



Grantown Initiative - Board Meeting

Minutes of Meeting on Tuesday 11 October 2016 – at Grant Arms Hotel, Grantown-on-Spey

Present: **Directors** – Dan Cottam (in the Chair), Melanie Dick, Stewart Dick, Basil Dunlop, Jane Hope, Bill Sadler

Also Present – David Fraser, Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust (SRCT)

Apologies: **Directors** – Isla Game, Karen Martin

Advisers – Lee Haxton, CNPA, David Lyle, Company Secretary

1) Attendance – Welcome / Apologies

The chair welcomed all to the meeting and apologies were noted.

2) Minutes of GI Board Meeting on 13 September 2016 (circulated)

Agreed

3) Matters Arising from Last Board Minutes

None not otherwise on the agenda.

4) Declarations of Interest (if any)

None

5) Membership – Applications

None

6) Grantown Action Plan –

Rails to Grantown / Community Interest Company (GVCC) – Update

Basil Dunlop (BD) reported that following the last GI meeting he had given a presentation to the Grantown & Vicinity Community Council. GVCC did not at this stage discuss the presentation but requested a copy of the presentation which had then been circulated (attached here for information – Annex 1), and

subsequently the GVCC had agreed that there should be a Community Interest Company (CIC) established to take forward the project of bringing the steam railway to Grantown. The name of a GVCC representative to sit on the CIC was awaited.

BD has also contacted one of the local MSPs, Fergus Ewing, for advice on the possible CIC and funding, as there was no point in the community putting effort into the project if there was no prospect of Government support to allow it to continue.

CARS, Grantown / Visit to Callander - Update

Bill Sadler (BS) reported on a useful visit to Callendar in the Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, facilitated by Lee Haxton of CNPA. The aim had been to look at how Callander had benefitted from a CARS (Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme) project between 2009 and 2014. A copy of the comprehensive report is attached – Annex 2. The scheme was regarded as having been successful. The Grantown Society was happy to be part of taking such a project forward in Grantown. However, it was noted that the Callander project had received considerable funding and staff input from the LL&TT NPA; early indications were that the CNPA had neither the funds or capacity to do likewise, and yet without their support the project would not be viable. It was decided that as part of the GI's deliberations on what the priorities emerging from the Iconic report should be, a further discussion with the CNPA and Highland Council on the prospects for a CARS bid would be useful.

Priorities

A long discussion took place about the capacity among volunteers within Grantown for taking forward the suggestions in the Iconic report, of which the Railway and the CARS projects were the biggest elements. Both were long term, and were huge undertakings. The importance was noted of:

- focusing on those projects which had good support from the community and from public sector and therefore a reasonable chance of success;
- making sure we continued to deliver the smaller projects, such as marketing the town as a visitor destination, with more immediate outputs;

-being able to direct our efforts into fundraising and grant applications. For this we would need a clear and coherent vision of what we wanted to achieve as well as some sense of the actions involved; that had been the purpose of the Iconic report. Ideally a dedicated person would be needed to take things forward; however, there was no funding for such a person unless a grant was acquired. The GI needed to see a clear way of cutting into this circularity.

A decision had already been made at the previous GI meeting to focus on support for the Rails to Grantown project, but it was clear that further work was needed to ascertain how a CIC and the GI (as well as the SRC) would interact in practice – clarifying roles was essential to avoid a confusing proliferation of organisations. A discussion needed to be held with representatives of GBA on how to take forward the marketing elements of the action plan which would complement the railway project.

7) Grantown Business Association.

No report. Discussion deferred until next meeting.

8) Grantown Community Website – Update

Steward Dick (SD) explained that the sub group had held several discussions with the contractor, and were now happy with the design. This was presented to the meeting, who unanimously approved the design and completion of the website development, which would be by the end of the year at the latest.

9) Treasurer's Report.

Deferred to next meeting.

10) Web Site Traffic Report for September 2016.

No discussion.

11) GI Projects .

Covered by previous items.

12) AOCB.

None

Next Board

The next Board would be on Tuesday 8 November 2016.

Jane Hope (in absence of Company Secretary)

Annex 1 and Annex 2 /

Annex 1

COMMUNITY INTEREST COMPANY A way forward for the Rails to Grantown Project

Presentation to Grantown-on-Spey & Vicinity Community Council By B M S Dunlop, Grantown Initiative, on 20th September 2016

The Grantown Action Plan, initiated by CNPA and VABS, was commissioned by the Grantown Initiative. It recommends 3 themes for the development of Grantown to access major funding sources:-

- 1) Protect, Enhance, Promote Town Centre
- 2) Develop Tourism and Events
- 3) Strengthen Community Action

The main recommendation under 2) and 3) is the proposed extension of the Strathspey Railway to Grantown – the R2G Project - by forming an Action Team to secure Community Support and Funding. This was agreed by Key Partners and adopted by the Grantown Initiative last Tuesday evening (Tuesday 13th September 2016).

The Strathspey Railway Company (SRC), the commercial wing which owns the railway and operates train services between Aviemore and the River Dulnain, has already spent almost £1m relaying track from Boat of Garten to the River. It is a 'Not for Profit' company, shareholders do not receive dividends, and Directors are not paid. To date improvements and extensions have been funded by annual operating profits plus grant aid, but it has no funds to finance the remaining 2.5 miles to the original destination – the former Grantown West Station site in the Industrial Estate, let alone the vastly more expensive long-term aim of extending to a terminus at the Dulicht Bridge, Seafield Avenue, estimated to cost £3.5m. This does not include the estimated £1.7m cost of a box bridge at Lower Gaich so that the A95T can be realigned over the railway by Transport Scotland, who have agreed to fund the £7m cost of the roadworks.

The Strathspey Railway Charitable Trust (SRCT) was therefore formed in 2007 specifically to raise funds from sources unavailable to the SR Company and build the extension and infrastructure. It has bridged the River, negotiated ownership/agreement on the land required, secured planning permission to relay track to Lower Gaich, produced a Business Plan and obtained an independent Cost/Benefit study, designed a possible terminus track layout and station buildings, and commissioned consultants to produce the required Environment Statements and draft Transport & Works (Scotland) (TAWS) application which is about to be submitted to the Scottish Ministers for Government approval of the project. This has cost almost £0.5m.

The proposed extension would bring extra revenue to the SRC, but the additional running costs would bring little profit to the company. Substantial Government funding is

therefore essential, and as it is highly unlikely direct grants to the SRCT would be made, a way needs to be found to access public finance. The main beneficiaries would be the community and Highlands, independently estimated as being worth about £3m per annum to the local economy, and the Scottish Government has stated its policy to support local initiatives. Therefore a way to access public funds such as Economic Development and Public Transport budgets needs to be found.

A Special Purpose Vehicle (SPV) with a Public Service Obligation (PSO), i.e. a trust/company with qualified paid staff, could be set-up to build the railway and run public transport train services between Grantown and Aviemore. This would qualify for Government subsidy as with the Borders Railway. Trains could be operated by SRC including steam trains in the tourist season, and visiting excursions, on payment to the trust/company, as with West Coast Railway running the steam-hauled Jacobite services on the Network Rail line between Fort William and Mallaig.

The SPV could be set up as a Community Interest Company (CIC) involving key partners such as Highlands & Islands Enterprise, Transport Scotland, Network Rail, and Abellio/Scotrail as well as local organisations such as Highland Council, Cairngorms National Park Authority, University of the Highlands & Islands, Voluntary Action Badenoch & Strathspey, SRC, SRCT, Grantown Initiative, Community Councils and Schools. This would seem to be the most realistic option. This requires the Grantown & Vicinity Community Council, as the community statutory authority, aided by Highland Council and the Grantown Initiative, to set it up. It would qualify for Government start-up grants, and would only need to call the first meeting and invite the key players. A Steering Group would be formed of professional experts and local interests which would then take over and apply for public funding, with the in-house expertise and equipment to build and manage the railway extension.

The details of how each partner would interact would be established through a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Memorandum & Articles of Association (M&A) regarding ownership, responsibilities, and arrangement for the operation of services on the two sections - between the publicly owned Grantown to River Dulnain section, and the SRC owned River Dulnain to Aviemore section. Eventually the former could perhaps be leased to the SRC.

The Grantown Community Council is requested to agree to and initiate the formation of a CIC as outlined above. This appears to be the only way by which railway services can be restored to Grantown in the foreseeable future, and the R2G project is RTG - 'ready to go'! The next stage would be a Public Meeting, organised by the GI Action Team and SRCT, to explain the proposed CIC project with maps and models, and secure public endorsement and support.

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Annex 2

Grantown Initiative Study Visit – Callander

Background

Since the initial “Our Community, A Way Forward” Action Plan was developed in 2008, there have been a number of further consultation and engagement exercises undertaken in Grantown-on-Spey. In 2016, the Grantown Initiative (GI) obtained funding from the Cairngorms LEADER Small Grants Scheme, to employ a consultant to review all of these exercises and highlight recurring themes, issues and aspirations.

One of the identified recurring themes focussed on the Town Centre, which is viewed as a key community asset, but one which requires attention. Concerns have been expressed about shop frontages and the state of repair of some of the key buildings. As part of the recommendations, the consultant put forward one possible solution, which was a Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme (CARS) project for Grantown-on-Spey.

Purpose of Visit

The purpose of the study visit was to find out more about the CARS in Callander, which ran from 2009-14. The Callander example was thought to be most relevant, as it is a planned town, established about the same time as Grantown-on-Spey; remains a key service and retail centre; is a popular tourist town; and sits within a National Park.

Process

Two Grantown Initiative / Society representatives joined CNPA staff on the visit, meeting Susan McGowan (Built Environment Adviser) and Susan Brooks (Development Planning and Communities Manager) from Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority. The visit included a presentation from Susan McGowan regarding the Callander CARS, discussion on 10 key questions which GI and CNPA had sent down in advance; and a tour of some of the key sites in the town.

Conservation Area Regeneration Scheme

CARS is a fund administered by Historic Environment Scotland (HES), which planning authorities, community groups and other appropriate organisations can bid into. The fund can be used for:

- a repairs programme for priority projects
- a small grants scheme – e.g. for homeowners or retailers
- community engagement through training and education programmes
- training opportunities for traditional craftspeople
- public realm conservation and restoration
- administration costs, including for the appointment of a dedicated project officer

The seventh round of CARS funding closed at the end of August 2016 and it is likely that the eighth will not open until April/May 2018. Generally, the process has three main phases:

1. Completion of a Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan
2. Submission of funding application to HES CARS
3. Delivery of CARS, including management and administration of key elements

The level of funding is negotiable with HES, but the most recent CARS scheme had a total budget of £10m for the whole of Scotland. The level of funding provided in each CARS scheme to properties is also negotiable; however in the Callander example intervention rates of 70-90% of costs were agreed.

HES are currently consulting on the process and criteria for CARS, so there is a chance that the funding scheme may change over the next couple of years. It is anticipated that a partnership approach, with more significant community input will be required than was previously the case.

Callander Context

Callander is the largest settlement in Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park and is seen as the eastern Gateway. The Callander Conservation Area was first established in 1981 and was then extended as part of the CARS in 2011. The Conservation Area Appraisal was commenced in 2007-08 by consultants, who were paid for by LLTNPA and then completed by LLTNPA staff.

A Conservation Area Management Plan has been developed over the course of the CARS project and has been developed by consultants paid for by LLTNPA. The Appraisal and Management Plan are approved by the Planning Committee of the relevant Planning Authority and Scottish Ministers need to be informed (but not consulted).

Callander CARS 2009-14

The Callander CARS scheme totalled £500k of grant funding, with £250k from CARS and £200k from LLTNPA (including additional £50k of staffing costs). The partners in the CARS were:

- Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park Authority
- Historic Scotland (now Historic Environment Scotland)
- Stirling Council (who invested £126k in various projects over the period of the CARS)
- British Geological Survey
- Loch Lomond and The Trossachs Community Partnership
- Local community groups
- Private owners

The priorities identified in the Callander CARS were:

- The repair of Historic Buildings (including unlisted buildings in the conservation areas)
- Promoting awareness of the historic built environment
- Ensuring traditional skills are not lost by using traditional materials
- Encouraging shop front improvements and restoration

- Returning vacant floor space to use
- Reducing our carbon footprint by conserving our built heritage

The Callander CARS identified five priority projects, which included two hotels; a large retail unit; a historic bridge; and a guest house/retail unit. During the lifetime of the project, the St Kessogs Church building was added to the list of priority projects, as a result of it being vacated by VisitScotland. The Ancaster Bridge was initially not in the Conservation Area, which was extended to include this and some additional properties, meaning that they became eligible for CARS funding.

The Small Grants Scheme element of the CARS has resulted in 34 grants being awarded (5 commercial and 29 residential). The Small Grant Scheme has been the most visible part of the CARS, but did bring some issues, e.g. having to secure 3 quotes for work; ensuring annual budget availability; and the potential for new problems being identified as work commences and structures become exposed. The Small Grants covered a number of elements, including chimneys, roofs, repointing, lime mortaring, stone repairs, architectural details, bargeboards, guttering and windows.

A further element of the CARS in Callander was a sponsored apprentice stonemason, identified through the Community Partnership. In addition to this, a series of training and educational events were organised with McLaren High School – these continue in the post-CARS period. These events have focused on traditional skills and materials such as stone masonry, brick work, slating, lead work and joinery.

Education and awareness of the historic environment is a key part of the CARS process. In the Callander example, the local Community Development Trust and Heritage Society worked with Council and NPA staff to produce a Heritage Trail, which guides you around some of the key sites in Callander, using interpretation panels and pavement markers, as well as maps and associated information. The Scottish Civic Trust “My Place” Photography Competition was promoted as part of the CARS in the local primary school, helping younger children to express their thoughts, experiences and perspectives on the heritage, buildings and archaeology around them.

The final element of Callander CARS saw the development of two surveys. The first was produced by the British Geological Survey, who gave much of their time in-kind to the project. This survey looked at the stone and slate used in the Conservation Area and prepared a report on the condition of the stone on one of the priority projects. This survey was a useful reference point for property owners, CARS staff and contractors as it provided clarity on what was required to meet CARS standards. The second survey was commissioned by CARS and focused on the historic shop fronts, ultimately producing a Design Guide, which were used by CARS staff when advising applicants on materials and possible sources. This also helps in responding to planning applications in the Conservation Area. This survey was also used as part of a Shopfront Improvement Scheme, which is regarded as being as unsuccessful due to the economic climate at the time; time constraints; and the tight criteria of the fund.

Callander CARS Achievements

From a publicly funded pot of £500k, a total project spend of £1.2m was achieved. In addition to the significant investment, the project has also:

- Raised awareness in the historic built environment
- Encouraged the sympathetic repair of traditional buildings
- Encouraged the use of traditional materials and traditional skills
- Enhanced the character of the built environment
- Delivered National Park Partnership Plan and Local Plan aims and objectives
- Delivered Community Action Plan priorities
- Made Callander a more attractive place to live in and visit
- Facilitated successful joint working with community groups and representatives
- Acted as a catalyst for ongoing improvement of the built environment

Following the completion of the Callander CARS, a Landscape Partnership bid has recently passed the Stage 1 phase. This is focussing on the area around Callander. In addition, a Built Heritage Repair Grant has been established and administered by LLTNPA. This has an annual budget of £20k and since its launch in August 2013 has supported 29 separate projects.

Key Questions

As part of the study visit, CNPA staff and GI representatives prepared a list of 10 Key Questions, covering the key issues they wished to cover. A summary of the discussion points is listed below:

1. What was the catalyst for the Callander CARS?
2. Why Callander? Did LLTNPA have to demonstrate a higher priority or need?
 - LLTNPA led the process from start to finish, in response to the first aim of Scottish National Parks, to “conserve and enhance the natural and cultural heritage”
 - The Callander Community Action Plan (CAP) had identified the town centre as an important and valuable asset, which required some significant attention and investment
 - The LLTNP Local Development Plan had a strong focus on the built environment
 - LLTNPA had a reasonable budget in 2008-09 to take forward match funding and resourcing
 - A Historic Scotland (now HES) survey of the listed buildings in Callander had been completed and encouraged an investment programme in key buildings
 - CARS bids for eight communities were originally submitted, with Callander and Killin being successful
3. What role did Stirling Council play in the process? Who did the Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan?
 - Stirling Council were a key partner and were on the steering group for the project
 - Stirling Council invested £126k in individual projects during the CARS
 - As stated, the Appraisal and draft Management Plan have been prepared by consultants and LLTNPA staff
4. How were community members involved in the development and delivery of the CARS?
 - The Community Heritage Association and Development Trust were key contributors to the Heritage Trail and Ancaster Bridge projects
 - Community members were not involved in the decision making process for funding – something which is increasingly highlighted as good practice by HES

5. How was the project administered? What specialist knowledge was required and how was this resourced?
 - LLTNPA Planning staff administered and managed the project – this was an in-kind contribution to the project. The CARS required 1 FTE post, which could potentially be funded through the CARS budget.
 - Staff learned “on the job” and had to quickly improve their knowledge of building materials and techniques. With hindsight, some formal training would have been beneficial

6. What outcomes were identified in the development of the project; and were these realised?
 - See section under “Callander CARS Achievements”

7. What were the main challenges and how were these tackled?
 - The initial community engagement was a challenge – this probably should have started earlier and been more of a focus. CARS increasingly focuses on community engagement and leadership, so important to get local groups and individuals involved and supportive as early as possible
 - i. Typical engagement methods included press notices, events and meetings
 - ii. The Community Hydro Scheme is now funding a Town Coordinator post, which is the main source of ongoing engagement in Callander
 - iii. The project could potentially have been more successful if the key property owners were identified and engaged at the outset, before an application was submitted
 - The Shopfront Improvement Scheme was not as successful as it could have been, mainly due to it starting late; the local economy struggling following the 2008 recession; and the tight criteria of the fund

8. What were the main successes? How have these been celebrated?
 - The main successes are listed in the body of the report
 - There has not been any form of “celebration”

9. How was the wider community kept informed of the project?
 - General press releases and information; specific events and meetings
 - Ongoing dialogue with key groups, including the Heritage Society, Development Trust and Community Council

10. Would you do it again; or do anything differently?
 - Yes, indeed a second CARS application was submitted for Callander, but was unsuccessful
 - The same level of money could be spent again to further improve the built heritage in the town
 - The community engagement element and Shopfront Improvement Scheme would be done differently

Conclusions

The Callander CARS scheme has been a success and has achieved a significant amount, for what was a relatively small amount of public investment. The National Park Authority were the lead body, with a broad partnership working in support of the project. Such was the success of the project, that a

second CARS application was submitted (unsuccessful) and a HLF Landscape Partnership application has also been submitted, recently passing Stage 1.

The Callander context is similar to that of Grantown-on-Spey in terms of its planned nature; role as a service and visitor centre; and location as a gateway to a National Park. The planning context in Callander made it clear that LLTNPA would be the lead public agency – the situation in Cairngorms is more complex and would need to be considered carefully. In addition, a generous budgetary commitment could be made by LLTNPA in 2008, a situation which has changed significantly since that time.

In principle it appears that a CARS could work in Grantown-on-Spey and it is felt that a strong case could be made for such a project to apply successfully. It is also clear that a project seeking to improve the visitor and residential experience of the town centre in Grantown-on-Spey is a real priority for the community. The Grantown Initiative are going to discuss this at Board level and seek to identify a community partner to lead on this, as they continue to focus on Rails to Grantown.

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