

**Westhill
Community
Council**

Officers:

Chair: Dr Donald Boyd
Treasurer: Kenneth Cox
Secretary: vacant
Minutes: Neil Hornsby

Members:

June Alexander
Brian MacGregor
Allan Simpson
Kath Fraser
John Thomson
Catriona Johnson

**ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF WESTHILL COMMUNITY COUNCIL HELD IN
THE COMMUNITY LOUNGE OF CRADLEHALL PRIMARY SCHOOL, INVERNESS,
AT 7.15PM ON WEDNESDAY 13 JUNE 2012.**

Chairman's Report

I wish to thank the Westhill Community Council for the opportunity to chair the council since the new Community Council elections in November 2011, and I pay tribute to Brian MacGregor as the previous chair. Our secretary Allan Simpson felt constrained to step down through pressure of work and we have decided to advertise for a new secretary. Each continues on the council, and Allan continues to manage the website. On behalf of the committee I express our thanks to them, in addition to the tangible tokens of appreciation which they have received.

It has been a busy but interesting time since I joined the Community Council over a year ago. In the past year WCC achieved a remarkable first in spontaneously organising a plenary meeting of the four local community councils with Highland Council, Highlands and Islands Enterprise and Transport Scotland to discuss and implement consideration of an improved access to the Beechwood campus for the new University of the Highlands and Islands.

The access to the Beechwood campus was approved by Highland Councillors in November 2011, but we continue to monitor the transport implications. The new slip road off the A9 has still not solved the traffic queuing on the southbound A9, and we continue to monitor why the warning signs are sometimes not operational, why the traffic lights are not clearing the A9 slip road queue, and the inability of the traffic light sequence to clear Caulfield Road North traffic, especially if drivers stop on the yellow box junction. HIE has agreed with WCC that the current approved access to the campus is not adequate for the future and HIE has agreed to work with WCC to implement a better access from the A9. This will require co-operation from Transport Scotland, for which we are using the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan as a catalyst for round-table talks between HC, TS, HIE and the community councils about solving the traffic gridlock. To this end, HIE attended a recent WCC meeting to discuss these issues and we plan quarterly meetings to maintain progress.

Future development of Community Councils

When I attended the last meeting of the Association of Scottish Community Councils in Dunblane, I learned that the ASCC began in the 1990s from a similar need for Community Councils to act in concert. However, it came to an end in 2012 through

withdrawal of Scottish Government funding. This is short-sighted, just when there is a need for the voice of Community Councils to be heard, especially in the planning process. The last meeting of the ASCC highlighted the short time-frames and deadlines for planning. We need to find ways to improve our representation. As well as using publicity, and our existing Highland Councillors, it may be that we can aim for Community Council representation on some committees of the Highland Council.

Community Benefit

The remote and rural Community Councils will receive a community benefit in the years ahead as they receive an independent income from wind farm developments, and the allocation of these funds between neighbouring Community Councils is promoting collective action among these councils. In Inverness, such funding is not immediately available, however on 30/5/2012 I attended a seminar *Achieving Impact with community benefit/investment* in Strathpeffer, which pointed out that Community Councils which cannot benefit from such Government subsidies are still able to invest in other projects collectively. This demonstrates the importance of more collective or plenary Community Council meetings, but such plenary meetings need to be flexible and capable of being called at short notice. However, only the Community Council itself has a statutory function. For more substantial matters, it is possible that we may be able to make more use of the Inverness City Committee.

Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan

The Westhill Community Council was also involved in the consultation on the Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan. The Call for Sites was completed in 2011 and we prepared a collective response from six Community Councils to the Main Issues Report which is out for consultation until 6/7/2012. This submission will be available on our website in due course.

Local issues

As well as these area-wide issues, the council has attended to matters within the community.

We have commenced a newsletter which has been well received. We are developing cost-effective methods of production and distribution. Because of Community Benefit, some Community Councils have a sizeable income which can be used to produce and distribute their newsletter. We have limited funds but we will need to use what we have to communicate more effectively with the community.

We have used the newsletter to invite applications for small grants for community initiatives and there has been some feedback from this. We helped to fund a new bus shelter at Castlehill Road, and a replacement shed for Cradlehall Primary School. We repeated our donation to the Senior Citizens Club and we have a few more applications to consider. The last chairman's report said that funds were built up for some sort of community facility. We will need to develop a budget for how to disburse donations and how much we can ring-fence for larger projects. We may be able to use the newsletter to canvas opinion on the worthy causes to support. Possibly

the schools can be used to develop projects to promote community ownership of community council projects to foster the community spirit.

We were successful in securing a pedestrian crossing on Tower Road, which had been unsuccessful in the past, and new street lighting on each side of the railway bridge. We also spoke up for the community during the change over of bus services in the area during the winter months.

We advertised the Community Council by placing notices in the two primary schools and Culloden Secondary School, and the latter notice included an invite to senior pupils to attend our monthly meeting. I offered to speak to interested groups in these schools about the Community Council but so far these offers have not been taken up.

On-going activities

We are currently supporting an application for a local pharmacy which has been turned down by the Pharmacy Practices Committee. We are concerned at the built-in anti-competitive bias in the process for determining the necessity and desirability of local pharmacies. We wish to build a community, and we believe that business and commercial interests should operate in favour of this instead of appearing to act against it.

We continue to monitor speeding at the pick-up and drop-off point for schoolchildren at Cradlehall Primary School, and the Highland Council Speed Limit Review. We are investigating improved lighting outside our meeting place.

We plan to monitor and make more use of the annual Ward Discretionary Budget administered by Inverness South Ward's four Highland Councillors. We continue to monitor planning issues, one of the main activities of the community council, yet the deadlines for responses do not fit easily with our monthly meetings. We are monitoring the impact on the community of The Call for Sites review, and corresponding with Council officials to safeguard earlier decisions.

Our activities can be followed by reviewing the monthly Minutes which are published on our website, and residents are encouraged to attend our meetings on the second Wednesday of most months of the year apart from the summer months.

On behalf of the Council, I wish to thank Cradlehall Primary School for the continued use of the Community Lounge, the office staff for distributing our newsletter via the school children, the janitor for his services, our community policeman, the four ward councillors who attend our monthly meetings and contribute their expertise and who follow up our requests for action by Highland Council officers, and Charles Stephen our ward manager. We are pleased to welcome the public when they attend our monthly meeting, and to hear their contributions if they indicate the wish to do so.

At the personal level, I would like to thank my fellow councillors for their help, support and forbearance, both the seasoned and the co-opted fresh faces on the council, but especially our Minute Secretary, Neil Hornsby for his assistance, our

treasurer Ken Cox, and Catriona Johnson, a former chair, for their help in the efficient running of your Westhill Community Council.

Dr Donald Boyd
Chairman
Westhill Community Council
INVERNESS