



**21 November 2023**  
**7:20 PM | Bonar Bridge Hall**

### **EXTRAORDINARY GENERAL MEETING**

**In Attendance:** Chair Silvia Muras (SM), Vice Chair Samantha Kane (SK), Treasurer Sabrina Ross (SR), Secretary Anna McInnes, Member Buster Crabb (BC), Cllr Michael Baird (MB). *Full list of community members in attendance is appended to the end of the minutes.*

#### **1. Welcome & Apologies**

Chair SM opened the meeting to welcome attendees and provided the following opening remarks:

*Welcome everyone to this extraordinary meeting in which we are going to try to collate a response to the consultation put forward by Forestry and Land Scotland regarding the private purchase of 3h of land around Carbisdale Castle.*

*I wish to thank fellow community council members Sabrina Ross, Anna McInnes and Buster Crabb who kindly agreed to hold this meeting, and also to all members of the public present here today.*

*Let's have a meaningful, informative dialogue. Being polite and treating everyone with respect will go a long way to achieve this. There will be opportunities for everyone to comment. This is how this meeting is going to be structured:*

- *The meeting will start with the formal co-optation of Buster Crabb.*
- *Then we will move on to the Carbisdale Castle land purchase, which will have two sessions:*
  - *The first part will be a presentation by Samantha Kane in which she will explain her plans with some detail. Please do not interrupt and let her finish her presentation.*
  - *It will be followed by a questions and answers sessions with Samantha. Please just raise your hand if you wish to speak.*
- *After all the questions have been answered, we will move on to the deliberation process, at which point we will invite Samantha Kane to leave the room.*
- *In the first part of the deliberation session, we will hear comments from the floor – so there's another opportunity for the public to speak.*
- *Once we have an indication of public views, we will then pass on to the vote and we will hear the comments from Community Council members.*

*In our decision and our response to Forestry and Land Scotland we will take into consideration arguments in favour and against that will be put forward today and we will vote as councillors with the community's interests at heart.*

*Sales of land to private individuals are unusual, and apart from different requirements like having to ensure that FSL receives at least the open market value for the land, they have to go through an appraisal process. The officer in charge of this sale prepares a report, for which the community council acts as consultee - similar to planning applications. Community Council comments will help*

*inform this report that then he will pass to the Chief executives of FLS, who will ultimately have the final decision on the matter.*

*Thank you all for your patience and let's start this session by moving on to the next item of the agenda, the co-option of Dr Buster Crabb.*

## **2. Co-option of Dr Buster Crabb**

All agree to approve co-option of Buster Crabb.

## **3. Carbisdale Castle third proposal - to acquire from Forestry and Land Scotland an area of 3ha (7.4 acres) adjacent to the castle**

*The Map of proposed purchase area can be found by clicking this link: [Carbisdale 3rd Proposal](#).*

**Presentation:** SK presented an overview of the castle history, the land area proposed for purchase, and plans for development. The restoration costs are approximately £20M. She wants to be transparent and ensure support of the community. Since purchasing the property she has created Lady Carbisdale Trust and Community Interest Company. She currently employs 12 people, will increase to 25, then increase to 70 after the health spa/swimming pool is established. She explained that the first and second proposals received objections, so the third proposal represents a much smaller parcel of land, as suggested at the previous meeting, to include only the foundations and cliffside adjacent to the castle needed to access for maintenance and services. She believes it to be small enough for FLS to legally sell under its Minor Property Sale policy but would like community support. Plans for development are to create private members club with 23 bedrooms for paying guests, ensure castle survival and provide employment and benefits to the local and wider region. It is a local business to provide jobs to local people. The Trust provides grants to groups and donations for fundraising. Community events will be held during January while the business is closed. The objective is to maintain the castle for the future with community support. Evidence of wider support in the region can be provided. Compared to similar properties such as Castle Leod in Strathpeffer. The presentation concluded and the floor was then opened to Q&A from attendees.

### **Q&A with community members:**

- Was the land area proposed based on a compromise suggested at previous meeting in September? SM clarified that FLS provided the suggested defined land area as a compromise and the FLS officer said there is no evidence of foot access to that area.
- Will the swimming pool and spa be located on the proposed purchase area? SK: No, this is not to be in area of proposed purchase.
- Why do you need to purchase this land for maintenance, when you can already access it anyway? SK: Without this land the property will be unmanageable.
- Can you clarify the area of land already owned? Is it just around the boundary walls? SK: There is very little land, indicated the green area of land within the red boundary on the map. Also owns the loch, kitchen garden, tennis courts. Access to the road is unchanged.
- Are you still interested in purchasing the wider land area of the first proposal? SK: No.
- Why do you need land round about the castle/why is it so important? SK: The castle will have 23 rooms for guests, this will be the only garden area. No sense of why SYHA sold it initially.
- Do you have plans to build on this land? SK: no, I can't build on the land.
- Do you plan to fence off the area? SK: no, it is already gated, and surrounded by a steep cliff.

- How much access will the community have to the spa and pool, will it only be when the castle closed during certain times of year? Could locals have a membership/use of facilities would be very welcome? SK: There will be community events in January and possibly throughout the year. The spa will be primarily for paying guests but is open to the prospect of access for the wider community.
- What is the procedure for FLS' Minor Land Purchase? SM clarified that FLS has advised there is no agreement to sell land at present. No matter the size of the purchase there is a process of appraisal that it needs to go through which includes consultation. FLS executives to make final decision and may disregard CC position altogether. FLS views as positives/benefits to community the economic value from employment and preserving the fabric of the castle. FLS are keen for resolution one way or another.
- SM reiterated that it can be that we might approve the sale and then it can be turned down by FLS if it doesn't meet their criteria, or we can reject it today, but FLS might decide that with the previous representations and the business plan put forward to them by SK they have enough to prove a benefit to the community.
- How often does FLS sell of land in area? SM: Sales of public land are unusual.
- Were you aware when you purchased the castle of not having any land and conditions such as the ability to access for services? SK: Yes. A previous prospective purchase was going to include additional land.
- If the land is needed to repair the foundations, surely Forestry & Land Scotland will grant you access? You can repair the foundations without owning the land. SK: No, owning the land is essential.
- Can you explain why this land is so important to business development and employment? SK: The issue is this is a historic building that needs land. The previous owner wanted to purchase land and subsequent owners will also want land.
- Why do you need the land, it's not of use to anyone? What are you going to do with the land? SK: It's not of use to anyone else but me.
- Do you want to obtain a mortgage for a larger investment or sell it for profit? SK: The castle is my legacy, I have no intentions to sell. FLS has sight of my confidential business plan. The castle costs £1M to maintain and has potential to make £1.5M per year which I want to invest in the community. Without land the castle will not be viable and employment opportunities will be lost.
- The Land is useless, but I'm concerned this will set a precedent to buy additional land? SK: it is not easy to buy land, but FLS has minor land policy.
- How does FLS qualify minor land, is it relative to the footprint of the building? SK: It is defined as 5-7 acres. She reiterated the area is not usable.

After the final questions SM closed the Q&A, thanked SK for the presentation and invited her to recuse herself from the following discussion and deliberation process.

#### **Discussion/Deliberation:**

SM opened the deliberation session and explained that a motion will be read out loud for discussion by the community, then put to a vote and the decision with A&DCC comments will be relayed in a letter to FLS. SK has declared an interest and is not aware of the motion being discussed. SM confirmed that SK is aware of the process but not a party to this discussion.

MB explained that the co-option of BC ensured the CC will be quorate, as SK must recuse herself from any item she has an interest in. MB noted that the CC must have a minimum of 4, others can be invited for co-option at future meetings to strengthen the CC.

SM read out the following motion to be discussed, and explained that the community members are welcome to comment on the wording, suggest or remove conditions:

**MOTION:**

To sell 3ha of forestry land around Carbisdale castle, defined as the 3rd proposal, with the following conditions:

1. The buyer will ensure that access and adequate signage for the core paths adjacent to the land are maintained at all times, and that there are no barriers for the community and the wider public to exercise their outdoor access rights, ensuring also access to the loch.
2. This sale should not set a precedent and future purchases of public land should not be considered.

**Discussion points from Community Members:**

- Concerned over pressures SK has put on local people over decisions to be made by CC.
- Sale of FLS must have economic and community benefit, but there was a lack of clarity of community benefit based on information presented by SK, and the business plan has not been shared with the community.
- Commend her for trying to safeguard the castle and wish her well, just not convinced that purchase of land will achieve that.
- Access to the new facilities will be desirable (e.g. spa, swimming pool) but it wasn't deemed necessary to be added as a condition.
- Unclear on what land is already owned by SK and more clarity is needed on what areas will be private vs what will be public.
- The proposed footprint seems excessive, not proportional to the size of the building; a much smaller amount of land could suffice.
- There was an exchange of land suggested previously, not part of this proposal. FLS mentioned that this was rejected by SK. Attendees felt that if this were to be considered, it would demonstrate goodwill, tangible community benefit and generate a high level of support.
- Adequate answers as to what are the plans for the land was not provided, e.g. a structural engineer report and indication of business liability or how to address competition with other assets.
- Concerned about precedent, Scotland's Right to Roam is precious. Previous owners of the castle have acted in bad faith and injured trust in the community.
- What happens if she sells the castle after buying the land?
- Not enough clarity around fencing, concerns around access to the core paths, forest walks and loch, public access.
- The conditions are not enough and can easily be overlooked by FSL during the appraisal process, a rejection would better reflect the community's views.

Several potential conditions were suggested:

- Any future sale of the castle would require return of this land to FLS/public ownership.
- To inform FLS that community does not support in principle the sale of public land to private owner.
- The buyer will facilitate access for locals to the swimming pool and spa (for a fee).

Following the community discussion, the CC members voted to uphold the consensus of the community that the proposed purchaser has failed to clearly demonstrate what benefit to the community will be achieved by the sale of the land, and concerns remain regarding access to core paths, forest walks and loch. The CC will inform FLS of its decision to reject the proposal.

SM explained that FLS has the final decision but will take community views into consideration. She also noted there have been letters of support sent directly to FLS, and CC comments are needed for consultation.

4. **AOCB:** None raised.
5. **Date of next meeting:** TBC

*Meeting closed at 21:30*

DRAFT

List of Community Members in Attendance

NAME	NAME	NAME
C. McMorran	Marc Foggin	
Elr MICHAEL BAIRD	Maureen Foggin	
T. LANGLET.	Hazel J Douglas	
Jan O'Paddy	Peter Monahan	
Beeley clay	Cher Beal	
Sean clay	DAVID BRUCE	
Betty Wright	DIANE ROSS	
Andy Wright	ARTHUR DUNCAN	
	ANNE HENDERSON	
	CHERYL MACDONALD	
	ANGUS MACDONALD	
Joan Flood	JANIS HEDLEY	
Ron Wynn	ROBERT SAGGER	
Carolyn Gibbs	CAROLINE MURRO	
VICTOR HANTADENE	Robert Wilson	
KERRY HAWTHORNE	DIVATE FONSECA	
MARION TURNER WELSH.		
MARCO SOTHELLA		
ELSPETH CALOGE		
ROB GALE		
STAN TOTLINSON		
SUE TOTLINSON		
HOUSE WORTHY		
ALEX ANDREWS		
S-Vinnell		
Kate Morrison		
KEVIN WHIBLER		