

The John Griss Charity

Registered Number 1193024

Open Meeting of the John Griss Charity on 17 April 2024

Present:

Members of the Parish Council as Trustees: M Bendle, J Blackmore, R Drew, J Kidner, N King, L Saunders and A Weekes.

Mr A Don (Fisheries advisor)

Also in attendance: S McGeever (Secretary) and residents of Clayhidon Parish

1. Welcome by Chairman

Welcome everyone, we are truly delighted to see so many parishioners.

And first of all can I thank the many kind people who have taken part in our parish litterpick this week. You can see the results by the front door. Thank you!

My name is Alison Weekes, the current chairman (until next month) of the Parish Council.

Next to me is Vice Chairman, Richard Drew, and Nick King, Chairman of the John Griss CIO.

The Parish Council is the charity trustee and all parish councillors are members of it. Would the remaining four councillors please stand, Maurice Bendle, Jamie Blackmore, John Kidner and Lee Saunders.

The agenda for this evening is first a few words about John Griss, the man who gave us all this amazing gift. Richard Kallaway, his neighbour, and friend, was with him in Musgrove Park when he made his will.

Next, I aim to give a quick background to the John Griss legacy and what has been achieved so far.

Then we are going to hear from Andy Don, our fisheries consultant on the John Griss charity, about the tremendous improvements which have been made to Hartsmoor in the past few months.

After that we will hear briefly from Jamie Blackmore about the land with the lakes and then from Nick King, chairman of the John Griss Charity about John's home, Rose Cottage.

Then we would like to open up to comments and suggestions which we will answer if we can, now or later, and, we hope, collect some ideas.

There is a suggestion box at the stage end of the hall so if you would rather use that for ideas please do.

2. John Griss: The Man and his Legacy

Richard Kallaway, as executor to John Griss's will, provided background information on John Griss who had left his estate to the parish of Clayhidon to be administered by the Parish Council in February 2020.

John Griss had lived in the parish since and boy and had attended Uffculme School. He was a talented sportsman and painter who set up as a dairy farmer. In 1980 as part of farm diversification project, he had set up the Hartsmoor Lakes and they became his passion.

Richard Kallaway expressed his pleasure at the Lakes being retained as part of the John Griss Charity and believed it was a fitting legacy for John Griss.

3. Introduction to the John Griss Charity and its Trustees

Someone sadly missing from this meeting tonight is the Parish Council's former clerk, Donna Evans. She died earlier this year at the age of just 54. She was pivotal in everything we are about to discuss and we miss her enormously. Donna was an exuberant, naturally cheerful person and fully involved in the council as clerk and the charity as company secretary. Although she was ill for some time, her death was a shock and left a few things unfinished which have been quite difficult to sort out! Let me introduce you to our new clerk, Sue McGeever, who has also taken on the role at Hemyock.

As you all know we have had the pandemic, lockdowns and the aftermath of all that since we heard about the John Griss legacy. Initially there was a flurry of excitement about the possibilities before reality intruded in the ways of bills, old equipment, safety, leaks and the deteriorating situation of the lakes, land and cottage.

This took quite a bit of sorting out and we are now in a situation where the lakes are on a five year lease, the land the same, and the cottage has been demolished with planning permission for four homes on the site of Rose Cottage and the derelict old chapel next door.

Two of these new homes will be low cost rented properties to be run by a housing association. Planning permission took a very long time. So the charity now has more than £280,000 in the bank gaining interest, it is getting rent from sheep keep, and the lakes have been vastly improved with the aim of bringing in a substantial regular income to the parish for years to come. And, of course, the charity still owns the Hartsmoor Fishery and the arable land and wood.

It has not been easy and it has not been without its critics but those who have complained that they did not know what was going on I would just say that there were reports on both the website and in the Pump. Not only that the Clayhidon rumour mills are quite good too. But some of the negotiating had to be done relatively quietly because of the financial aspects involved.

Now finally, we are asking everyone what they feel could be done in the future, bearing in mind that any cash we have cannot be used for anything which should be provided by rates and taxes. I'm afraid that rules out potholes.

And I am making this plea to all of you. Please look forward to the future not back at what might have been done, could have done or should have been done. We are past that.

And bear in mind we could have had an election last year when any of you could have stood to become a parish councillor and members of the charity, and only one person came forward for the vacancy we already had.

4. The Fisheries

Andy Don, a parishioner of 25 years, Fellow of the Institute of Fisheries Management, and a fishery expert for the Environmental Agency, had offered his services to the John Griss Charity. He hoped that his expertise would prove valuable in maintaining the Fisheries for the parish.

The Fisheries were a great asset to the parish and as they developed and grew would not only provide an annual income but also increase in value.

Following a site visit from the Institute of Fisheries Management, an audit was undertaken to assess stock levels, the state of the lakes themselves including a complete survey showing the profiles of the lakes and assessing their size. All the lakes fell under the threshold of being deemed a reservoir.

The decision was then taken to lease out the lakes with one lake being for parishioners use. A two stage interview process had been undertaken and the lessors appointed.

A peppercorn rent was agreed for the first year due to the amount of work that needed to be done to bring the lakes back into working order but going forward should provide a good annual income for the charity.

The lease included KPIs – Key Performance Indicators – that would ensure the management of the Fisheries going forward.

Grants had been obtained to carry out works such as clearing the lakes, putting in otter fencing and putting in paths. A 30lb carp had a value of £2500 and thus needed protection from the otters.

Further works to provide improved access and car parking would be undertaken. The slide presentation is available to view on the Parish Council website.

5. The Land

Jamie Blackmore advised that the land totalled 37 acres and 25 acres had been leased out to a young, local farmer who kept a small flock of sheep on the land. The lease was for a five-year period and it was hoped that the lease could then be handed on to another young, local farmer to get a foot on the farming ladder.

Rural Payments were being received for the land and grants to cover such things as hedge laying were being applied for.

The land would remain an asset for the parish.

6. Rose Cottage

Nick King advised that it would not have been practical for the John Griss Charity and its Trustees the Parish Council to attempt to develop the building and land themselves.

Discussions had been entered into with a local builder who had agreed to purchase the site and provide two low cost rented homes. Clayhidon was currently designated an unsustainable village which meant that the option to build new homes without them being part of an existing property did not exist.

Planning for 3 houses was agreed with MDDC in October 2023 and a S106 agreement put in place to ensure that the low cost homes were built and would be run as part of a community housing project by one of the local housing associations. The S106 agreement meant that residents of Clayhidon had the first option on the local cost homes.

Due diligence had been carried out with proper valuations carried out putting the property between £200-250,000. A sum of £285,000 agreed.

If the property had gone on the open market, it would most likely have become another large home and the opportunity for affordable housing would have been lost.

7. The Future

Following the deduction of costs, it was likely that there would be £250,000 to invest/spend from the sale of Rose Cottage.

Going forward, the income from the Fisheries and the Land could be as much as £15-20,000 and the value of both assets would increase.

Thought had to be given as to whether capital expenditure was preferable to an annual income which could then be invested in projects for the village.

The John Griss charity called for ideas from the floor which would then be considered by the Charity.

The Village Hall representatives believed there was a mandate from the village for the funds to be invested in a new village hall on its current site. The potential cost could be around £750,000.

Those present felt that a further meeting would be beneficial where parishioners would discuss the ideas put forward in greater detail and several residents offered their support to achieve this.

This included the suggestion that an Independent Consultant be employed to manage the process of engaging with as many parishioners as possible to identify what the Community's requirements are. Such a consultant could provide detail of what other Parish Councils/Charities are doing nationally for their Communities.

A decision by the CPC/JGT to adopt this process, and publish the Consultants findings, would do much to legitimise the selection process and clear the air.

Residents asked for more information about parish access to the lakes and the parish fishing lake and the opportunity for more Open Days.

The ideas put forward at the meeting are given in the Attachment to these minutes.

Alison Weekes closed the meeting and once again thanked everyone for coming.

Attachment

Suggestions:

1. Appoint a sub-committee of Clayhidon parishioners to consider all the ideas put forward then those ideas should be reported back to the Trustees to make the ultimate decisions involvement)
2. Public access to Hartsmoor site. It would be good if there was a footpath available to enjoy the wildlife
3. Hall - badly needs extraction/air handling to stop deterioration
4. Setup a community hub in the village hall which would benefit everyone example Cafe, health advice, food, party etc
5. Consider addressing poor rural broadband/connectivity infrastructure
6. An internet cafe could benefit and bring together you and old - doing homework, learning new skills (eg languages) and facilitate a skills exchange & interaction between generations.
7. Playpark and picnic area for the community meet up
8. Sustainable investment income stream established with half of the current charity funds
9. Purchase of a field/outdoor space as close as possible to the village hall as a community asset.
10. Fund improvements to the village hall
11. Support for local people to install/implement environment/conservation measures interest/income from the investments
12. Community benches
13. New village hall
14. Use the investment income (5% a year on £250,000) to invest in or grant new business/new farmers a startup fund.
15. Use the interest to invest in ongoing maintenance to key buildings that keep people together family play park, business centre etc.
16. Playpark/picnic area
17. Grants for local business
18. Purchase a large community marquee as hall only hold 94
19. New kitchen for the existing village hall
20. Increase lengthman's budget
21. Provide educational bursary's for Clayhidon children where households do not have the means to support a child in future education
22. Provide financial assistance to travel to Universities/Colleges where families are unable to meet the cost.