

2023 AGM of Harris Forum – Report of the Chair

It is my privilege to present my second AGM report as Chair.

I would firstly like to pay tribute to Margaret Mackenzie who was our vice-Chair until she recently stepped down from Scalpay Community Council. Margaret provided me with valuable support and guidance at all times since I took on the role of Chair. Her work on the Community Council and Harris Transport Forum has been for the benefit of all in Harris and we wish her well. Secondly I thank Linda and Michael for their diligent work as the joint secretaries this past year.

In my report in December 2022 I discussed the recruitment campaign to get a new Development Officer in post which at that point in time had not been successful. A new advertising campaign was started in early 2023 and this elicited a better response resulting in David MacDonald starting in post in early March. I would like to put it on record how much I enjoy working with David and to express the Forum's thanks for the energy, drive and enthusiasm he has brought to the role. The community groups David has supported in the time he has been in post have provided very positive feedback and significant progress has been made on a number of projects important for our Island.

On behalf of the Member Organisations I would like to thank our Harris Councillors for their time and the support they give the Forum. We hope they find their participation beneficial as they represent the people of Harris.

In the year since our last AGM the Forum has started to improve its visibility in the wider Harris Community. Our use of social media and developing a website alongside more traditional methods of information dissemination will help to raise our profile. This will be a focus for the coming year. David has also been instrumental in meeting with our peer groups in other island communities through national events and meetings on matters of common interest.

We have benefitted from guest speakers wanting to come to make presentations to the Forum and this will be encouraged in the New Year. We were delighted to have Cllr Paul Steele present to us recently discussing the pressing budget issues faced by the Comhairle.

In the year the Harris Plan has been updated to include a matrix scoring of all projects. This helps to ensure a fair allocation of the Development Officer's time and resources. The work to keep the Plan up to date and relevant is a big part of David's role but it is important that groups with items on the plan keep him updated on progress on a regular basis.

During 2023 a Housing Sub-Group of the Forum was created with participation from CnES, HHP and TIG. We now have a Joint Strategy Housing Plan approved by that group. The Plan document and Sub-Group have been of benefit already providing pressure to address the number and phasing of house builds in the proposed Leverburgh development. If agreed by Member Organisations, further Sub-Groups will be created as and when required to address specific issues.

Although some initial work was done on updating the Harris Forum Constitution in 2023 this is now a project for the Member Organisations to review and agree in early 2024.

The challenges of the coming year are not to be underestimated, however, I believe the Forum is in good shape to face them. I thank the Member Organisations and their representatives for the support they have given me as Chair during the year and for the open debate we have had on a wide range of issues.

Paul Munro, Chair