

**Holmehill Community Buyout (Holmehill Limited)**  
**Annual General Meeting**  
**14 August 2006**

**Chair's Report**

May I start by welcoming you all to the first Annual General Meeting of Holmehill Ltd. We are particularly glad to welcome Davie Newton from Knoydart and Ian Philip from Dunning who are going to tell us later about their experiences of community land ownership. We are delighted that so many members of the Dunblane community continue to be interested and concerned about the future of Holmehill. Our paid-up membership now numbers around 84 and we have application forms here for any of you who are not members and who would like to join this evening. Holmehill Ltd. consists of a Board of 15 Directors, 3 of whom have recently resigned. Later in the Meeting, we shall be seeking to appoint 3 new members to join the Board.

How to summarise what has happened to Holmehill Ltd. since its inception? Little did we know, when a group of around 100 people attended a meeting about the future of Holmehill early in the New Year of 2005 that for some of us, it would come to occupy so central a part of our lives.

Under the leadership of Jim Bennett, Holmehill Ltd. was formed as a limited company that now enjoys charitable status. We attempted to register our interest as a community in Holmehill with the Scottish Executive using the new Land Reform Act of 2004. Had we been successful, we would have had the first opportunity to try and buy Holmehill to secure it for the community of Dunblane. Initially, we tried to register the community interest through the Dunblane Development Trust but its Articles of Association did not meet the Scottish Executive's requirements. In order to act swiftly, before the land was sold, we set up Holmehill Ltd. to take the application forward.

As I'm sure you all know by now, the Scottish Executive refused to register our interest. We appealed to the Sheriff - the first appeal under the new legislation - and were represented by Messrs Simpson, Marwick, solicitors and John Campbell, QC. Those of us who were able to attend the hearing of the case at Stirling Sheriff Court found it extremely interesting. For some, it was the first experience of The Law at work! Last November, Jim decided to stand down from the Chair of Holmehill for work and family reasons and I was asked to take it over. Jim is a hard act to follow!

After many months, the Appeal hearings were finally concluded and we waited several more months for the verdict. The Sheriff found **against** us and **for** the Scottish Executive. In addition to a great feeling of surprise and disappointment, the Board had to face the award of legal costs for Hilton and the Executive against Holmehill Ltd. After many anxious weeks, Hilton agreed to bear their own costs and we were able to reach a settlement with the Executive regarding their costs. At this point, can I just say how grateful we were for the pledges of financial support which, together with fundraising events - to which Steve Mason will refer further in his report - enabled us to stay financially viable and pay our own legal costs.

Our MSP, Sylvia Jackson, who is unwell and so sadly unable to be with us this evening, has been very supportive throughout our campaign. In May, she and our Secretary, Caroline Crawford, had a meeting with the Minister, Rona Brankin to discuss our experiences of the Land Reform Act in practice and its shortcomings. Sylvia and Caroline presented the Minister with evidence from the Stirling Council and Dunblane Development Trust local plans, both of which emphasised the importance of

maintaining and developing Holmehill as open space and a 'green lung' for Dunblane. Following that meeting, the Minister wrote to Sylvia and invited us to make a second attempt to register the community interest, which would now be more favourably received. Alan Booth, of Dunblane Development Trust has since been in touch with Mr. Frew, the civil servant responsible for administering the Land Reform Act and he has renewed this invitation. The Board will be acting swiftly in the light of this further encouragement.

Following the Sheriff's verdict, we have been contacted by Caledonian Trust, through an intermediary, asking if Holmehill Ltd. would support a purchaser intending to develop the footprint of the former Holmehill House. After much debate and discussion, the Board agreed to talk to Caledonian Trust to hear their plans. Two meetings have been held, one of them in Dunblane. In the light of our discussions, Caledonian Trust agreed to reconsider their proposals. At no time has the Board agreed to support these proposals and we have continually emphasised that if Caledonian plans to buy Holmehill and wishes to elicit the support of the Dunblane community, they will need to bring their proposals to a public meeting. There has been no further contact over the past six weeks.

Thanks to Steve Mason, we were successful in our applications to both the Land Fund and the Big Lottery Fund for funding to undertake a community ballot and commission a Business Plan for the future management of Holmehill. We have accepted the Land Fund offer of some £6k, which is subject to our obtaining a formal agreement to manage or own the land. Whether we can make use of this grant will become clearer once Holmehill is sold and we know the buyer's intentions.

Dunblane Development Trust have continued to be interested in our attempts to acquire Holmehill for the community and have been represented on the Board by John Seddon. Representatives of the Trust met Board members recently to discuss the outcome of our appeal and we are hoping to have a similar meeting with the Community Council shortly.

This brief summary of Holmehill Ltd's activities does not do justice to the hours and hours of time that many people in Dunblane - not just Board members - have devoted to supporting the campaign to acquire Holmehill for the community. Most people who did this had 'day jobs' as well and used their precious free time to undertake Holmehill activities. There has been a tremendous spirit of 'community' in this endeavour and new friendships made as a result of involvement in Holmehill. I should like to thank everyone for their many and varied contributions without which we could not have continued. I especially want to thank Steve Mason, our Treasurer, who has not only managed our finances admirably but has also used his knowledge of business practice and the public sector to 'keep us right' with legal requirements. Caroline Crawford, our Secretary, has been tireless in her efforts to promote the community ownership of Holmehill. Her professional background as an ecologist has been invaluable as have her IT skills in putting together the beautiful brochure to accompany our appeal for funds earlier in the year.

We are extremely grateful to Paul Jones and Terence O'Byrne, through whom we have been able to communicate widely with our supporters via the Dunblane Internet website, as well through as local newspapers and the Dunblane Community View.

The enthusiasm that brought Holmehill Ltd. into existence still exists to maintain an interest in its future and we hope to do that through constructive dialogue with its new owners. We hope you will continue to enjoy your support. Thank you.