

Arbirlot Old Kirk Trust SC054039 Report for period to 31st March 2026

Arbirlot Old Kirk Trust SCIO (AOKT) was granted charitable status by OSCR on 7th March 2025. The Organisation was formed for the public benefit of the Community of Arbirlot and surrounding area, which is defined by a list of postcode units annexed to its Constitution. Its purposes are:

- (a) the advancement of citizenship or community development
- (b) the advancement of the arts, heritage and culture, and
- (c) the provision of recreational facilities, or the organisation of recreational facilities, with the object of improving the conditions of life for the persons for whom the facilities or activities are primarily intended.

Following the closure of Arbirlot Parish Church by the Church of Scotland (CoS) on 21st April 2024, AOKT came about by the coming together of a handful of local people who determined to turn the former church building in the heart of Arbirlot Village into a multi-purpose space for the benefit of their community. That group grew in numbers to form a working party, and members contributed time, expertise and enthusiasm to the extent that by September of 2024 plans for development of the building had been produced, a firm offer to make land available for a much-needed car park had been received, and liaison with Angus Council's Planning Department regarding the building and car park was progressing. The working party, by then numbering ten, took their ideas for development of the building and the uses to which it might be put to a Public Meeting on 24th September 2024. This was well attended by over 70 and a show of hands indicated around 80 % support.

Dealings in relation to the sale of Church of Scotland property is dealt with by the Church of Scotland's General Trustees (GTs). Their rules of procedure following closure of a building provide that, rather than it being immediately marketed for sale, a "Period of Exclusivity" should be given to a local organisation registered as a charity who indicate a desire to purchase it for the benefit of the community. Following on from the positive outcome of the Public Meeting in September, the group gave formal notification to the GTs of its intention to buy the former Arbirlot Church and was granted a Period of Exclusivity to 9th May 2025. The working party then moved as quickly as possible towards registration with OSCR and obtaining funding to meet the purchase price.

An appeal to members of the community and other supporters resulted in pledges for a sum of £85,230 being given. The GTs advised that they had obtained a valuation figure of £75,000. The group commissioned its own valuation which gave a figure of £50,000. An offer of £50,000 was intimated to the GTs but that was not accepted.

Following notification from Angus Council's Vibrant Communities service that funding available from SSEN was not limited to registered charities, and with assistance from them towards creation of a Business Plan, application to SSEN for a grant was made in November 2024. This was heavily over-subscribed, and the application was unsuccessful. Shortly after registration with OSCR had been achieved, however, application was made to the Scottish Land Fund (SLF) which awards grant funding to assist communities purchase land and property. SLF funding is made in two stages; applicants who receive funding for essential reports at Stage 1 are invited to apply for Stage 2 funding which would award a sum in line with a property valuation obtained by SLF.. AOKT's application for Stage 1 funding was successful and two valuable reports were obtained.

In connection with its application for Stage 2 funding from SLF, AOKT consulted the Community again, in April of 2025. With free of charge assistance offered by the Accelerate Programme of Community Enterprise, that consultation was done in the form of a Drop-In Session and also an online questionnaire. The number of participants was smaller than those attending the initial Public Meeting in September 2024, but the outcome was equally encouraging, with 35 community residents responding of which 69% were supportive and 48% indicated willingness to help with renovations. 63% also offered to help with fundraising.

AOKT's application for Stage 2 funding to meet the purchase price of the building did not, however proceed – despite fulsome pleas, the GTs refused to grant an extension to the Period of Exclusivity

and insisted that AOKT must offer to buy the property at their valuation figure of £75,000 by the 9th May 2025 deadline, failing which it would be exposed for sale on the open market. The time frame for the SLF Stage 2 grant was such that if AOKT were to be successful, grant funding would not become available until October 2025.

A purchase was therefore going to have to be made using the funds pledged. The Trustees felt that, because of the £50,000 figure obtained in their valuation, it would not be appropriate to meet the GT's asking price of £75,000, and submitted an offer at £55,000. The GTs advised that there was another interested party, and fixed a Closing Date. Because the Trustees had investigated the consents that they would need and had set up insurance cover on satisfactory terms, they were able to make an unconditional offer, held at £55,000, at the Closing Date, and this was successful. The funds pledged were called in, and AOKT's purchase of the building went through on 22nd August 2025.

The Arbirlot Old Kirk building, which dates back to 1838, and is Listed Category B, has never been served by water, so AOKT's first priority has been to introduce water and drainage and create toilets. At the date of this report, good progress has been made, and toilets should be in and functioning within the next three or four months.

Activities have been limited because of the lack of toilets. Short events have been held in the building – monthly Songs on Sunday and a Christmas by Candlelight event on Christmas Eve. All have been well attended and the opportunities to socialise before and afterwards welcomed. Donations from those attending have been generous. Such occasions have now ceased for the time being, due to work on the creation of toilets having commenced on 10th March 2026.

A weekly Walking Group was formed in September 2025. This has grown in numbers and continued to thrive, even through the winter months. Dogs are welcome, as are youngsters, and current ages range from one to eighty-one. Initially, members returned to the Old Kirk after their walk for a cup of tea or coffee, but are presently making other arrangements due to the building being currently closed during alterations.

Fundraising has also largely had to be outwith the Kirk building. The Trustees were delighted when members of the community stepped up to organise two major fundraisers, a Duck Race / barbecue in the village in October, and a Christmas Tractor Run. Both were very successful and well received. The Duck Race raised £1,556 and the Tractor Run £6,500.

Pews in the building and the pulpit have also been sold to raise funds, and a grant was awarded by a local charitable trust which has enabled chairs to be purchased to take their place.

Arbirlot's War Memorial is on one of the outside walls of the Old Kirk, and a Remembrance Day Service was held at 11:00 am on 11th November 2025. Despite the weather, this was attended by a good number, including children and teachers from Arbirlot Primary School. The School was also welcomed into the Kirk for their end of term Christmas Service. Arbirlot School is located one mile out of the village and the Trust has had letters of support from both the Head Teacher and the chair of the PTA. Both stressed that because the former Church Hall in Arbirlot village was also sold in 2024, the multi-use space which AOKT is creating will be invaluable to them for seasonal celebrations and fundraising events, as well as allowing pupils to be a real part of the community.

One of the reports obtained with grant assistance from SLF was a Building Condition Report. This identified areas of the roof that required attention and this work has been carried out. The pipe organ in the building is listed as an historic instrument by the British Institute of Organ Studies. This is valued by AOKT and has been serviced, tuned, and used for Songs on Sunday and the Christmas Eve event. It is currently "wrapped" in polythene sheeting to protect it against dust during the renovation work.

The Trustees are confident that once the installation of toilets is complete, Arbirlot Old Kirk will quickly be able to move towards significantly fulfilling AOKT's stated purposes of serving the Arbirlot community.