

13 November 2021

Mr Ewan McIntosh
Engagement Co-ordinator – Policy and Reform
The Highland Council
Glen Urquhart Road
IV3 5NX

Dear Sir

CAT – Land 20 metres SW of 9 Neil Gunn Road, Dunbeath – Dunbeath and District Centre

I openly declare my position as a Trustee of the Dunbeath and District Centre (D&DC). My views are based on not only my knowledge of the hard work that a voluntary Board has undertaken over the last 10 years, supported by a staff and a large group of volunteers, but also my understanding of the complex needs of this community that lies in South East Caithness.

D&DC is a long-established community organisation which has slowly and carefully developed its range of services to meet the needs of its community. The Centre provides a very strong community benefit, acknowledged by, among others, NHS (Highland), from which it currently holds Assured Status and a Service Level Agreement that has continued since April 2014. It is the only Wellbeing Hub in Caithness.

It has the capacity to deliver in response to community need. To ensure that it continually provides what its Registered Users need and want, Caithness Voluntary Group (CVG) conducts an independent Customer Satisfaction Survey on behalf of the Centre every two years, the results of which are considered at a formal Board Meeting. Where funding is available or can be raised, every effort is made to ensure that Registered Users' requests are met.

D&DC has evidenced community support from organisations including Highland Council, none more obvious than when the Pandemic struck here in March 2020. Due to the funding provided, the Centre was able to ensure vulnerable people of all ages received nutritious food, prescriptions, shopping, books, etc. on a regular and consistent basis through a well-managed team of over 40 volunteers, who themselves came from the South East of Caithness. Without this service which placed the physical and mental wellbeing of the community at its heart, incalculable damage may have been done to vulnerable, lonely or scared people who had no-one else to turn to. D&DC became a 'life line' for many.

D&DC has proven that its model is sustainable, even in these financially and socially difficult times. A professional Accountant not only examines the Centre's Accounts but provides advice to ensure that finances are managed in a prudent fashion. Careful consideration has been given to the sustainability of its model which provides the bedrock for its growth plans. Our business plan is publicly available.

Resourcing procedures are very strong evidenced by its ability to offer a wide range of activities and services over the years as well as by its ability to fund its existing 4 members of staff, as well as a new post of Operational Growth Manager.

The Centre operates from what is essentially a one-bedroom bungalow. This limited space places severe constraints on the ability of the Centre to expand to meet the growing need for health and wellbeing services, hence the need for larger and more purpose-built premises. D&DC's preferred model for the new Centre is for a newly built Wellbeing Hub with 2 affordable housing units plus parking. The existing Centre could then be re-purposed to provide much needed holiday accommodation for people with mobility impairment.

Yours faithfully

M O'Neill

Maureen O'Neill