



CAITHNESS ARTS FORUM
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD IN
MOWAT ROOM,
ASSEMBLY ROOMS, WICK
11-12-09

Present:

Lord MacLennan
David Morrison
John Green
Nancy Nicholson
Graeme Smith
Graham Elliott
George Gunn
Christine Russell
Jenny Bruce

In attendance: Koreen MacDougall, David Shearer

The chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

1. APOLOGIES

Shelagh Swanson
John Cairns
Rachel Skene
Robert Coghill
Ian and Bunty Gunn
Jane Paige
Willie Mackay
Eann Sinclair
David Brookfield
Alistair Cruickshank
Katrina McNabb
Jennifer Irvin

2. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the last Caithness Arts Forum meeting 27-03-2009 were approved as a true record of the proceedings, proposed by George Gunn and seconded by Graham Elliott.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM LAST MEETING

Agreement to deal with these under AOCB.

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4. THE PURPOSE OF THE CAITHNESS ARTS FORUM

The Chair invited Koreen MacDougall to remind everyone of what the forum was originally set up to function. Koreen explained to the forum that it had been originally formed in 2006 and read out the original aims and standing orders:

AIM

The aim of the Forum is to provide a forum for members of the arts community in Caithness and the relevant government agency bodies with an interest in the arts to discuss matters relevant to the promotion of the arts in Caithness.

OBJECTIVES

- To develop a local policy for arts (and this will include an emphasis on the need to support artists financially)
- To provide a forum for the exchange of views on how member organisations can work together well
- To develop a higher profile for the arts economically and culturally
- To allow communities to feedback to each other and the public agencies about their arts activities/projects
- To help develop a common view of the arts - both amateur and professional, local, national and international - as integral to a healthy economic and social infrastructure
- To ensure that the arts sector is fully involved in the community planning agenda for Caithness

The Forum will take cognisance of, and promote, the fact that the county has a wealth of arts activity in the various sectors – performance arts (music, dance and drama), visual arts, crafts and the written word - and give due attention to each form.

The Chair thanked Koreen for the explanation and stated that it was quite apparent that the forum was not achieving that kind of an impact and therefore should review the purpose, and direction as well as alternative ways of delivery of the forum. The chair explained that this was particularly important to review this at this time due to the current financial climate. The chair stated that it was near certain that public funding for the Arts was going to be substantially tightened and that the arts are therefore one of the most vulnerable sectors in the community. It is therefore an advantage to the arts community to have the support of the Caithness Partnership and its members.

Koreen MacDougall explained to the forum that the Caithness Partnership is not biased in any way and its role is to facilitate the Caithness Arts Forum. Koreen reminded the forum that the Caithness Partnership's members also support the work of the Partnership including all of the forums that the Partnership facilitates. These members are; Association of Community Councils, Caithness Business Club, Caithness Chamber of Commerce, HIE Caithness and Sutherland, Caithness Voluntary Group, Forest Enterprise, Highlands and Islands Federation of Small Businesses, Highlands and Islands Fire and Rescue Service, National Farmers Union of Scotland, NHS Highland, Northern Constabulary, Scottish Water, Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, Scottish Environment Protection Agency, Scottish Natural Heritage, Scrabster Harbour Trust, The Highland Council, The North Highland College, Thurso and Wick Trade Union Council, UKAEA, Visit Scotland, Wick Harbour Authority. Koreen stated that having the

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support and cooperation of these organisations has significant benefits as well as indirect benefits to the arts community in Caithness.

5. RELATIONSHIP OF CAITHNESS ARTS FORUM AND CAITHNESS ARTS

The chair stated that he wondered if there was a case for one organisation instead of two. The Chair reported that he had discussed with the Chairperson of the Caithness Arts Alistair Cruickshank. The Chair reported that the Chairperson of the Caithness Arts thought that, in his personal view, that there was indeed a case for the two organisations becoming one because there is a risk of having two separate voices not perhaps united and secondly that there is a risk that people will take the view that as they are a member of one organisation they may not bother with the other which will weaken the impact of both. The Chair also stated that the amount of time artists have to commit to organisations such as the forum is limited, which further endorses the need for only one organisation.

John Green Chair of the Caithness Partnership explained that the partnership's role is not to take over any organisation but to work with and facilitate with people and organisations involved in the Arts in Caithness.

The chair stated that in a community such as the size of Caithness, we have to be extremely careful about proliferating the interest of the arts and that the community has a large number of organisations doing wonderful things for the arts such as the Wick Players, Greycoast and Northlands Creative Glass as well as numerous individuals. The chair stated that we need to showcase these organisations as well as assist with their needs such as travel and that this should be the agenda for which ever organisation is to function.

The Chair acknowledged that due to the nature of arts, everyone will have their own particular interests that they wish to pursue but that it is important to understand that to be effective, it is necessary to have an overview of how things are to be taken forward with clear aims and objectives. The Chair stated that both Alistair Cruickshank and himself have agreed that there ought to be a discussion regarding strategy as they are both concerned about speaking with two voices, duplication and spending half the time reporting what the other organisation is doing, therefore making it twice as difficult to secure funding.

George Gunn stated that it is important that we define what Caithness Arts Forum and Caithness Arts are. He explained that he is not able to speak for Caithness Arts but his understanding is that Caithness Arts is a membership organisation where their members pay for membership and is an artist led body. Therefore it is up to Caithness Arts to decide what they wish to do but in his opinion can be represented at the CAF just as any other CAF member. Caithness Arts Forum is an entirely different body where people can talk and take collective decisions regarding strategy and its strength is that it is part of the Caithness Partnership. George Gunn reported that in January 2008 he met with Angela Saunders, Scottish Government Cultural Division. George discussed with Angela Saunders the Arts in Caithness, the decommissioning of Dounreay and the need for regeneration in Caithness. He stated that Angela recognised the significant role the arts had in regeneration and that she was very impressed that the Caithness Arts Forum was part of the Caithness Partnership which demonstrated that they had community support for the CAF which ties in nicely with the Scottish Government document, Culture Delivers. This document was produced to assist local bodies and authorities to come to single outcome agreements for the arts in community planning. George stated that he believes this therefore is the strength of the CAF and the fact that we haven't drawn on this is the lack of an arts strategy. He stated that in his view what the

Draft For Approval at Next Meeting of the Forum

CAF need to do is focus on an arts strategy that would benefit the artists in the community and the people who live here and how the arts can play a constructive role in the regeneration of our area when Dounreay decommissioning is completed. It should therefore be the CAF function to talk up the role of the Arts within the regeneration and community planning and that is the reason why he is here.

The Chair thanks George for his contribution and asked for Jenny Bruce for her view.

Jenny reported that Caithness Arts at present are carrying out a study on their members gathering feedback on exactly what they want. Jenny stated that there is a need for help on the ground with money, help with transporting to exhibitions and to showcase the work that is done in Caithness. Jenny reported that she has met with Murray Lamont because the Arts in Caithness are not being exposed in any of the travel brochures or tourism sector.

Koreen MacDougall explained that Rachel Skene, HIE's newly appointed Head of Tourism had been very keen to come to the meeting but was unable to attend and it would therefore be in the interests of the Caithness Arts to contact Rachel.

David Morrison explained that the Caithness Arts have a good strategy and hopefully will not be a fund source for performances. He stated that it is the Caithness Arts intention to support its members with funding advice, networking opportunities and to promote the value of the whole cultural sector, professional, voluntary and amateur in Caithness. It is the proposed intention that Caithness Arts is going to be a facilitator. The Caithness Arts has approximately 60 prescriptions consisting of individual artists, crafts people and groups. The Caithness Arts is not going to be promotional but will be an agency through which members can use as an advisory service. David stated that therefore he doesn't see any conflict between Caithness Arts and CAF.

Nancy Nicholson wondered if the fact that two arts organisations of very similar names is a mistake. She explained that the CAF could be mistaken for a discussion forum for the Caithness Arts. Nancy also stated that it is important to agree a strategy before looking at what people's problems are or where funding is available.

Graeme Smith explained why the CAF was initially set up and that it was setup for the same reasons as the Caithness Partnerships Transport Forum was formed. He stated that they were never meant to bodies which would be a conduit for funding or fundraising organisations. They were forums where practitioners could get together with the wider community to discuss what the wider community expected of the practitioners therefore placing the customer and practitioner together. This was quite separate from what Caithness Arts were doing which was formed to promote specifically arts and to find ways to secure the funding necessary to achieve this.

Graeme explained that the CAF was deemed necessary because of the concept of one Scotland featuring community partnerships and community planning, where these community bodies could only secure funding if they met the single outcome agreement. This meant that the only way to secure funding was by having community backing for these individual projects and this was where the forum was seen to have the big advantage by demonstrating clearly to the relevant funding bodies that the applicant has community backing. Graeme stated that he therefore sees a significant role for the CAF that is a wider role than the arts practitioners and believes that the arts practitioners should be responsible for securing funds. The practitioners

Draft For Approval at Next Meeting of the Forum

should be coming up with project ideas, informing the CAF about the projects then getting the CAF to agree that the project has the community blessing and then approach the funding source stating, this is our project, we thought it up, but have the approval of the wider group that discusses arts in Caithness. In this model there is therefore a place for the CAF but is really quite a limited role and is simply an umbrella group giving blessing and therefore would not have to meet that often but will have an understanding of what is going on in the Arts and how it fits into the community. This therefore provides the practitioners with far greater strength to their funding application. Graeme also acknowledged that it would be difficult to find a solution to avoid duplication in the arts sector due to the individual nature of needs.

The Chair acknowledged that this would be difficult, as the Arts community is a community of individuals and will all have different priorities therefore making it difficult to establish agreement.

Christine Russell explained that the forum was created in an attempt to provide an opportunity to raise the profile of the Arts without necessarily having the burden of a constitution or having to deal with individual pots of money. At this time community planning was something everyone had to take note of and The Caithness Partnership in her opinion was an ideal mechanism to oversee and support the activities of a sector within Caithness which was trying to function with some substance and economic understanding. Christine stated that in her opinion the fact that we are now having difficulty defining the forum is just a casualty of history.

The Chair expressed his concern stating that there are numerous worthy Arts organisations in the community and all of them have individual needs for finance, require support and approval. The Chair questioned how as a function this in reality would work. David Morrison agreed, stating that it is unlikely to get all of these groups in agreement together.

The Chair stated that before we agree a strategy it might be an idea to hold an Arts Day where during the day, people can put forward their creative and constructive ideas and the evening can be structured to a more social entertainment setting and hopefully at the end of this event we would be able to find our voice and therefore establish a strategy. This would require a special effort from all our members and also to possibly call on the support of the members of the Caithness Partnership. David Morrison also stated that as well as the Arts sector, it would be a good idea to invite people from the business sector.

George Gunn stated that there had been previous discussion regarding holding a Caithness Culture Day in Holyrood where there is a whole day of events for MPS's and constituents to come and see so we can raise our profile. George stated that we need to come up with actions that Koreen MacDougall can carry out

Jenny Bruce explained that Caithness Arts as part of their development are already putting together an Arts event over two days where one would be for the business sector and the other for the general public with an informal session in the evening.

Koreen MacDougall stated that it is excellent that the Caithness Arts are doing this and now that the forum is aware, it save us wasting resources planning a duplicate event when Caithness Arts are clearly already ahead working on such an event. The Chair stated that the event should be carried out by the Forum where Koreen MacDougall has the ability to act as an executive. The Chair further stated that if the Forums role is simply to say that we support the event, then it is quite simply pointless. Jenny Bruce explained that the Forum would not just be

Draft For Approval at Next Meeting of the Forum

supporting the event but would be present at the event and could have a stall as well as a voice. The Chair stated that this scenario cannot be the role of the Forum. Either the Forum is going to make an impact or it does not deserve to exist. Jenny Bruce stated that surely the Forum is a discussion place and not an actual organisation to take forward an idea but a place for discussion where the organisations within the Forum can give their approval or disapproval.

George Gunn stated that the Forum is an aspect of the Caithness Partnership that addresses the Arts in Caithness. The Caithness Arts is an organisation that represents its members. We as artists in Caithness have a duty to develop a strategy that moves the Arts forward and should therefore use the Caithness Partnership to its full advantage. That is what it is for and that is what the community wants. The Forum is not about juggling cats, it is about moving forward strategically so that the people who live after us can benefit. George suggested that before the proposed Arts event, we should have a draft strategy distributed throughout the community to enable us to retrieve feedback at the Arts event so we can decide as an Arts community a strategy for the Arts. What we should be seeking is a form of unity and hopefully the Forum is where we will find unity.

The Chair agreed stating that unity is also his hope and with regards to the Arts event, would like to see the Forum provide the platform for this event. If the Forum is representative of all these organisations and Caithness Arts is representative of all theirs then surely to goodness we can get it together.

The Chair summarised stating that that at least we all seem to agree that there should be an Arts event of this kind. We therefore need to establish a proposed date for such an event to allow plenty notice. Jenny Bruce explained that Caithness Arts have already discussed a venue and how to execute such an event.

Koreen MacDougall suggested that if Caithness Arts have already carried out all the planning for such an event, why don't Caithness Arts carry out the event and the Caithness Partnership will then gather all the information obtained at the event and produce a document where the Forum can then discuss and decide a strategy from the document produced.

The Chair and the meeting agreed that this would be a satisfactory way forward.ⁱ

George Gunn suggested that any draft Arts strategy presented prior to the event should include Education in the Arts, Arts Form Development and Audience Development which are very important and that one leads to the other.

The Chair agreed that it is important to have a document circulated in advance of the Arts event. He stated that the question is who would be responsible for producing it. The Chair stated that ideally there should be a dialog between Caithness Arts and Caithness Arts Forum on the content of the document of draft strategy and the document should not be attributed to any individual or organisation therefore saying that we have all agreed it as something worthy of discussion.

David Morrison agreed suggesting the formation of a small committee of the Chair, George Gunn, a Caithness Arts representative and Caithness Partnership to agree a draft strategy.

The Chair agreed and asked if all present agreed which was then approved by all at the meeting.ⁱⁱ

Draft For Approval at Next Meeting of the Forum

6. Potential Arts Venues

John Green explained regarding suitable Arts venues, that Koreen MacDougall has been working on looking at upgrading the Wick Assembly Rooms which would provide a suitable Arts venue. Koreen explained that this was still at an early stage of development and consultation is still ongoing with user groups. The aim is to bring the Assembly Rooms up to a modern standard attracting a wider range of user groups from the Arts sector right across to the Business sector with broadband access, improved changing rooms and tiered seating.

David Morrison listed to the Forum potential Arts venues in Caithness; Assembly Rooms, St Fergus Kirk, Mackays Hotel, Wick High School, Mill Theatre, Lyth Arts Centre, Thurso High School, and Local Hotels. George Gunn added that there are also 24 perfectly suitable village halls.

7. A.O.C.B.

George Gunn raised the issue for the purpose of minutes, regarding the Cinema which is now closed and is not therefore good news. Koreen MacDougall agreed and also stated that this would be a good potential Arts venue.

Koreen stated that she has met with Jennifer Irvin from Business Gateway regarding business startup issues which might be of interest to the Arts. Koreen explained that Jennifer had intended to attend the meeting but was unable to do so. Koreen passed round information leaflets from Jennifer Irvin.

The Chair concluded that the meeting had been helpful and thanked everyone for attending.

8. Date & Time of Next Meeting.

Date to be confirmed for a suitable Friday in late January-February

ⁱ Action – Caithness Partnership to produce document from information gathered at the proposed Caithness Arts Event. – *Koreen MacDougall – Caithness Partnership*

ⁱⁱ Action – Formation of subcommittee to establish a draft Arts Strategy for circulation prior to the proposed Caithness Arts Event. – *Koreen MacDougall – Caithness Partnership*