

**Minutes of the Public Meeting
held by the Way Forward Group (WFG)
on Tuesday 22 June 2021 at 7pm in Creich Community Hall**

Present were Linda Cameron (chair), Eleanor Wagstaff (secretary), John Noddings, John Cameron and John Wagstaff (all members of WFG); also Jenny Earl (Church of Scotland minister) and Gill Morley (church treasurer). The meeting was attended by a further 22 members of the public whose names are recorded in a separate list.

Welcome and Introduction

Linda Cameron opened the meeting and welcomed those present.

Apologies were received from Andrew Todd (WFG member), and Tony and Jenny Jeffries. (Further apologies were received after the meeting from Martin and Marilyn Grainger.)

Church of Scotland update

Jenny Earl gave the following summary:

The future of Church of Scotland buildings in the Parish of Kilfinichen, Kilvickeon and the Ross of Mull (KKRoM) had been discussed at a public meeting in September 2018. At that time, the Presbytery of Argyll was willing to wait for the congregation to present its vision for the future. Again, at a meeting held on 18 February 2020, two Presbytery representatives left the situation open to the local congregation. The Covid pandemic intervened, and for a year, no action was taken. During that time, the income of the churches was seriously depleted, and an immediate reduction in expenditure is required as a result. The Rev. David Mitchell, who is responsible for property, has recommended that Bunessan Church be kept and St Ernan's disposed of.

WFG was formed following the meeting of September 2018. It has since been active in supporting the church and considering a vision for the future. Meanwhile, the new Loch Pottie Footpath has opened and a car park has been created beside St Ernan's. Faith in Community Scotland (FiCS) has contacted Argyll Presbytery with money to support local communities, post Covid. WFG has been awarded a starting grant of £3,000, plus the support of FiCS personnel, with Iain Johnston (Director of FiCS and an elder), supporting WFG in its bid to develop St Ernan's. The Government's Adapt and Thrive scheme has been identified as a possible further source of grant funding.

WFG is now at the point of buying St Ernan's. Its next step is to seek a valuation of the building, either from the Church of Scotland or from an independent surveyor. It is committed to developing St Ernan's in the best way possible for the local community.

WFG presentation

Linda Cameron presented the following information:

WFG was formed after the meeting of September 2018 and, at around the same time, she herself was co-opted onto the Congregational Board of KKRoM. All the members of WFG have strong ties with St Ernan's, either through family, church membership, or other local connections. Meetings of WFG are attended by Jenny Earl as parish minister, and Gill Morley as treasurer to the Congregational Board. Monies raised by WFG are currently held by the Board in a restricted St Ernan's fund.

A buyout was not the original intention of WFG, but matters have changed since the pandemic, with

the Congregational Board arriving at a decision to close St Ernan's. WFG now has the support of FiCS and has also had the offer of architectural services. It needs to be sure of local support before becoming a legal entity – e.g., a SCIO or Board. WFG has reached a decision not to use MICT or SWMID in seeking to purchase St Ernan's, in order to preserve its independence. The plans on display at the meeting are simply ideas at this stage, and not fixed. Various individuals have pledged money, should a buyout go ahead.

Questions and answers

Linda Cameron opened the meeting to questions:

- Janna Greenhalgh asked how St Ernan's might sustain itself financially on ceasing to be a church. The panel outlined some possible sources of income – these include rental from various groups who might use the space, links with pilgrims, sale of refreshments and so on. St Ernan's would be a 'quiet place', with an emphasis on spirituality and worship, and therefore wouldn't clash with Creich Hall.
- Anne Baxter asked about possible links with Iona. Jenny noted that a group of pilgrims had visited St Ernan's recently on their way to Iona, and had been supportive of, and excited by, the development proposals. Jan Pickard described similar pilgrim routes in Fife, but added that, without Presbytery involvement, St Ernan's would have greater freedom and flexibility. Anne recommended the installation of a WIFI-based payment system.
- Joanne MacDougall asked how much money had been granted to date, and where money would come from to buy St Ernan's. Discussion followed about changes to church life in the future – it is possible that Bunesan Church will become a Mission Station attached to the North Mull parishes, and that when Jenny leaves, there will be no resident minister in KKRoM. If WFG is successful, however, St Ernan's will still be available for worship, and for weddings, funerals and other services.
- Callum MacDougall asked if Iona was in the same situation and how this had arisen. Jenny explained that nothing has yet been decided, but that Church of Scotland ministry will be reduced by 40% in the near future and that change is therefore inevitable.
- Alasdair MacDougall stated that he had received no advance warning of the current situation, despite being a long-standing Church of Scotland member. He suggested that new housing development might increase church membership, that Sunday Schools should be reinstated and a Gaelic-speaking minister sought. It was explained that Church of Scotland decisions were not for tonight's meeting, and that the main aim of WFG is to retain St Ernan's for the community.
- Brian Thomas endorsed and supported the work of WFG. He hopes to help with fund-raising in the future by producing and selling some models of St Ernan's.
- Rob Jones urged WFG to become an incorporated body, so that legal responsibility for a dilapidated building does not fall on individuals. The panel agreed that this is an immediate priority.
- Tim Dawson asked how congregation numbers might be increased. It was explained that this is not an immediate concern for WFG, but that, following a successful buyout, St Ernan's will be available to Christians of all denominations, and also to other faith (and non-faith) groups. Some Christian groups might come together as a result.
- Martin Caldwell asked whether the cost of the buyout would reflect the dilapidated condition of the building. The panel assured him that the matter would be handled in a professional way. He asked what the annual income of the parish was in a 'model' year. Gill Morley gave the figure as £10,000 maximum.
- Anne Baxter asked if there would be a legal connection between FiCS and WFG. The panel explained that membership (and therefore control) of the St Ernan's project would be with the local community. Non-resident supporters could become associate members, however.
- Brian Thomas suggested that local builders might be willing to give some of their time and skills free, as a means of supporting the project.

Proposal

Anne Baxter proposed that the meeting give its support to WFG; this was seconded by Janna Greenhalgh. Those present were asked to endorse the proposal with a show of hands. Support was almost unanimous (some three people didn't respond).

Final comments

Linda informed the meeting that WFG minutes are posted on the KKRoM website. Further information will be supplied to Round and About magazine, and may also be posted on Facebook.

The bookstall is open in St Ernan's and members of the public are welcome to use it.

Jan Pickard challenged the notion (expressed earlier in the meeting) that the Church of Scotland is abandoning the Ross of Mull. She outlined the opportunities for worship which will be gained from a closer link with the North Mull parishes.

Janna Greenhalgh suggested crowdfunding as a source of income.

Closing

There being no further comments, Linda thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting. Brian Thomas in turn thanked WFG for their efforts.

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Sederunt

WFG members:

Mrs Linda Cameron (chair),
Mrs Eleanor Wagstaff (secretary),
Mr John Noddings,
Mr John Cameron
Mr John Wagstaff

Rev. Jenny Earl (Church of Scotland minister)
Mrs Gill Morley (church treasurer).

Others:

Mr David Greenhalgh, Mrs Janna Greenhalgh, Mr Tim Dawson, Mrs Linda Dawson, Mrs Anne Smith, Ms Jan S Pickard, Mr Brian Thomas, Ms Anne Baxter, Mrs Mary MacKay, Mr Alan Schofield, Mrs Janet Schofield, Mrs Euphie Wood, Mr Rob Jones, Mrs Margaret MacLean, Mrs Mary Dickson, Mr Jeff Fielding, Sr Pamela Owens (CAH), Mr Martin Caldwell, Mr Alasdair MacDougall, Mr Callum MacDougall, Mrs Joanne MacDougall and Mrs Jackie Alexander.