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Neil Grant, Shetland Islands Council

29th June 2022

Dear Neil,

As the Finance Director of Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust (FIBOT) and as a private individual who uses the ferry, I am writing this letter in support of the application by Shetland Islands Council for funding in connection with seeking a replacement for the current ferry to/from Fair Isle.

FIBOT was founded in 1948 and since then it has established itself as one of the world's leading bird observatories. It has accumulated unparalleled data on both migratory birds and seabirds. This seabird data is particularly important as regards establishing climate change on a scientific basis.

Unfortunately, in 2019 the Observatory was completely destroyed in a fire. FIBOT is currently in the process of rebuilding it and we aim to reopen to guests in the spring of 2023. This rebuild is costing approximately £8million which has been funded by a number of parties including FIBOT itself, our insurance settlement, the Scottish Government, Shetland Islands Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, private trusts and an appeal which raised £650,000 from donors worldwide.

Transport of guests to occupy our 28 bedrooms is fundamental to our successful operation. Fair Isle, by dint of its location, will always be limited in the number of guests that can travel to it which makes it even more important that a modern ferry able to provide a resilient service operates. A significant number of our guests including myself travel by the ferry who need the certainty, so far as is possible, that travel will take place in a comfortable manner that befits the 21st century. There is a greater reliance on the ferry recently, as air transport becomes increasingly problematic due to changes in weather patterns with more fog affecting the ability of planes to operate, particularly in mid-summer.

It is not only in the conveyance of guests that FIBOT relies on the ferry but also in the transportation of goods such as food provisions, vehicles and general day to day goods. Our operations are severely impacted if such items are not able to be brought in as we are being on a remote island completely dependent on a ferry to bring these items in.

Fair Isle Bird Observatory is not only recognised worldwide for its ornithological work but it has been recognised, at both local and national government level, that its guesthouse operation is integral and central to the continuing development of Fair Isle itself. Our economic importance to the island should not be underestimated, therefore our successful continuance is vital to the island. The provision of a modern fit for purpose ferry is fundamental to that. I therefore fully support the replacing of the current outdated Good Shepherd with a new vessel as a matter of urgency.

Kind regards,

Mike Wood, Finance Director, Fair Isle Bird Observatory Trust