

**Report from Chair of the Board of Assynt Development Trust on the current situation regarding its future governance.**

ADT is a success story in that it has emerged from the previous Assynt Community Association focusing on support of other local community groups, to being the recognised anchor body for Assynt as well being the primary recipient of external funding to the area. It played a significant role in attracting and distributing the funding to aid resilience during the covid pandemic and can claim credit for a wide range of other projects that have benefitted Assynt since its creation less than ten years ago. One measure of this success being level of turnover which was £95K in 2022, £142K in 2023 likely to be close to this for 2024, mainly from restricted grant funding for projects.

The major part of this success is due to hard efforts and capability of Adam Pellant and Ewen McLachlan making up our single (job shared development officer post). At the outset of seeking funding for this post in 2017 the Board decided it did not want to burden it with significant amounts of administration on behalf of ADT, but rather to focus on development activities. This meant such administration fell on the Board to undertake and the bulk of this was undertaken by Willie Jack as the Chair (though with some unpaid accounts assistance in effect fulfilling the Treasurer function). Willie gave significant time and energy to addressing the multiple issues facing ADT and without his dedication and leadership it would not be where it is today. Most notably through mechanism of Community Asset Transfer he consolidated its financial position by acquiring the freehold of the Mission building and Culag Park to ADT. Unusually for a Development Trust, ADT now has this secure asset as well the acquisition of the Glebe Land providing an opportunity for ADT to develop much needed affordable housing, as well as recreational and possibly job creating activities.

Since Willie and Sue Jack moved away from Assynt in late 2023 the tasks of Chairing, Treasurer and those of Company Secretary have fallen on me to sustain, and I am very aware of not always managing to maintain the standard of attention provided by Willie. At the outset I stated I would do this as a temporary matter, and yet more than two years have elapsed and here I am still finding it too demanding and an ever constant burden that prevents me pursuing other interests and activity. I have made it clear to the Board I intend standing down from being Chair (and also in effect Treasurer and Secretary) at this coming AGM. I will remain on the Board and (on an interim basis) I will undertake the critical financial function of paying bills, wages and so forth as well as the closing the accounts for 2024, and the transfer of this function to an outside provider.

Unfortunately none of the current Directors wish to take on the task of Chairing the Board. It may be alternative ways can be found to fulfil this function, but there is a real crisis facing ADT of an existential nature, if it cannot attract and retain members of the community to share in its governance. It is apparent that ADT is not alone in facing such difficulties and other community groups also face similar issues. Hence it may be opportune for ADT to join the ongoing debate within Assynt on the means of governing and sustaining community assets and organisations.

Meanwhile I believe the Membership of ADT need to be aware of the situation facing the Board. The Board will be meeting ahead of the AGM and hopefully finding a way forward to address the multiple issues raised above, and will be able to report on this to the Membership at the AGM.

I hope you will be able to attend this meeting.

Nigel Goldie Chair Assynt Development Trust

## **Update on recent projects:**

*Lochinver Glebe Housing* – thanks to funds raised from Communities Regeneration Fund, Crown Estates Community Capacity-building Programme, Rural & Island Rural Housing Fund and SSE Sustainable Development Fund, the detailed design work has been ongoing. The planning decision on the first phase of 10 houses has been long delayed, mainly due to extra work required to design the access from Lochinver Main Street with kerbed footpath. Planning permission is expected any time now, following the Transport Planner's supportive response on 27<sup>th</sup> February 2025.

*NW2045* – The Northwest 2045 group, for which ADT acts as the Anchor Organisation, has gone from strength. This collaboration of community development organisations, environmental bodies, HIE and Highland Council has become a real advocate for the Northwest.

- Notable successes have seen NW2045 and Highland Council appoint ADT as the anchor organisation for the Scottish Government's Regional Land Use Partnership (RLUP). This essential piece of community engagement with community, eNGO and private landowners has attracted circa £450,000 to the Northwest, the vast majority of which has been retained locally due to our policy of employing and upskilling local contractors.
- We also managed to compile a Natural Capital Audit for the Northwest which has given us an indication of the value our peatland restoration, re-forestation and biodiversity restoration contributes towards the Net Zero targets.
- In 2024 we were awarded funds to employ a Northwest 2045 facilitator and co-ordinator. This post has been incredibly helpful, recently we've undertaken wide-ranging community consultation, commissioned Biggar Economics to undertake an economic baseline report into the GVA (Gross Value Added) of the Northwest, which outlines whether certain areas are undergoing growth or decline in their economic output, it will also outline the expected community benefits that should arise from Renewable Energy and Natural Capital projects across the area.
- We have been advocating on child care issues and training for people to learn the required skills of both child and elderly care.
- We have been awarded funding from the Scottish Government's 'Addressing Depopulation Fund, which will give us a better understanding of the scale of the problems and discovering the most effective means of tackling the problem. This document is in draft form at the moment and should be publicly available soon.

*Clashnessie Falls Footpath, winter 2024-25* – ADT agreed to lead on this project to enable grant funding to be sourced towards the work, and the work has now been successfully completed.

*Assynt Food Larder* – Further grants have been sourced through 2024 to cover the cost of food supplies. Thanks, continue to be due to Assynt Leisure, local donors, and Mary and Iain Macleod for co-ordinating the larder.

*Assynt Local Place Plan* – A Local Place Plan is a new kind of formal document, used in the local authority's planning process and elsewhere. Most Highland community areas now have one or are in the process of creating one, to help enable development especially built development. ADT aim to create one for Assynt in 2025, which will involve local consultation on where people think different kinds of developments could or should occur.

*Seaweed Farming Proposal* – Jointly with Kinlochbervie and Scourie development organisations, a business plan was commissioned, building up a proposal for a sustainably farmed seaweed business

in the north-west. The business plan proposes 3 buildings, including one in Lochinver, for processing harvested seaweed along with spare space for local business rental, and suggests potential for several seaweed farm sites around Assynt's coastline, subject to future discussions with local coast users including creelers. The farms would be similar to mussel farms, with seaweed, mainly kelps, grown on seeded lines in relatively sheltered locations.

*Achmelvich car park & public toilets* – with input from ADT especially in the early design and fundraising stages, Highland Council's contractors have completed car park and public toilets works at Achmelvich, subject to water and electricity connections to the toilets which are hoped to be ready to open by Easter 2025.

*Discover Assynt*- Last year saw the first Discover Assynt tourism forum since 2019 and the advent of the Covid and pandemic. A dozen or so tourism business attended and engaged in conversation with speakers from Venture North and Visit Scotland across a wide range of issues ranging from Short Term Let legislation to the proposed Visitor Levy.

*Lochinver former Highland Council mental health drop-in building, and Assynt community work shed group* – Assynt's community work shed group has grown with many people locally keen to have a building for activities like DIY and crafts with a social aspect, similar to the 'men's shed' concept but for any gender. One building they were exploring use of was the former HC mental health drop-in building on Lochinver main street which has been unused for many years. ADT could potentially acquire this from HC through the Community Asset Transfer process. Having considered responses from local consultation on use of the building, the ADT board think it would be best used for retail or other business enterprise. Expressions of interest in local rental of the building are planned to be sought soon, after which ADT could acquire the building then rent it to one or more local business.

*The Luis Gouveia Fund* – ADT agreed to take on this fund several years ago. It is intended to fund worthwhile ventures by local young people involving travel, and ADT have generally felt able to commit £500 per year of their unrestricted funds, to grant funding requests, usually to one or two people per year. The guidance for applying is currently being updated, to help give clarity to those interested.

*Assynt eBikes* – ADT over recent years acquired around 7 e-Bikes including an e-Cargo-trike, with Assynt Leisure managing their local rental. The bikes are getting old now and Assynt Leisure no longer have capacity to manage their rental, so ADT are planning to seek local expressions of interest in purchasing the eBikes.