

Hello, I am Emma Pollock and current Chair of Mill of Benholm Enterprise.

Thank you all for coming along tonight.

Firstly, I would like to thank the other trustees, our treasurer John Maxwell and Minute Secretary, Sally Leavey, Hannah Macgregor and especially Vice Chair & Secretary, Henning Wagner for organising the AGM and all the paperwork associated with this.

Mary McCafferty has also agreed to become a trustee and has already been heading up our Gardening sub-group in the community garden.

Well, we finally did it!

Aberdeenshire Council have agreed to transfer the Mill of Benholm to Mill of Benholm Enterprise and with that, ensure that the Mill belongs to the community.

As you know, this has been a lengthy process and everyone who has contributed to this achievement is due thanks, from our many members and supporters, local and national political representatives, consultants and previous trustees and friends.

The Community Asset Transfer journey has been complex and time consuming but collaborations along the way have eventually been fruitful and we are now nearing the end of this process and the beginning of a new one.

So, I think we should all give ourselves a round of applause!

All the letters and emails of support, attendance at meetings, surveys and now our amazing volunteers who are driving the Mill of Benholm on to the next phase, all so important.

After the last AGM we submitted the full application for a Community Asset Transfer to Aberdeenshire Council for the transfer of ownership of the Mill of Benholm to Mill of Benholm Enterprise.

Along with the application, we submitted our new business plan which highlighted the phased approach we want to take in restoring and conserving the Mill of Benholm. The grounds have really suffered from lack of attention, but the buildings are in relatively good condition and this was detailed in an extensive Conservation Report conducted by Conservation Architect, Sonya Linskaill. A Condition Report was also completed with costings used in the Business Plan. All these reports can be seen on our website at millofbenholm.scot

While all this has been going on, Henning has been applying to the various funders for different portions of work and is now quite the experienced applicant. We have been

successful in our bid for funding to enhance the car park, from the Coastal Communities Fund(?). The plans for this are on display.

Linking the car park to the paths in Mill Brae Wood will really improve the outdoor offering and when the lease for the Wood is competed, funding will be sought for the upgrading of the path network. This lease is also nearing completion thanks again to David Alexander and Brotherton Estate for the continued support.

We are looking forward to being able to hold our own events but in the meantime, last summer we took a stall at the Fish Festival and later, held our annual Christmas in Benholm gathering at Benholm Kirk in collaboration with Historic Churches Scotland.

We have hosted visits from many stakeholders and potential users of the site including Head Teachers, Scout Leaders, Coastguards, Forest School leaders, a Film and Location officer, a Cruise Liner and tourism officer, Politicians and Councillors. We were also visited by BBC Scotland and recorded for the 'Out of Door's' programme.

We engaged the Sustainable Water Company to use their truxor to remove the overgrown reeds in the Mill pond. Time will tell how successful this has been as the roots were very well established and there will still have to be further work done here to keep the pond clear.

Our social media presence is updated regularly mostly by Henning and we have a new separate Community Garden page run by Mary, our resident gardening enthusiast. We have over 1400 followers on Facebook but are also looking into other ways to communicate to the public as we know, not everyone chooses to use social media.

While the asset transfer process was progressing and to make a start on trying to tame the vegetation on site, we signed a Licence to Work with Aberdeenshire Council. This allowed us to work on the grounds only and start to engage volunteers to manually cut back the overgrown hedges and shrubs that had started to engulf the site.

We have been overwhelmed by the ability and enthusiasm of the people who have given up their time to volunteer at the mill of Benholm. When the weather has been bearable, we have been meeting up every other Saturday afternoon to do what we can and so much has been achieved already.

We have had to use some of our reserves to pay to get the toilets up and running including replacing the pumps which move the septic tank overflow to the reedbed but Aberdeenshire Council also contributed to this through a £5000 grant to cover some of the utility reinstatement costs.

In our Business Plan we referred to this Phase as the Preliminary Phase and one in which we would try to make the site safe prior to opening up the site to the public. We still have much to do but progress has been really encouraging and we hope to be on track to open up parts of the site very soon. The Licence to Work will continue until the

transfer is complete and then we will be responsible for the whole site with the relevant insurances being in place from day one.

The Council Officers who we have been working with this year have been supportive and helpful and relations have been good. The transfer is now in the hands of the solicitors and both parties hope to conclude in the next few weeks, all being well.

Our focus will now be on delivering on our promise to open up the Mill of Benholm to the public again and to this end we will look to bolster our finances to cover the expected costs ahead. We held a successful online fundraiser where we raised £1432.46, thank you to everyone who donated, it is most appreciated and will help during this transition phase and while we seek further funding.

As had been discussed in the past, we are now looking to ask our members for a small subscription fee to help with the costs of running the Mill. In due course there will be additional perks but at the moment, it is to bolster our efforts as we endeavour to work together to make the Mill of Benholm a success!