

## Highlands Open Studios

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held on Sunday 1<sup>st</sup> November 2009  
at 2.00 p.m. at Eden Court Theatre, Inverness.**

Present: Ruth Black (chair), Valerie Ford (Treasurer), Gail Steele, Michael Stuart Green, Gillian Pattinson, Clare Blois, Eileen Addly, Theresa Brown, Robert Livingston (Hi-arts), Lynn Bennett-Mackenzie, Hazel Reed, Cyril Reed, Christine O'Keeffe, Margaret Cowie, Alan Bransbury, Jan Teago, Rob Teago, Isabell Dickson, Nicola Macdonell, Dorothy Francis, Avril Marr.

Apologies received from: Fiona Matheson, Julie Cribb, Alistair Smyth, Jane MacRae, Andrea Butcher, Helene Lister, John Nicholson, Carol Cocks, Frances Baxter, Miriam Smith, Suzie MacKenzie, Vicki Stonebridge, Gwen Black.

**1. Chairman's Welcome** Ruth Black welcomed members to the meeting.

**2. Approval of the Minutes of 2008 AGM (23<sup>rd</sup> November 2008)** Proposed by Gillian Pattinson, seconded by Margaret Cowie, the Minutes were approved. No matters arising.

**3. Approval of the Minutes of the recent EGM (September 2009)** Proposed by Dorothy Francis, seconded by Gail Steele.

The Chairman reminded the meeting that all the above Minutes have been posted on the HOS website.

### **4. Chairman's Report**

**5. Treasurer's Report** Valerie Ford reported as follows: "2009 has been a difficult year for everyone because of the economic recession and credit crunch. Naturally this also affected HOS and we experienced a reduction in our income from all available sources. As a result of this, the 2009 committee were forced to make some difficult decisions.

We have seen the membership shrink by almost 23% - down from 106 last year to 82 members for 2009. This reduced our subscription income by 13% from last year's figure of £8240 to £7140 for this year.

Consequently the number of adverts placed in the directory also fell, they were down by 50% from 16 last year to only 8 this year, reducing our income from advertising revenue by 28% - down from last year's figure of £1159 to £835 for this year.

The most devastating blow was the reduction in income received from external funding – whilst we were aware that the amount we could expect to receive for 2009 would be less than that received for previous years, the actual amount awarded fell by 80% from last year's figure of £7500 to just £1500 for this year.

Finally, a combined effect of interest rate cuts and less cash in the bank saw the amount of interest received on our bank account cut from last year's total of £85.25 down to a paltry £9.67 for 2009 – a cut of 89%.

The bottom line of all this shows a total cut in income of 33% - down from last year's figure of £17,841.97 to just £11,913.96 for 2009.

Such a drastic cut in our income forced the committee to face some difficult decisions as it was evident that we would be unable to fund all our planned activities.

The directory of members was our first priority. On a positive note, the reduction in members and paid advertisements meant that the 2009 directory required fewer pages, therefore costing less to produce. Design and printing costs were £7502.80 – a drop of 7% on last year's cost of £8079.32.

The 2008 committee had already made the decision that we would move our website for 2009

and have the new webmaster design a more user-friendly site for us. The additional costs involved in designing and setting up a new site have been offset by the benefit of us now having total control over the content of the HOS website. As we were committed to this decision, £3000 was allocated to website costs for 2009.

I'm pleased to report that Len Black has done a wonderful job creating the HOS09 website, and that it all came in under budget. The site design cost us £2690 and we paid a further £93.60 for domain and hosting. Comparable figures for 2008 were £1882 for website amendments and £170.38 for hosting.

It was also agreed by the 2008 committee that HOS should approach the Art Society of Inverness to request the hire of storage facilities for our gridwall and spare stocks of the '09 directories. These storage fees cost a total of £240 plus an additional £31.20 for keys. As available funds were in short supply, we had to keep costs for the directory launch as low as possible and a maximum budget of £500 was set. Again, I'm delighted to report that Dorothy and her team of helpers did a splendid job in organising the April launch exhibition at Eden Court and keeping costs well below budget. The launch and exhibition costs came to £416.55 – a drop of 40% on last year's total of £695.18. This exhibition generated artists' commissions of £707.39 which appear on the annual statement as cash in from 'Commission on Exhibition sales' and payments out to 'Artists' commissions'.

Other costs paid during this financial period were for the 2008 AGM which cost us £80.92 and a further £31.50 for the EGM held in September.

As the proverbial pot had run dry, we were unable to fund any advertising during 2009 or provide assistance to members for the Open Studios Week.

At the EGM it was agreed to bring forward the date of the AGM to November 1<sup>st</sup>. If we had kept to the HOS accounting year end of 31<sup>st</sup> October, it would not have been possible to prepare a financial statement for presentation at the AGM. For this reason, it was decided to bring forward the accounting year end to 30<sup>th</sup> September to allow the financial statements to be prepared and audited for presentation.

As a result of this decision, a statement of Income and Expenditure for the 11 months ended 30<sup>th</sup> September 2009 has been prepared. This shows our total expenditure for the period was £11,797.96 – a reduction of 27% on last year's total of £16,205.07, and that we have a balance of funds amounting to £116 in the bank which will be carried forward to 2010.

Taking into account comments made at the September EGM that members expect us to provide both a directory and a website, we will need to generate a minimum income of around £12,000 to cover the costs of these. Additional income will be required to allow us to launch the 2010 directory, provide a members' exhibition, offer support for the Open Studios Week and assist with promotion and advertising.

Looking ahead to 2010, we cannot assume that any income will be available from external funding so we will need to raise all our income from members' subscriptions and advertising. We are streamlining the registration process to cut costs and have signed HOS up for a PayPal account to enable members to make online subscription payments. I am afraid that we will need to raise the basic subscription fee and this will be discussed at the AGM.

If we are unable to raise sufficient funds to cover our projected expenditure for 2010, the new committee will again be faced with some very difficult decisions over what we are able to provide for our members. If you would like to be part of the decision making process, please put your name forward when the new committee is being elected. As several of the long-term committee members are stepping down, we desperately need your support to enable us to move forward with new ideas.

I don't like ending on such a negative note, but the bottom line is that HOS has reached a crisis point - if we are unable to elect a new committee today, there will be no HOS10. The last 4 years have been amazing; please help us to keep it going. HOS needs your support to survive."

The Chairman noted that the next website update would cost around half as much as the last

one, as the basic work has been done. It was also noted that £200 was still due from Hi-arts, on receipt of signed accounts. Ruth recorded her personal thanks to Valerie for her efficient and supportive work as Treasurer, and for the extra work involved due to the fact that it is not possible to put a Treasurer's Account online.

The Accounts were circulated to those members present and were approved (proposed by Gail Steele, seconded by Dorothy Francis).

## **6. The Future Direction of HOS**

⌚The Chairman reminded the meeting that at the recent EGM it was agreed that the directory and the website were the most important benefits of HOS membership, and were the core activities. Regarding open studios events, it was agreed that HOS was a facilitator rather than an organiser.

⌚Exhibitions: What is the role of HOS exhibitions? They do not generate much income. It was agreed that Dorothy has done a marvellous job in organising exhibitions to date, and the meeting expressed thanks. New committee to decide the future of exhibitions, which could have merit if tied in to an event such as directory launch. Robert Livingstone pointed out that there are galleries available for hire outwith the Highlands in, for instance, Glasgow.

⌚Possible gallery space for members in Strathpeffer: Helene Lister has leased a shop in Strathpeffer and has asked if HOS would be interested in some kind of involvement. She has proposed that HOS members would be able to sell their work on a commission basis, or without commission if they gave help in the shop. Exhibitions might be themed. The premises could serve as a base, information point, meeting place, workshop space, space for community projects. The meeting agreed that HOS did not need a central point, the directory and website being our public face, and it was not appropriate for HOS to enter a business arrangement with Helene; however, thanks were expressed for her offer and ideas, and it was hoped that she might approach HOS members individually to exhibit in her new gallery.

⌚ Open Studio Event and Directory: Lynn Bennett-Mackenzie suggested that areas could stagger dates of the event, but it was agreed that this would be logistically difficult. Gail Steele suggested that if each member had their individual "event" dates in the directory, they could update information themselves on the interactive website. Cyril Reed pointed out that members who are open all year do not see the need for a special event. Alan Bransbury did not wish to be tied to opening in a specific week or indeed at all. Michael Stuart Green pinpointed the change of emphasis in HOS, which had started out being about opening up studios. Rob Teago confirmed that there was ongoing interest in the directory from his gallery customers. Clare Blois agreed that directories are picked up by customers all year. Christine O'Keeffe felt that there was no reason to re-join HOS if there was not an open studio event. Clare Blois felt that it was of great benefit to artists to be visible in the directory. Robert Livingstone suggested that HOS needed its activities to reflect

*maximum impact for minimum cost and effort.* The directory and website were handsome and useful. Artists' own updates to the website could be moderated if necessary. He mentioned that the former Hi-arts information directory lasted for 2 years, with website updates and additions. He suggested that membership of HOS involves a degree of altruism and a wish to support arts in the Highlands. Avril Marr hoped that if Michael Stuart Green stepped down, the quality of the directory would still be maintained. It was agreed that the distribution of directories was difficult and hard physical work, and improvements are necessary. It was suggested that we could pay for distribution by one of the companies that handle this. It would be beneficial to get the directories outwith the Highlands. The idea of producing a directory that lasted for two years found favour with the meeting. It was agreed that less than double the quantity would be needed. Members joining up after publication would have exposure on the website and pay pro-rata. Members were divided as to the best time for an open studio event. The meeting agreed that it would be more satisfactory if members decided on their own dates (either individually or in groups). Clare Blois felt that in many cases the Open Week had been unsatisfactory for artists, and unlike some other Open Studio organisations, HOS, for various reasons, has never managed a great deal of effective PR or publicity, nor was it likely to manage this in the future. If artists chose their own dates they would be forced to take responsibility for the marketing themselves. It would also attract more gallery members, for whom the open studio week is not in fact beneficial at all. Robert Livingstone pointed out that artists could link in with other arts events, festivals and dates in their area, and Hi-arts keeps a list of these. Nicola Macdonell pointed out the difficulties faced by those who could not get broadband. Could paper still be sent to members who wish it? It was agreed that this would be possible where necessary, however, it was pointed out that HOS is for artists attempting to make some kind of an income from their work (rather than purely leisure artists), and realistically they need to keep up with modern ways of communication provided this is technically possible for them. Robert Livingstone confirmed that tourists and visitors do indeed make full use of the internet to find information about the Highlands, both before their trip and during it. It was agreed that the HOS branding is beneficial to members, at whatever time they open up their studios. It was suggested that Hi-arts might be asked for funding towards signage and branding.

**OUTCOME** Votes were taken and decisions made as follows:

Members to choose their own open studio dates and arrangements. Members to be encouraged to hold an event of some kind, but not compulsory (i.e. "open all year" or "by appointment" is acceptable.)

The Directory to last for two years and be distributed throughout that time. Members may update their information on the website. New members to be entered onto website and pay subscription pro-rata.

**7. Membership fee:** Agreed as £150 for two years. Covers entry in the directory and self-updatable facility on website. Payable at the beginning of the two years. Payment possible online via Paypal. It was agreed that to encourage members to join the committee, committee members would receive a £50 discount on their membership fee, i.e. £100 for two years. This was proposed by Michael Stuart Green and seconded by Hazel Reed.

**8. Geographical area:** Membership applications from outwith the Highland Council area to be considered individually on geographical grounds. (How desirable is it to HOS for their location to be included? Is there another open studio scheme already in their area?)

**9. Election of Committee** The following members agreed to stand and were elected: Ruth Black, Gail Steele, Valerie Ford, Gillian Pattinson, Carol Cocks (in her absence), Julie Cribb

(in her absence), Helene Lister (in her absence), and Lynn Bennett Mackenzie. It was agreed to ask John Nicholson and Vicki Stonebridge if they would be willing to join the committee. It was agreed that other members could be co-opted by the committee to give assistance, and also non-members if required, who would be non-voting advisors.

Clare Blois and Alan Bransbury both stressed that whilst willingness to be on the committee is much appreciated by the rest of the membership, there is a requirement for committee members to “deliver”, i.e. do more than just attend meetings, and perhaps each should have more of a defined role in attending to the practicalities, so the work is not all left to a very few people.

**10. AOCB** Nicola Macdonell suggested that each member should co-opt another to join up. It was agreed that lapsed and new members should be encouraged to join.

The meeting expressed thanks to all 2009 committee members for their dedicated hard work and commitment to HOS

**11. Date of Next AGMA** member of the Free Church had requested that meetings should not be held on a Sunday, but it was pointed out that it is the only day gallery owners and some others can manage.

Date agreed is Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> November 2010.

**Close of meeting**