



## Mill of Benholm Enterprise AGM 2023

### Chairperson's Report

Hello, I am Emma Pollock and current Chair of Mill of Benholm Enterprise. Thank you all for coming along tonight.

Thank you to the other trustees, our treasurer John Maxwell and Minute Secretary, Sally Leavey and especially Vice Chair & Secretary, **Henning Wagner** for organising the AGM and all the paperwork associated with this. Simon Horne stepped down as a trustee during the year, but we would like to say thank you for your time and enthusiasm. Margaret Benton also resigned but is continuing to assist us.

Also, thank you to Paul Higson from North East of Scotland Preservation Trust and Sarah Kettles, who has been contracted as a Development Officer, for attending.

Since the last AGM we have been working together with NESPT to meet the conditions Aberdeenshire has put on the transfer of the Mill of Benholm to NESPT.

Aberdeenshire Council required that NESPT provide reports outlining the capital and revenue **costs** associated with the plan for the Mill and the benefits to economic development or regeneration, health and social and environmental wellbeing.

These reports were based on work by Arc Architects, surveyors and specialists. Funding was needed to cover the costs associated with Phase One – around £250000.

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

NESPT applied for funding to the Coastal Communities Challenge Fund, the Levelling Up Community Ownership Fund and the Place Based Investment Programme.

In the meantime, we used events, social media and newspaper articles to raise the Mill's profile. We created our own **website** with Falu Studios. Developments and information about the Mill of Benholm can be found here, there is an online membership form for new members, a donation page and all our policies, plans, events and volunteering opportunities and much more is here.

Our social media presence is kept updated regularly by Henning and we can be found on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and Mastodon. Our membership has risen by 54 to 106 and we have over 1200 followers on Facebook.

We have also reinstated the quarterly newsletter.

We have hosted our fair share of elected officials this year and shown them the current, deteriorating condition of the Mill. Interest and support has come from Councillors Mark

Findlater, George Carr, Laurie Carnie and Alison Evison. Also from MSPs Tess White and Mairi Gougeon and MP Andrew Bowie. Andrew Bowie also wrote a letter in support of our Levelling Up application.

We are in negotiations with Brotherton Estate to lease Mill Brae Wood so that it can be managed alongside Mill of Benholm. We want to reinstate the path network and make it accessible again.

We have already done some work in the wood with informal agreements but have decided to formalise this arrangement. Thank you to David Alexander and the late Norma Alexander for your continued support.

We attended the Johnshaven Fish Festival where we manned a stall to engage with the community and do a spot of fundraising. As we were unable to use the Mill for Doors Open Day last September, we held a Mill@BenholmKirk event.

Historic Churches Scotland, who own Benholm Kirk have been very supportive of us and are keen to work with us on joint ventures in the future. On this occasion, we invited anyone interested in the project to come and see us and to hear about progress.

In December we held a joint Christmas Gathering at Benholm Kirk singing carols and inviting the community to participate.

We were fortunate to have Johnshaven Primary School pupils sing for us and members of the local Baptist congregation also performed.

We had a rather good article in the Press and Journal which included some useful drone footage.

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.

Two of the funding applications that NESPT needed to fulfil Aberdeenshire Council's conditions have been unsuccessful. The levelling Up Fund will not inform us until the summer but, as the other funds were match funding for this one, it may be that this too is unsuccessful unless other funds can be identified. Some reasons have come back from the funders such as we 'did not score as highly as others on deliverability and evidence of place-based impact' for the Place Based Investment Programme delivered by Aberdeenshire council. It remains the case that these are competitive funds and we are at a disadvantage by not having ownership already.

This situation has led us and NESPT, to the conclusion that Mill of Benholm Enterprise should reapply for our own Community Asset Transfer rather than relying on another organisation to succeed.

We have the support of our Development Officer, Sarah and Paul and NESPT will help us.

We have a better foundation, more experience and super support this time round.

Today we submitted our Expression of Interest for a Community Asset Transfer to the Council and we will submit our full application as soon as possible.

Thank you.