POINT AND SANDWICK TRUST BOARD

MINUTES – 28 JANUARY 2025 at 7.00pm

Minute of Meeting of Joint Board of Directors of **Point and Sandwick Trust and Point and Sandwick Power** on **Tuesday 28 January 2025** at **7.00pm** in **PST Office**.

PRESENT:
Duncan Mackay, Board Member
Eddie Macgregor, Board Member
Andrew Mackenzie, Board Member
Agnes Munro, Board Member
Dan Maclennan, Board Member
Jane Watson, Board Member
Chris Tom Mackenzie, Board Member
Donald John MacSween, General Manager
Calum Macdonald, Development Manager PSP
Stewart Wilson, Energy Support Unit
Dan Morrison, Energy Support Unit
Kenny Maclean, Energy Support Unit
Catherine Anne Smith, Finance Manager
Christina Smith, Office Manager
Matthew Smith, Development Support Assistant
Laura McEwan, Croft Woodland Officer

APOLOGIES
Norman Mackenzie
Rhoda Mackenzie
Angus MacCormack (Hon President)
Gordon Mackay, Board Member
Donald Macdonald, Board Member
Rhona Gallagher, Board Member
Iain Macaskill, Board Member
Ian Irvine, PSP Board Member
Viv Halcrow, Croft Woodland Adviser

1 WELCOME

Duncan Mackay (In the Chair) welcomed all those present to the meeting.

2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Donald John MacSween and Calum Macdonald declared an interest in Garrabost Mill Item.

3 MINUTES

(a)The Minute of Meeting of the PSP/PST Joint Board of Directors of 25 November 2024 was **approved subject to inclusion of Chris Tom Mackenzie in the sederunt list;** and

(b) The Minute of Meeting of the Grants Sub-Committee of 25 November was **approved**.

4 MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

5 POINT AND SANDWICK POWER by Calum Macdonald

1) Output
The output in November was 2,737 hours which is just 2% below P50 (because of the need to replace a tower light on T1 and do some bearing grease work on T2) and 3,022 MW hours in December which is 8% below P50 in line with lower average wind speed. Performance and maintenance continue to be good although we may have more scheduled outages from SSE this year due to an uptick in grid upgrades in Skye.

2) Wind farm subsea insurance.
No update on subsea insurance.

3) Community Battery Project.
The battery planning application was approved by the Council in December with only three Councillors voting against it.
I have had further meetings with SSE (both Transmission and Networks) and the National Grid. We are still waiting for the connection offer to be modified as we requested. The good news is that SSE will advertise a new tender for supplying a grid stability service in Lewis in February and we shall apply.

4) Repowering and Grid Capacity.
There is no update on the scope for increasing the Beinn Ghrideag grid connection, but I am working with Greenspan on this. It will not be straightforward because new grid rules have just been introduced which require you to have a supportive letter from the landlord to book a place in the queue.

5) Community Cable to Skye.
No update.

6) Hydrogen.
No update.

7) CES, CPOH and the Community Energy Alliance
The new SCCE (Scottish Community Coalition on Energy) comprising CES, Community Land Scotland, Development Trusts Scotland and Foundation Trusts Scotland) continues its work on policy changes to promote community energy gov policy at Scottish and UK level.
CES and I met with Ofgem and National Grid representatives on 8 January as part if our continued push for changes to the Grid regulations to make it easier for communities to
connect. Ten of them were on the call which indicated that something is rustling in the bushes, and they asked us to help write a short definition of community energy which they could use, which I have now submitted to them.

I also submitted a paper to the Commons Energy Committee enquiry, as copied to Board members, and I have made a similar submission in my own name to the Scottish Labour policy review that started recently.

8) Dividend.
The legal work to update the Macaulay Farm and the Bennadrove leases is almost complete but still to be signed off by the Bank. I have asked the bank to allow a dividend of £2 million when they do sign. This will bring the dividend paid in gift aid from January 2016 to January 2025 up to £8.8 million in total.

9) Corporate PPA.
No update.

10) Cowal.
I am helping CCE (Cowal Community Energy, formed by five local development trusts and community councils) to submit a tender (due on February 3rd) for the Cruach Mhor wind farm lease which is on forestry commission land, and which is currently leased to Scottish Power. The wind farm's current size is 30MW so if the community bid wins the tender, it would succeed Beinn Ghrideag as the biggest wind farm in the UK.
Part of the tender is to provide evidence of previous experience in developing and operating a wind farm. Obviously, CCE have no such experience so I have suggested to them that the project company should be owned 97.5% by CCE and 2.5% by PSP. They agree this would be a good idea.
This would require no equity investment by PSP as the capex funding will be made up entirely of senior debt (eg Santander) and junior debt (eg SNIB (Scottish National Investment Bank) who I have met and who are supportive.
After discussion, it was agreed that Point and Sandwick Power would take a 5% share in the Cowal Community Wind Farm.

The PSP Report was noted.

6 CROFT WOODLAND PROJECT by Laura McEwan
Period covered: 25th November 2024 – 28th January 2025 (9 weeks incl festive break)

1) Overview
Viv : 1 new **enquiry** during the period
Laura : 12 new **enquiries** during the period, bringing the overall total so far to 879
Viv : 0 **site visits** in the period
Laura : 13 **site visits** in the period, an overall total of 787 croft visits to date.

2) MOREwoods:
Finalising MOREwoods schemes for 2024/25 planting has taken up quite a bit of time. There have been real issues with the availability of planting stock from nurseries, leading to several CWP meetings to sort things out. This underlines the need for reliable nursery provision in the islands. In Uist and Barra there are eight confirmed schemes (others withdrew or postponed until 2025/26 for a variety of reasons) and eighteen in Lewis and Harris, with one large scheme pulling out yesterday. We are working with colleagues at Woodland Trust to process these schemes for delivery in

March. Orders for sundries (guards, fertiliser, etc) have been placed with the supplier. Viv will receive bulk deliveries of trees and sundries in Uist, divvy up the stock and deliver to crofters in early March. Trees and sundries for the Barra schemes will be transported across by Viv in mid-March. Horshader will be handling and delivering individual orders in Lewis and Harris.
This year we are able to offer to fund rabbit netting to protect trees instead of individual rabbit guards, which some crofters prefer.

We're investigating the use of the product TRICO as a deer deterrent instead of high fencing. While deer fencing is the most reliable way to keep deer from browsing the young trees, it is very costly, there are few contractors to do it, and it can have high landscape impact. It is made from emulsified sheep fat and deer dislike the smell and taste; it has been trialed on the mainland and shown to be effective. We intend to offer it to crofters who are planting MOREwoods schemes and haven't yet installed deer fencing. It could be a really helpful product if it is effective enough to allow trees to be established.
We're looking into the mycorrhizal fungi product Rhizocore which may be of benefit in establishing trees on our tree-less soils.

3) Forestry Grant Scheme:
Uist and Barra:

- One scheme will be planted imminently
- Two more FGS schemes in Uist have been approved.
- Two more applications have been submitted
- Two more are ready to submit but awaiting the go-ahead from Rural Payments (AKA the Dept)
- One more is almost ready for submission
- A further three FGS schemes are in active development in Uist and Barra.

It's unusual to have so much FGS activity; good, but heavy on admin time. Viv continues to liaise with Donald MacLeod of Scottish Forestry to ensure the application process is smooth. Top-up funding (ie purchase of some materials or trees) is being offered to those crofters whose schemes show a large deficit between the grant income and the actual costs. Donald J MacSween has been kept informed over this use of funding.

Lewis and Harris:

- 2 FGS administered by Robin Reid in his WT role have just finished their planting.
- There are 3 new FGS schemes in preliminary stages of development.
- Donald MacLeod from Scottish Forestry did site visits with Laura on 24th December and has given the approval for application submission to the 3 schemes in preliminary stages (above).

The deadline for claims is approaching and several crofters have needed a good deal of help with completing the claim form.

4) Free Crofting Tree packs: 2024/25 planting:
Two packs have been agreed in Uist so far: for 'Pals of Bayhead Playpark' in N Uist, and Balivanich Primary School in Benbecula, plus a small number of trees for Grimsay

Community Association. In Lewis and Harris, there has been one agreed for Sir E. Scott Primary in Tarbet, one for the Point and Sandwick Coastal Path and one for Galson Estate Trust to line the walkway to Na Dorsan.

5) Community: Viv has started to arrange community planting days in Uist and in Barra, scheduled for March/April.

6) Planting : The planting total to date is 211,420 trees spread through the Western Isles. An updated total will be calculated at the end of the 2024/25 planting season (April).

7) SSE Compensatory Planting: One SSE compensatory planting is almost complete in Ardroil. There has been no communication from SSE about it. The crofter got in touch with Laura to write a letter to their landlord. As the Woodland Trust has not been involved in this scheme at all, it was considered best if the letter came from SSE themselves or the crofter's solicitor.

8) HHP: Viv and Laura had a meeting with HHP staff in relation to tree planting in new HHP developments in Lewis, Harris and Barra. Discussions are ongoing.

9) Nursery Network: In Uist, Paul Wright in Benbecula is overseeing the nursery through the winter months.
The Uist nursery has been accredited under Woodland Trust's 'UK and Ireland Sourced and Grown' scheme. Trees can now be sold for MOREwoods schemes. Viv is expecting to hear about the Professional Operator registration and the ability to issue Plant Passports (both these are necessary if plants are to be sold) very soon, and is dealing with the other necessary admin. ~1500 Downy birch, alder, rowan and a small amount of willow plants will be of a size to sell this winter.
Frank Stark is on a slow road to recovery. His tree operation will be down-scaled considerably but he has stated that he will focus his efforts on growing trees for MOREwoods schemes only. He has been collecting and processing seed when he is feeling up to it. Hopefully this will mean that all trees for MOREwoods schemes in Lewis and Harris next year will be supplied locally.
The Stornoway Trust nursery is working towards their UKISG registration to be able to supply trees locally for MOREwoods and Forestry Grant Schemes as needed.
Recipients of FGS schemes are responsible for sourcing their own trees of the right provenance and many of them are struggling to source them and finding delivery costs an unexpected additional expense. Hopefully, a local source will help this situation.

10) Woodland Survey:
We have begun discussions with a suitable contractor (Robin Reid), to undertake some of this work in 2025. Laura and Viv will carry out some of the work with the aim of completing the survey in late 2025.

11) Promotion:
Fb pages: 'Western Isles Trees on the Croft' post and 'Croft Woodland Project' posts.
Laura presentation at the Scottish Crofting Federation Gathering on Saturday 23rd November resulted in two MOREwoods schemes being delivered this season, one being Sweeny's in Ness! She will be delivering a presentation on the Croft Woodlands Project at the Pairc Trust on 30th January for crofters.

12) Training; Viv is developing ideas for training days in Uist and Barra in the late summer.

13) General: Woodland Trust Scotland monthly recording update. CWP report for PST. There has been further deer damage to MOREwoods schemes in Upper Shader. We will be supplying Trico Deer Repellent Spray to these schemes to try and prevent further damage.

The Croft Woodland Report was noted.

7 ENERGY SUPPORT UNIT` by Stewart Wilson

1) ESU and Hardship Fund

The ESU continues to assess households for assistance through the fund. The increase to the energy price cap coupled with the removal of the Winter allowance for many and the prospect of further increases to the price cap in April 2025 all drives demand as households grapple with the increasing cost pressures for energy. With this context we have now reached and exceeded the £300k threshold for all hardship grants.

Between 1 January to 31 March 2025 the energy price cap is set at £1,738 per year for a 'typical' household who use electricity and gas and pay by Direct Debit. This is a increase of 1.2% compared to the cap set between 1 October to 31 December 2024 (£1,717**).**

2) Mapping of EPC Data

Some preliminary mapping work has been undertaken from the online EPC data sets available publicly boosted by our EPC's. The aim will be to develop this for all the data we hold throughout 2025.

Moving forward we have proposed in the workplan to build on this work to help us understand strategically where to prioritise various programmes of work. We will also begin to analytically map our own database data to help inform the board of the data we hold on various issues from the likes of fabric condition to child poverty. This will take into account any revisions to EPC's which are being consulted on at present by the Scottish Government.

We have also arranged a follow up with a specialist energy data agency ProCode to establish if we could employ their software to help map the residential community assets. This is an API solution, but we need to interrogate how well mapped the data is in our locality.

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This is an API solution, but the ESU needs to interrogate how well mapped the data is in our locality.

Ecofit can work with home energy management apps to understand the energy portfolio of a home and reduce their customers' bills via the API. Integrated with their own systems, the API provides the data on the fabric of the property along with smart meter data.

3) OFGEM Chairman – Meeting with RIFPAG

Stewart Wilson attended the Rural and Islands Fuel Poverty Action Group meeting in Glasgow in late November on behalf of Point & Sandwick Trust. As a group we had the rare opportunity to meet with the Chairman of OFGEM, Mark McAllister, in order to communicate to him a range of issues particular to the Island and rural communities. The discussion covered:

The RTS and smart meter roll out –
• Poor engagement
• Lack of contractors
• Lack of logistical support
• Lack of Utility consumer support
• Signalling issues
• Technical installation issues
• Responsibility for errors -utilities must be made to cover installation error billing
• The group called for more proactive measures from Ofgem to ensure suppliers take accountability and act quicky to resolve issues to support vulnerable tenants.

Off Gas consumers
• RIFPAG members asked that Ofgem admits its responsibility to vulnerable off-gas customers and asked for solutions which mitigate the price gap, with suggestions of a social tariff to ensure off-gas households can access heat at prices comparable to gas.
• Ofgem have a national heat electrification strategy – however it will not be possible if electricity is not affordable. Ofgem must incentivise the move off gas to electric heating.

While electric heating could be beneficial in the long term, there must be significant policy changes and incentives to make it affordable and equitable for low-income households.

Demand Side Rural Tariff
• Discussion focused on the development of a proposal for a demand-side rural tariff aimed at addressing fuel poverty and improving energy affordability in off-gas rural areas. The initiative, proposed by members in partnership with Connected Response, aims to reduce costs, optimise energy use, and ensure vulnerable households benefit from smart energy solutions.

4 Cross Party Group – Island Housing

At the request of PST, Stewart Wilson has participated in the Scottish Government's Cross-Party Group on Islands - Island Homes II (9th Oct 2024/11th Dec 2024). This group
discussed the fuel options for new homes and development options, models and barriers for new homes across the Islands. He has been invited to attend the parliamentary event on 2nd April 2025 run by the group in the parliament building.

5 Partnership Working
Dan Morrison and Stewart Wilson met with Donald Morrison of Home Energy Scotland in late December. Donald is a familiar partner to Dan and Stewart as he is based in Lewis but operates across the Hebrides and the West coast and Inner Hebrides. Donald is keen to establish a closer working partnership with the ESU for events in Point & Sandwick and we were very supportive of this approach. We will aim to develop some joint working opportunities in the first half of 2025.

6 Home Repair Service – Piloting Case Studies
While awaiting clarification on funding to allow the service to go live, the ESU undertook a small number of pilot works to enable the Board to better understand the type of work which could be tackled. Illustrations of the works undertaken were given at the meeting.

7 Dampness and Dehumidifiers: Winter Packs
We have been in discussion with Utilita's Business Development Manager and Partnership's Manager (North) re Utilita Giving, the charity associated with their energy company. We have prepared a bid for them to support the issuing of dehumidifiers for the winter packs which would allow us to extend this support to additional homes.

The ESU Report was noted.

8 POINT AND SANDWICK TRUST by Donald John MacSween

1. Finance

The balance in the PST account is c£200,000

The balance in the Insignis Investments Account is £212,017.
An Insignis update report is appended, recommending building up PST reserves in Insignis to £1m by the AGM in November, once dividend has been received.

The balance in the ESU account is c£32,056 and it will require a top up of £20k before the end of May.

A Report on the Budget and actual spend compared to the Budget to the end of December is appended.

The Gift Aid payment up to the end of November 2024 is assumed to be £2m.

1. Grants Sub-Committee

The recommendations of the Grants Sub-Committee of 27 January 2025 were all **approved**.

2. Point and Sandwick Trust: Community Support : Update

1) Coastal Trail
The Aird, Upper Aird to Sheshader project is due to open on 23rd January, this month. A Westminster Parliamentary Question, dated October 1902, asked when a

footpath from Aird to Sheshader would be completed and the answer given then was at the end of the subsequent month! A wide range of local organisations have been invited to participate as well as external funders from the Ian Findlay Fund (Paths for All). An application was made to the Woodland Trust for native trees to be planted in the vicinity of the new bridge. 300 trees are being reserved for planting this Spring.
Paths for All agreed to a change request before Christmas to reallocate nearly £100K from Melbost/ Aignish to Knock\Swordale to Lower Bayble\Eagleton development. This project is now live with works which do not require planning consent being initiated and consent has been applied for two 240m sections that were gaps in preexisting tracks.
Sheshader -Dun Dubh is expected to be more straight forward once PST funds become available later and local access issues are resolved. A change of access will probably require a further planning application.
There is uncertainty about future path development funding. Path for All has a full programme for 2025. Alasdair Nicholson has raised with them the possibility of an expression of interest submission for Steinish to Sandwick in case there is slippage in their programme. It is likely that after next year path development funding will be routed through transport partnerships and local authorities. Given the examples of Crown Estates, which were 'local funding' streams but essentially, and subsequently, subsumed into authority budgets, that may not be good news for accessing the size of grants we have been able to have recently.

2) Sandwickhill School

Ken Kennedy has taken over as chair. Donald John MacSween is going to take forward with Just Enterprise the prospect of external support in developing their business plan.

3) Garrabost Mill

Since the last batch of PST and HIE funding was approved Tony Robson has been busy arranging material and works relating to the grants. The road improvements and ordering of the external toilet units have been scheduled and additional safety works. Calum Graham is involved with works progress and GMT has been advised on pursuing electrical plans and details required for building warrant submission. A separate bid relating to the purchase of Croft 53 has been submitted to PST for £73,000. This would significantly enhance the potential of the site, which is transformational and likely to be a once-only opportunity.

4) Constitutions and advice

As previously advised, a draft constitution for a Community Hut was provided for the steering group. This has been approved by the group and an application to OSCR has been made for charity recognition on their behalf. OSCR sought some clarification which was provided to them.

Two funding applications were made on behalf of Knock Youth group towards a skatepark. The two bids were successful, worth nearly £20,000. Tony Robson has applied for planning permission on their behalf. The group were successful with much of their own funding efforts but there is still a potential shortfall of around £18-

19,000 towards their estimated project cost of £107,502. It is recommended that £19,000 be set aside, in reserve, to enable them to draw on this should this be required before the next PST Grants Sub-Committee is scheduled later in the year. Part of the conditions of some of their funding require some work to progress.

4. Impact Hub Meeting

A proposal from Impact Hub to carry out a Social Impact appraisal and a 5 Year Development plan for 2025-2030 will be tabled at the Board meeting.

5. Tourism Development

Members will recall discussing the possibility of setting up a Social Enterprise to take advantage of the growth in tourism, particularly cruise ship visits, to establish tourist destinations in the PST area- Iolaire Memorial, Sandwickhill School, Eaglais na h-Aoidhe, Aignish Riots and Crofters Memorial, Garrabost Mill, Knock Mission Hall, Tiumpanhead Lighthouse etc.

I have asked Impact Hub, through Just Enterprise, to explore and recommend an appropriate legal structure to drive tourism development in the PST area.

This was agreed and noted.

6. Sandwickhill School Development

I was given permission by the above to apply for Just Enterprise help in formulating a Business Plan for the above to enable them to progress the purchase of the school and site from the council.

I hope the bid will be successful and the Business Plan will enable them to conclude the purchase with the grant awarded by PST in November.

This was agreed and noted.

7. Local Innovation Centre

In the past PST have supported Lews Castle College to set up an Innovation Centre on the local UHI campus. Given recent changes and downsizing at the College it is obvious that the Innovation Centre is no longer functioning as planned.

There is still a need for an Innovation Centre form in the PST area, and Impact Hub said they would be interested in helping us set up a fund, having previously considered setting up such a fund to support young entrepreneurs by providing seed corn funding.

They are enthused by the idea, and they have expertise in appraising new business ideas. They will prepare a proposal in time for the March Board meeting.

The General Manager's Report was agreed and noted.

8. Tighean Innse Gall Housing Projects PST Area

The General Manager reported that he received a Housing Proposal from TIG suggesting a PST loan to bridge the funding gap in their business plan for 12 Low-Cost Home Ownership in the Melbost area.

The loan option in the Proposal as currently presented is not affordable, it would impact the requirement to refinance/replace the turbines in 2029-30, and the grant option, while moderately more affordable, would severely impact other PST activities by committing funds to help a relatively small number of people, however well deserved.

The Board agreed not to approve the proposal and discuss with TIG to see if PST could help with the project in some other way.

9 ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Eddie Macgregor raised the issue of payments to the local Hospice which currently receives £55k per annum and asked if they could they be given as a one-off payment, £55k plus £10k, or a similar figure given that it is struggling for money to keep theses valuable services going.

This was agreed.