

**Minutes of the Mavisbank Trust Board Meeting
held online on
Friday, 11th December 2020**

Present

Rhona Brankin, Chairperson
Sarah Barron, Trustee
Charlie Cumming, Trustee
David Harrowes, Trustee
Chris Lewis, Trustee
Ellen McCalman, Trustee
Keith McIntosh, Trustee
Michael Steven, Trustee
Lucy Wood, Trustee
Ian Young, Trustee

In attendance

James Simpson, Simpson & Brown
Grant Ballantine, Midlothian Council
Pauline Megson, Historic Environment Scotland

ITEM

1. Apologies

Jeff Stoddart, Trustee

2. Mavisbank Trust 2019-20 Annual Account

- 2.1 CL presented the Trust's annual accounts for the 2019-20 financial year which had been circulated previously. After due consideration these were approved by the trustees and RB was authorised to sign the balance sheet and the directors' report on behalf of the Board. It was agreed that CL would lodge a copy of the annual accounts with Companies House and complete the OSCR annual return.

**At this point the meeting was adjourned in order to hold the
Mavisbank Trust's 2020 Annual General Meeting.**

3. Minutes of the Board Meeting of 8th September 2020

- 3.1 The minutes of the Board meeting held on 8th September 2020 were approved as a true record.

4. Matters arising

- 4.1 Paragraph 6.3 - In response to IY's query, GB advised that Midlothian Council would not commence legal work on a CPO of the house before the Mavisbank project started.
- 4.2 Paragraph 6.6 - CL said that he was still awaiting information on costing from Arch Blue and Simpson & Brown regarding finishing the digital reconstruction visualisations and possible additional work.

5. Mavisbank Project Steering Group Update

- 5.1 RB reported that good progress was being made and that the project grant submission to NLHF would be submitted on 26/02/21 with the outcome being known in June 2021. The project was one of 12 UK applicants with the other Scottish candidate being Cairngorms 2030 - People and Nature.

- 5.2 PM said that the Mavisbank Activity Plan was being pulled together by the consultants, Ingham Pinnock, who had held meetings with various local community and heritage organisations to gather their views and scope options for their involvement in the development phase. These had included the Esk Valley Trust, NHS, ELGT, Scotland's Garden & Landscape History and the Mavisbank Trust, as well as Midlothian Council and HES staff.
- 5.3 PM reported that as part of the wider community engagement HES's online survey had received close to 800 responses. Preliminary results suggested that what people liked most were the historic buildings, biodiversity and the peace and quiet of Mavisbank, although all four were very closely ranked. With regard to what people most wanted to see wildlife, better walking routes, nature trails and indoor facilities such as toilets were most important. Whilst restoration was generally supported over-development and light pollution were looked upon negatively.
- 5.4 KM asked if there had been a summary of the survey results produced by the consultants and PM said that she would forward a copy to the Trust. SB enquired about the geographical spread of the responses to the survey and PM reported that 27% came from Bonnyrigg, 20% from Lasswade, 17% from Loanhead, 11% from Edinburgh. PM
- 5.4 IJ asked if the partners had decided what the delivery vehicle would be for the project yet and PM advised that HES would be the lead applicant to the NLHF. However, there various legal and financial issues, such as who would reclaim VAT on works. As there were several possible options HES was awaiting further legal and VAT advice before making any decision.
- 5.5 CL said that to make it easier for the Trust to deal with enquiries it had received and the lack of public information available from HES and Landmark he had put together a Trust 'explainer' outlining the previous attempts to restore Mavisbank and the current project so as to help prevent unfounded rumours spreading within the local community. SB informed the meeting that the Lasswade District Civic Society had sent out incorrect information on the present Mavisbank plans to its members when encouraging them to respond to the online survey. KM agreed that it was important that the local community had the correct information. RB asked PM to get together with CL to ensure that there were no conflicting messaging about the project from the partners.

6. Future Role and Structure of Mavisbank Trust

- 6.1 CL introduced a discussion paper on the future role of the Trust in the Mavisbank project and its potential evolution to become a local community-led organisation. Under the current proposals the Landmark Trust was responsible for the house restoration so the Trust needed to explore how best it could re-position itself so as to be able to play an active role in the development, restoration and community activities within the grounds. If the Mavisbank project was to be successful it was vital that there was an effective mechanism that would enable the local community to engage in a meaningful way with the project and activity plan.
- 6.2 JS said he was strongly supportive of the community trust idea and felt that the sooner a decision was made the better but asked whether or not it would be necessary to establish a new trust. CL pointed out that as the Mavisbank Trust was already a well-established charity it was far easier and quicker for it to adapt to a new role than to set up a new organisation from scratch. He emphasised that this

would be an evolutionary process that would take some time but it was important that the Trust could formulate its long-term ambition as soon as possible.

- 6.3 CL cited Bannockburn House in Stirling as an example with many similarities. After a community buyout the trust, which had over 500 members and volunteers, was working to restore the house and grounds and undertook a wide range of community activities. PM said that the Mavisbank Trust's proposed direction of travel was a good one and it was important that it should be embedded in the community. HES was used to working with volunteers on many of its sites already.
- 6.4 IJ and PM said that consideration needed to be given as to where the Trust fitted into the overall project. CL suggested that HES and Landmark should work more closely with the Trust to establish this and to agree what activities it might take on. RB thought that further down the line the Mavisbank Trust could become an umbrella for project delivery but it was important to know what it could contribute in the immediate future as well.
- 6.3 KM asked which body would be taking overall responsibility for the project even though HES and LT were delivering it jointly. PM advised that HES and LT would have a legal agreement, but that HES would be the lead body. RB enquired about the project timescale and PM said that there would be a 2 year development phase and a 3-4 year delivery phase. HES intended to be custodians of Mavisbank for the long-term and did not intend to walk away from the project.
- 6.4 After further discussion the Board agreed to set up a small sub-group of mainly local trustees to examine how the community trust proposals could be taken forward and to report back to the next meeting. The members of the sub-group would be RB, CL, CC, SB, LW, MS and EM.

7. Report on Website and Social Media

- 7.1 LW said that the Trust needed to establish a social media plan in order to sustain public interest and this should have new and engaging content and also link to local community groups. A draft Mavisbank social media calendar had been produced and she was happy to answer any questions on its content and further ideas via email.
- 7.2 MS said that he had now regained access to and rationalised the Trust's various Twitter and Facebook accounts and all were now identified with the 'Mavisbank Trust' as their handle. Accessing all the social media platforms was now via one generic email which would future proofed it. Nothing has been added to these platforms for a long time and there weren't any links to them from the HES and LT websites. However, the intention was to update the platforms regularly and include the community survey, photos, etc. on the website. He would also like to include a short paragraph of biographical information and photos of all the trustees as well.
- 7.3 MS said it would be good to include guest blog entries relating to Mavisbank on the website and they were looking for volunteers and ideas. Any should be passed on to LW and it was suggested that imminent postings topics might include 'Mavisbank at Christmas, a New Year message and reference to Allan Ramsay. RB thanked MS and LW for all their hard work.

All

8.0 Financial update.

- 8.1 CL updated the board on the Trust's 2020-21 income and expenditure account to the 31st November 2020. There had been very little activity over the last quarter and the

current balance stood at £1,303. A number of gift aid donations had been gratefully received recently and the main outgoing of around £1,000 related to the preparation of the Trust's annual accounts. He noted that it would be advantageous to have an accountant on the board who might be able to volunteer their services to save on this expenditure.

9.0 Any Other Business

9.1 JS apologised for the long delay in finalising the digital visualisations of the house and policies which only needed minor tweaks to complete them. He said that he would be willing to contribute to seminars, blogs, etc. for Trust's website. His proposed book with the Birlinn Press of 3000 word essays on Mavisbank was still at the ideas stage but he hoped that it would be ready for 300th anniversary of Mavisbank's conception in 2022-23.

9.2 GB advised that the Mavisbank Conservation Area Character Appraisal consultation had started the previous week and CL said that he had already circulated the draft Appraisal document to trustees. SB wanted to know whether responses should be made by individuals or as one from the Trust. GB advised that a collective one would be best and IY volunteered to coordinate this if individual members of the board sent theirs to him. In addition, CL noted that the Mavisbank policies had been re-assessed by The Wildlife Information Centre and it had retained its designation as a local biodiversity site.

IY

9.3 CL said that he had been approached by a NatureScot employee living in Loanhead who wished to become a volunteer for Trust. After CL had consulted with PM and Peter Ransom at HES he was now undertaking a tree survey at Mavisbank and updating the Woodland Trust's database of ancient trees. In addition, another company that specialises in drone photography and digital reconstructions had offered pro-bono services at Mavisbank.

9.4 CL said that he was undertaking research to see if there were any connections with a famous 'Blue Mountain' coffee plantation in Jamaica called Mavis Bank which, according to Wikipedia, was named after our Mavisbank.

9.5 IY asked whether it would be possible for the Mavisbank Trust to see the NHLF grant application at some point. PM said that the consultants were coordinating the plan but it was unlikely as it was a confidential document for a competitive bid.

9.6 EM said that Peter Ransom was sending out misleading information to local residents on the future maintenance of Mavisbank and SB said that the HES Landscape Consultant's Mavisbank Landscape Management Plan had still not been made public. PM said that she would speak to PR and report back.

10. Dates of 2021 Board Meetings

4th March, 3rd June, 2nd September and 2nd December - All Thursdays at 2.00pm.