

AGM 2023 Newsletter



Thank you to everyone who joined us at our AGM 2023, we even needed to take out some additional seats. Always great to see the huge interest within the community for the Mill of Benholm. A support which is constantly growing and becoming stronger despite the fact the site still has not been transferred back into the community by Aberdeenshire Council, despite the fact the Mill of Benholm is still closed to the public and despite the fact the buildings, water structures and the whole site are deteriorating every day further and further.

The membership of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise has risen by 54 to 106 members since our AGM in 2022, a further proof of the determination of the community to revive the Mill of Benholm and to secure the site for generations to come.

It was as well good to see Cllr Alison Evison and Cllr George Carr attending the AGM, both are strong supporters of the Mill of Benholm. Although unable to attend the AGM Andrew Bowie MP, Mairi Gougeon MSP and Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands, Tess White MSP and Cllr Laurie Carnie are enthusiastic supporters of the Mill of Benholm.

Emma Pollock, Chair of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise (MoBE) pointed out in her annual report how the MoBE was working together with the North East Scotland Preservation Trust (NESPT) to satisfy the conditions attached to the transfer of the Mill of Benholm to NESPT by Aberdeenshire Council.



Emma explained that new reports were provided to outline the capital and revenue costs associated with the plans for the Mill of Benholm and the benefits to economic development or regeneration, health, and social and environmental wellbeing.

Arc Architects renewed their condition report of the site, divided in different phases. Phase 1 included to make the site safe to enable us to open the Mill of Benholm for visitors and to halt further deterioration to this Grade A listed site. The costs for Phase 1 are estimated with £250,000.

A revised business plan was compiled, and funding allocated from the Coastal Communities Fund for a Development Officer to help with funding applications. This was for a limited time only and has now come to an end now.

NESPT applied for funding with the Coastal Community Fund, Place Based Investment Programme, and the Levelling Up Community Ownership Fund to cover the costs for Phase 1.

Emma spoke further about the work done by MoBE since the last AGM including organising events, increasing the social media presence, engaging journalists and politicians to support the Mill of Benholm

A joint statement together with Historic Churches Scotland, owner of the Historic Benholm Kirk was issued to formally announce the commitment of both organisations to work together in their efforts to promote the whole of the natural and historic beauty of Benholm.

The trustees of MoBE walked through the Mill Brae Woods together with the landowner David Alexander to establish the lease plan for area which will be leased by MoBE from Brotherton Estate to enhance the recreational value of the Mill of Benholm site. The lease is currently drawn up by the solicitors involved on both sides.

Recently an architect from SPAB, the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings visited, offering their support for the restoration of the site and wish to hold a volunteer weekend at the Mill as soon as the ownership has been transferred.

A Conservation Plan for Mill of Benholm is being drawn up by architect, Sonya Linskaill who has been assessing the site recently.

We have laid the foundation for a strong future, but despite everyone's best efforts, NESPT has encountered some severe challenges.

Even though best efforts were made by NESPT to secure funding and the transfer of the Mill of Benholm to NESPT, the Coastal Community Challenge Fund and the Place Based Investment Programme funding applications failed to be successful and due to this NESPT was lacking the required funding for Phase 1.

After long and thoughtful discussions between MoBE and NESPT both organisations agreed the best way forward would be now a true community lead approach and for MoBE to re-apply to Aberdeenshire Council for the Community Asset Transfer of the Mill of Benholm.

With the strong foundation we laid over the last year, the great support of the community, excellent expert advisors, focused political support and a determined board of trustees we shall be working hard to make the Mill of Benholm a success story. We endeavour to transfer the site back to the community where it belongs, halt any further deterioration and revive the Mill of Benholm to the 'Gem of the Mearns' this site is to be enjoyed by the community and visitors alike.

Treasurer John Maxwell presented the accounts for the financial year 2022/23 to the AGM for approval



The total available funds at the end of the financial year were £15,846.41, the building of the website was the largest amount spent with £1,045 and MoBE raised £685.38 during the financial year 2022/23.

The full Report of the Chair and the accounts can be found on our webpage under <https://millofbenholm.scot/annual-report/>

On our webpage there are not only all our plans laid out, but brief description of our trustees, all our policies, the current constitution and much more information.

To bring the Mill of Benholm back into the community is not only a very time-consuming effort by all of our trustees, but it is an expensive venture, and we would be extremely grateful for any donations toward this goal. This can be done through our website at

<https://millofbenholm.scot/donate/>

Sarah Kettles from Sarah Kettles Conservation and Paul Higson from NESPT explained further the future path for the Mill of Benholm and engaging in discussion with the interested community as well as former trustees of MoBE.



Paul explained the given reasons by the Coastal Community Challenge Fund and the Place Based Investment Programme for their decision to decline the funding application, with a big focus on ownership, project might not be finished with the given time frames of the funders, and especially for the PBIP the heritage aspects of this project are irrelevant.



Sarah then outlined the potential future funders which had been contacted to find out the general feeling about this project and the feedback was very positive. She then went on to point out the importance of the cooperation between Historic Churches

Scotland and the Mill of Benholm Enterprise, as this cooperation will make funding much more available, especially when taking the Mill Brae Woods into consideration as well. Due to the abundance of the natural and historical importance of the conservation area of Benholm, the passing Historic Coach Road and the Coastal Path just a stone throw away makes the whole area interesting and in need of a hub, the Mill of Benholm.



Hannah McGregor was elected to become the 5th trustee of the board of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise. Living very close to the Mill she has an interest in reviving this site to its former glory, which Hannah has witnessed when she originally moved to this area.

A few more administrative changes to the constitution were approved by the AGM and the board will continue to review the constitution to make it a working governance document for the Mill of Benholm Enterprise adapting to the needs and changes of the charity.

The trustees of the Mill of Benholm Enterprise would like to thank everyone who made the effort to attend and made the AGM 2023 the success it has been and looking forward to seeing you all in 2024 with hopefully much better news regarding the transfer of the ownership and the re-opening of the Mill of Benholm.

