilary Lacroix (HLC), Jade Rae (JR), Justyna Szczachor (JS), Hal Robinson (HR), Mark Colyer (MC), David Lumsden (DL), Lorna McConachie (LM), Ewen Hardie (EwenH), Bec Raynes (BecR)

On zoom: Ian MacLean (IanM)

Apologies: Evelyn Danson (ED), Mike Danson (MD)

Abbreviations:

SDC: Strathnairn Development Company

SNCC/CC: Strathnairn Community Council

SCBF/BF: Strathnairn Community Benefit Fund

CDO: Community Development Officer

FHC: Farr Hall Committee

SHA: Strathnairn Heritage Association

Location: Farr Hall / and by zoom.

1. **Welcome, introductions, proxies and quorum**

MB: standing in for MD who sends his apologies. Welcome all and to those on zoom.

IH: raised 2 points of order in case it invalidates the meetings – IH query related to people he related (4) that had not received the notification of the AGM and does this invalidate the meeting quoting “page 8 of SDC constitution – at least 14 days notice must be given of AGM” also notes that constitution says “accidental omission to give notice to one or more members will not invalidate the process of the meeting” – his query focuses on that the ‘or more’ would amount to. MB stated an e-mail went out with correct due notice to all members. SM suggests IH should check his spam folder.

IM suggests it is wiser to trouble shoot the email address and see if that solves the problem for IH not receiving emails for some time.

MB would suggest that SDC would look at the MailChimp system as it seems to cause issues for some.

IH: His 2nd point concerned submitting election forms as trustees and availability of the application form online.

MB said that notification for this meeting went out by MailChimp to all members, and was shared on social media. SM thinks this is an issue to look into but should not nullify the meeting. General agreement to this point as the number in attendance is good.

MB: We are returning to the election process in due course and to make clear how the process will run but, in brief, as a board we have decided that we will not seek an election of trustees at this time but wait until September until the funding structure is clearer.

The following proxies were received and acknowledged:

1. MD, ED to RS

1. Tina Hardie, Denise Hardie and Sean Hardie to EwenH

Present on the board this evening – Megan Bee (acting chair in place of Mike

Danson), Elna Harvey (EH), Isla MacLeod (IslaM), Paul Robinson (PR), Raghnaid Sandilands (RS – minutes). This meeting was quorate.

2. Minutes from AGM 2023/24 approved.

Minutes from the last AGM circulated. KA proposed they be approved and GR seconded.

The members then approved the minutes.

3. Chair's report

MB went on to highlight a few parts of the broader annual report:-

1. During the year SDC have focussed on implementing the CAP, including raising the funding to employ a CDO. Following positive conversations with the SCBF, SDC were granted funding to further the purposes of the SCIO. Initial financial support was given to recruit and employ a CDO, support running costs and organize a series of events for the community. Jessica Boughey was employed as CDO in November 2023. Events and public meetings were facilitated by SDC trustees and CDO over the year with a large increase in activities and consultations over the first half of the financial year in particular. As with most of SDC activities, the trustees and CDO worked with community groups to run Farr Gala, help support Strathnairn Connect with its efforts, Hall committee with reestablishment of the seniors lunch. A hub steering group was established with representatives from SDC, Farr Hall, SNCC, SCBF, co-ordinated by the CDO which made significant progress with Jessica's oversight with consensus leading to scoping out architects for possible developments. Against the proposals of SDC and the significant investment of time and effort by SDC reps, the steering group was abruptly disbanded in the late Spring of 2024. This occurred before the community hub proposed in the CAP could be properly explored with the wider Strathnairn community.

2. SDC continues to work with other community groups to fulfil the priorities revealed in community surveys, meetings and the CAP, in particular with the taking into ownership the historical Dunlichity Church by the SHA.
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- 1.
2. Through the work of the CDO and the board significant funding for community activities was brought into Strathnairn. Small grants fund for Gaelic week and Bòrd na Gàidhlig's community grant of about £4500 was secured to deliver concerts, talks, classes, bookbug session and other activities throughout the year.
- 3.
4. External funds were forthcoming to deliver popular cinema days for young people and adults with support coming from Film Hub Scotland.
- 5.
6. Preliminary work on a Local Place Plan, affordable housing, community ownership of assets and other projects in the CAP were progressed.
- 7.
8. After the CDO left for a new more senior post in May 2024 adverts were made for a replacement, applications to SCBF were made for renewed funding for a CDO and SDC running costs, as we had been encouraged to. However, no funding was forthcoming and no official explanation was offered and this led to an impasse and a slow down in our work. Therefore we sought advice and guidance from the 8 officially recognized regional and national organizations in social and community development. All advise seeking mediation between SDC and SCBF. This was arranged but only SDC were willing to engage.
- 9.
- 10.
11. Membership of SDC were appraised of these developments through emails to membership and the wider community of Strathnairn via social media.
- 12.

13. We were given encouragement by these national bodies to seek external funding for Strathnairn for the benefit of the community and steps to ensure that will be a priority for the new year.

14.

15. Our extensive engagement with other community groups and respected national bodies, and experience in participation in a range of fora and policy areas and practice organisations across Scotland do give us optimism for 2025 that we can meet the aspirations of the community.

16.

17. SDC would like to say a huge thank you to the contribution and hard work of our outgoing trustees – Aileen Taylor and Guy Harris and in particular the huge amount of work undertaken by our vice chair Neil Dawson.

18.

19. An external auditor was engaged to sign off on the report and financial statement.

DM wanted to note what he feels to be an inaccurate statement re; supporting the re-establishment of seniors lunch club and the establishment of community cafe that he feels was noted in the previous year's report. DM feels the Senior's lunch club was re-established by individuals and that SDC were not to be credited with helping. DM offers these are corrections and would like them removed from the report.

MB acknowledged the edits he would seek to the report.

4. Annual report

A review of the year – {see Annual Report and Financial Statement previously circulated to all members prior to the AGM} and has been made available on the website.

5. Confirmation of Charity Trustees

Current Trustees and Election of new Trustees

A statement to confirm the current charity trustees; Mike Danson, Elna Harvey, Paul Robinson, Isla MacLeod, Megan Bee, Raghnaid Sandilands.

The board has decided not to have an election at this current AGM b/c its funding position will be clearer in 2025. This will hopefully generate fresh intake of trustees.

MM – queries whether as a tier 2 SCIO can make the decision to delay the election to better fit the situation. She feels we are acting as a Tier 1 SCIO and it is up to the membership to decide if this is permissible. MB replies that we will look into this but her understanding is that we are on solid ground.

6. Questions and answer session

Topics/ questions raised and discussed in order:

1. PM – asks if the SNCC would be included in the mediation meeting. LM emailed also to ask whether the CC would be included in the meeting.
2. MB confirmed that the mediation would be between SDC and SCBF if they choose to show willingness.

LM would appreciate this clarified also via email.

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2. BR – why are SDC seeking mediation, what's the reason?
3. MB answers that we have come to an impasse on not receiving an explanation on funding for our application for a CDO. We also strongly felt the whole governance, systems of communication and oversight needed fresh eyes and the Board was strongly advised we have an external body come in and support us through that process.
4. DR suggests the impasse was the SDC refusing to have a separate meeting with the SCBF. He suggests a number of requests to MD and ND who declined that offer, and stated the need for mediation. SCBF believe they need to meet SDC first, because there 'wasn't anything to mediate'.
5. Speaking as a member of the public and not SCBF director, DR feels the progression made by the SDC over the past 4 years has been 'poor' and he queries 'value for money'. DR feels that the SDC refusal to have a meeting with SCBF and SNCC to discuss the way forward and about how the CDO role

would work, SDC's refusal to have that meeting, without mediation, was difficult to understand.

MB made the point that for SDC, having discussed our view point and taken our concerns to respected bodies for advice, looking at the last 4 years and how to improve our practice and our communication, and the situation regarding employing a CDO we feel mediation to be the key to progression, not as a negative step but a normal and positive step.

6.

7. Question then asked by MC about 'mismanagement of CDO 'or the employment of them - and the loss of 2 members of staff in quick succession - feels appropriate that SDC answer questions re; this.

MB reiterated that the role of mediation was in part to look at what ways in which CDO could better feel supported in the role and lines of communication and oversight be made clear with all parties. This would help future employees and SDC in their role as employers and community groups seeking support with projects going forward.

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10. PM asked why SDC and SCBF and SDCC can't just meet to discuss funding of CDO and employment of them - while the role was empty PM thought this was the time to meet to discuss and why were SDC not willing to come to meeting to discuss. A community asset that we all need and want and the SDC are a hindrance to that at the moment.

MB reiterated that SDC are willing to meet and seek this, but with an external presence as part of the process. Doesn't understand what the impediment is. It's a normal step.

11.

12. KA notes having been on the original steering groups and reflecting on all the time spent working on behalf of the community, the continuation of what she feels sadness at what she perceives to be personal grievance and fragile egos that have sought to hinder the progress of the SDC from its very inception. We all need to work together and if there was open honest and aided communication then we could make progress on the CAP which we spent good money on doing. The CDOs left for various solid reasons which cannot be discussed but they did a good job and employees leave. This is the nature of being a community development organisation.

13.

14. PM says this is what the SNCC wants. All agree this is a positive idea. RS asks are SCBF willing to come to mediation and have these conversations in the round, with someone independent, and if not, why not?

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17. DR says understanding of mediation is about governance, structure and how we communicate – the purpose of an initial meeting from his understanding is separate and to discuss the application for the CDO and how we could make the CDO work across 3 of those groups, milestones for deliverables etc. He feels they are two very different stand points.

IR asks why not do it all with mediation? Meeting for mediation needed for all the reasons MB has outlined.

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20. DR everyone is passionate about the community, wanting to drive forward. There are ways and means to get parties around the table and if it means having a mediator there to observe, he doesn't think people have an issue with that.

A general applause and positive responses to this statement by the membership and trustees. Another SCBF director DM raised a concern regarding the 8 hours time suggested to fulfill the process. MB clear that that would be only a gauge of a maximum. It can be split into sessions that are workable for all.

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23. DR asks why not spend those hours and come for a meeting about the CDO application?

24. MB because the CDO management, role going forward and how that looks, how the role is set up is completely tied into governance and communication going forward. Those things are totally connected. We want to attract somebody into a role where we have sorted out these issues, we know exactly where we are going and are all happy with our roles and how they work. This creates a good playing field with which to attract a CDO into that position. News travels across the Highlands and people hear when things are

not going so well. We want to attract someone into a peaceful, productive working environment. A CDO and the general governance and communication is part of a good vision of how we go forward and mediation would help this happen. MB concluded that we should look forward. DR responded with 'Can we agree on the date for a meeting if you can find your mediator?' MB expresses board's gladness at this and with a

25. Applause from the audience.

20. DL feels SDC has not built in feedback on decisions being made by the board.

1. GR a mediator would suggest means to offer feedback as part of improvements to communication, for what is best practice.

MB responded that a mediation will allow SCBF to put these things on the table and find solutions. It's an opportunity for everyone.

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22. PM feels SDC was locking itself away by not attending a community wide group meeting. MB - we were waiting on this decision re; mediation to be on the right footing, not sidestepping our role but being consistent with advice given.

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25. AB requests more visibility of SDC board members. MB points out all trustees are active members of many community groups and are known and recognized in the community.

IM this is the sort of thing that could be explored in solutions-focused mediation.

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28. DR mentions frustration rise from concern re; progress over last 4 years. Last year's report was much like this progress and little tangible things delivered for money given. Felt the report was light on tangible results. MB replied that lack of a CDO has caused delays.

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31. MC Local place plan was delegated to SDC to bring it forward – deadline is past. Why has the place plan not been progressed?

PR/MB replied that CDO had reported her progress made in her time with us. This report is viewable online on our website. She reported on her progress with local place plan which is a sizable task.

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34. PM – SDCC asked about place plan so they could bring it forward. PM says MD did not respond to this. MD will respond.

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37. PM (as SNCC Chair) – raised a point with regard to lack of engagement by SDC with regard to the new community website. The SNCC secretary overworked putting up news. PR said that SDC discussed our contribution with PM 2 years ago, telling him we would be part of the scheme. We warned him then that proposals would lead to volunteer fatigue. And proposed workable solutions that would make it easy to update SDC's part of the site. SDC replied to the survey request in August 2023. At last AGM IanM confirmed SDC was part of the scheme. PR can send LM the survey response again. Clearly there is some issue with communication lines. LM outlined some things she would need and link to the website – meeting with LM and PR is easy to set up.

38.

39. KA a lot of elderly people can't access the web. Newsletter missed – is there a way that SDC can take on the role of a newsletter. A valuable community asset. PM described steps taken so far and SNCC hoping to post it out.

MB good to review all systems of communication to better aid progress.

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42. EwenH asks about the last CDO – queries the correlation between what she was tasked with doing and items raised in the CAP. Asks how the board feel about her not doing what she had been tasked to do – MB asks for specifics – Ewen interested in research done on the feasibility of a community

owned gym. MB research and discussions was included in the work of the HUB steering group which was abandoned abruptly – he queries the progress made about the MUGA and whether the cinema nights were requested in the CAP. MB says the quick wins of establishing social events was outlined as a popular and positive offering. EwenH asks where does the CAP mention climate events – MB replied that this is connected to Active travel and environmental considerations that are in the CAP. Otherwise EwenH's opinions were noted.

SDC Board does not feel there is a disconnect between what CDO was tasked to do and her activity – CDO produced multiple reports on her activities. She was working towards her targets. MB says EwenH welcome to email for more details if he seeks further clarification / the research documents as they stood when the steering group was functional. MB says should he follow up there is a folder of research on the feasibility of gym that was gathered.

43.

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45. MB thinks we have established a common desire to sort communications, roles, governance, CDO employment and broader plans in a positive way with mediation as a natural and normal step.

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48. BecR seeks commitment from SDC, SDCC and SCBF to look at community housing. Delighted that this meeting has got to a stage this evening to go forward to address the top issue in CAP: community housing.

49.

50. BR ask re; handover of skills and info and new trustees in September – MB says appointing and co-opting new trustees is an option and a community wide call out is also planned as a natural part of new recruitment.

51. DL asks re; next steps.

PR / IslaM responded with details of Natalie's desk-based research outlining funds that have good potential – looking at external funding for CDO, funding streams re; association for community housing, SSE and HIE and others. Time line relaxed as she has been signed off. IslaM limited for us to do a lot as volunteers – a lot easier after this mediation to make progress and in a position to employ and retain good candidates. MB says mediation would be a fast process to implement. HLC offers baking. DR mentions again what the remit

would be – MB mentions mediator has a process and a format can be agreed via email by parties involved ahead of time – MB nobody wants to go in blind. IslaM this can be arranged by an agenda that is shared and edited. SDC to get in touch with the mediator first, to learn the usual outline of approach, gets in touch with SCBF to take forward and to set up the process. IslaM / MB restate the link between governance, communication and successful employment of a CDO – whole system review for best practice.

6. Annual report – trustees' report and financial statement

Treasurer's report {see Annual Report and Financial Statement previously circulated to all members prior to the AGM}

Income £4788 funding for position and community events and running cost for SDC. Expenditure £22298. Leaving us as of Sept last year with £14,357.

PR gave an overview of income and expenditure.
The finance account was approved with no objections.

7. AOCB

No new points raised.

8. DONM

To be decided.