

# Fortrose & Rosemarkie Community Council



## Chairperson's Report 2018

Your community council has continued to be a proactive voice to Highland Council and other public bodies and businesses. Even though we often feel our voices are not being listened to we keep trying. I'd like to thank my fellow community councillors for their commitment, time and patience as well as others in the community who have helped out over the year. Thanks also to our Ward Manager who is a continual fount of knowledge and wisdom and is always there when you need a word.

Here's a review of a very busy year.

## Community Council Membership

Currently there are 8 Community Council members – 6 elected and 2 co-opted.

Russell Mackenzie was a co-opted member this year. Russell has so many links to the community as well as an abundance of practical and local knowledge. He's been an invaluable addition to the team.

## Communication

We now have 570+ likes on Facebook; up significantly over the year. 😊 More of you are getting in touch via Facebook and e-mail – or just stopping me in the street - which is fantastic. Despite building up our Facebook profile we still never underestimate the power of the paper notice. Our Surgeries are now run by appointment. The web site has been partially rationalised. This will carry on as and when time allows.

**Newsletter:** due to time pressure and uncertainty over our budget I haven't put together a newsletter in recent months. It is anticipated that next year a form of newsletter will be more regularly produced.

**Media:** we continue to be in touch with our four local newspapers and Chatterbox when appropriate.

**BICC (Black Isle Community Councils):** we have continued to meet informally with other Black Isle community councils on issues of common interest. FRCC hosted a presentation by Rory Mair on the potential presented by the Community Empowerment Act. BICC also facilitated a gathering of local parent councils who were concerned about recent plans for 'cluster heads' (which were then put on hold.)

**Highland Council:** we are regularly in contact with Highland Council officials and our elected Ward Councillors attend our meetings most months.

**Police Scotland:** PC John Murphy is always responsive when contacted and makes time for chat. When Police Scotland is able to attend meetings it is hugely appreciated.

**MP/MSPs:** I have to commend the offices of both our local MP Ian Blackford and MSP Kate Forbes as they never fail to respond promptly to a phone or e-mail query. We enjoy positive and respectful relationships with both.

### **Community Activity/Issues**

**Volunteer Groups:** the Rosemarkie volunteers and Fortrose 'Tidy Our Burgh' groups have carried on their good work this past year with our support. The Rosemarkie group created a stunning Christmas tree for the village and in May spent a Saturday clearing away rubbish right up the Fairy Glen road. A fantastic effort. Those who enjoy a stroll down St Andrew's Walk will notice a difference there thanks to the work of Tidy Our Burgh - hours of effort and commitment. I must also pay tribute to Rosemarkie Amenities for their dogged persistence to get things done. The new tennis courts at Rosemarkie beach look fabulous; the beach area is so well cared for and the Beach Café more popular than ever.

**Community Brown Bin:** the community now has a dedicated brown bin for garden waste in Fortrose (which was secured free of charge.) The bin is kept at Fortrose Academy and is regularly used by the Tidy Our Burgh volunteers.

**Grit Bins:** monitoring of the grit bins continued this winter and we were successful in securing some additional bins, though not all we wanted. Tom Heath (CC member) also created a grit bin map.

**Annual Litter Picking/Beach Tidy:** many groups have come forward to litter pick this year. Thank you to all. Special thanks to the Co-Op staff for helping at the official Beach Tidy in Rosemarkie. It was also great to hear via the parent council's monitoring that the vast majority of pupils coming from the Co-op do put their litter in the bins provided. At key points in the villages we do need more bins or more frequent collections. The community council is in regular touch with waste management services at Highland Council regarding bin collections, the siting of bins and litter issues more generally.

Currently the equipment for litter picking has to be borrowed from Highland Council. This takes time and organisation. With our surplus funds we will be investing in a supply of litter picking equipment so residents and groups have quick and easier access.

**Rosemarkie Beach:** a higher than usual number of beach parties have taken place this summer with litter, debris from camp fires and shards of broken glass left along the beach. A hazard for the public and unnecessary additional work for the amenities. The police have been informed about concerns regarding the worrying number of very young teenagers attending and drinking heavily at these parties.

**Academy Street Picnic Area upgrade:** new picnic benches were kindly donated by an anonymous resident and the broken fence was replaced by Aardvark. In addition, a new-style litter bin (that can only take small items and doesn't blow open) has replaced the old. This upgrade has been warmly welcomed by residents.

**Play Park (on Chanonry Park, Fortrose):** there are continual complaints about litter and broken glass in the park and on the footpath from Dean's Road. These issues are regularly reported to the development's management company. On occasion residents and community council members have cleared up the mess. Recently, needles indicative of intravenous drug use were found. A disturbing development. The police were alerted. The siting of this park is an issue – it's out of sight and has become a 'go to' place to hang out when its purpose is for the enjoyment of younger children.

**Dog Park (proposal):** an enthusiastic resident came to us with the idea for a dog park on land next to the play park (it's currently wasted land.) There are numerous reasons why this is a good idea - a new social space - but not least because it will ensure the area around the play park has a more regular flow of people in and out discouraging anti-social behaviour. The resident and I have both pursued this idea with Tulloch's but so far they have refused to explore it or even agree to meet up on site. Disappointing. This is not an idea to give up on though.

**Bank of Scotland closure:** the Fortrose branch closed and the ATM with it. There is anecdotal evidence from high street businesses that the loss of the ATM has impacted on trade and footfall. So far we've had no feedback (official or anecdotal) on the efficiency of the mobile banking service.

**Pavement Parking:** residents complained about pavement parking, especially down Academy Street. I raised the issue with Fortrose Academy management who reminded staff and parents of the unacceptable inconvenience this causes wheelchair users and parents/carers with buggies. I also appealed more widely to the community to think before they do it.

**Public Toilets:** the community council were emphatically opposed to the idea that, as a cost cutting measure Highland Council were to close our public toilets. They remain open for this season but the future is still uncertain. Highland Council will be consulting in the autumn.

**Speeding (especially on the approach into Fortrose from Rosemarkie):** we're regularly communicating the public's concerns to both Police Scotland and Highland Council. The Police do make regular speed checks but driver behaviour still hasn't altered. With no response from Highland Council on this issue the community council propose fundraising for our own LED speed control sign for the approach to Fortrose. There are some affordable options on the market. This is on the agenda for 2018/2019.

'Twenty's Plenty' for Rosemarkie: Anne Phillips is leading a campaign group and has signed up to this national initiative. Look out for activity for 2018/2019. The community council support it.

**Christmas Trees:** thanks to volunteers Rosemarkie had a stunning tree. The community council took on organising a tree for Fortrose. Despite it blowing down in a freak wind storm and the first set of lights malfunctioning we persisted. Eventually it was put up, stayed up and lit up. The public was appreciative so there **will** be a tree again in 2018.

Christmas lights: once again we thank David Grigor getting the lights up and down.

**Food Bank Xmas Collection:** this new idea proved a huge success. We asked for food items to be left under the Fortrose Christmas tree and at Rosemarkie Stores the week-end before Xmas and your generosity was overwhelming. Donations weighed in at amazing 505.60kg. Thank you! We'll be repeating this for 2018.

**Annual Christmas Carol Singing (Fortrose Cathedral):** last year's event was the biggest ever and raised a record sum: £575.00. The money was split between local Brownies and Rainbows.

**The Andrewina Junor Trust:** Community Council representatives, along with Trustees carried out their annual duty to distribute donations from the Trust ahead of the Christmas season.

**Senior Citizens Lunch:** this annual event was, once again well attended and hugely appreciated. Thank you for pupils and staff from Fortrose Academy for helping out and for Douglas Stuart and his musicians for 'stepping in' at short notice with the entertainment.

**St Boniface Fair:** thanks to Wilma Downie, Libby Brown, Rae Simpson and Emma Dalseme for organising another successful event. Thanks to residents who turned up to help us put up and take down the stalls.

**Community Market:** we are delighted to be bringing a community market to Fortrose starting next month (August 2018 for a 6-month trial period). We hope the increased footfall gives the village and local businesses a boost. Thank you to Transition Black Isle for giving this a chance and to High Life Highland for their co-operation.

## **Common Good**

**Fortrose Town Hall:** we organised a public meeting to begin a process of exploring options for the future of Fortrose Town Hall. This building is a common good asset. Currently it is leased to High Life Highland (HLH) by Highland Council who are Trustees (AKA custodians) of common good assets and the common good fund. HLH act as a booking and management service for the venue. It's important to note that HLH do as good as job as possible within the limitations of their remit. They do not have the staff or the budget to market the venue or to

upgrade it. The hall has many negatives and currently loses HLH money. As a minimum it requires an upgrade to be comparable with other village halls. The current 'model' for the management of common good assets appears incapable of delivering the required investment or any long term vision for Fortrose's most visible, centrally located community space. We were therefore delighted that a local resident came forward to try and set up a Town Hall Group. As a 'stage one' the aim will be to promote the hall more widely and increase its use. Alongside this first step, longer term options will be explored for the remainder of this community council's term of office. If this building is to have a viable future then it's the community that has to make that happen.

**Coastal Protection (Rosemarkie Caravan Park):** work on repairing this piece of the coastline is scheduled to start in October. We accept that this work has to be done. However, the community council has expressed serious misgivings about the financial package, the conditions attached to it and the cost estimate. All three are supported by our Ward Councillors and have been approved by the relevant Highland Council committees. Current cost estimates are confidential but the common good fund will be significantly depleted as a result of this project. The Caravan and Camping Club (CCC) are making a sizeable contribution but with caveats: a rent freeze to 2030 and a renewal of the lease a year early in 2026. The current rental for this site is low by commercial standards but that cannot be changed. We would, however hope for a more commercial rental for the next 25 year lease and that a new lease would be tendered. This would significantly restore the common good fund over a 10-15 year period from 2026/27. We are not confident this will now be possible. The conditional nature of the CCC deal will significantly reduce the ability of the Trustees to negotiate. I personally feel our concerns about the longer term have not be listened to by our Ward Councillors. I have asked them, as Trustees of the Common Good Fund for their plan/strategy to restore the fund to better financial health and await a response.

Highland Council has appointed a Common Good Officer, Sara Murdoch who came along to meet the community council earlier in the year.

### **Chanonry Point**

Summer 2017 was even more chaotic than 2016 at Chanonry Point, made worse by food outlets selling down there without permission creating additional chaos. The situation made life horrendous for residents; impacted commercially on the golf club and became an issue of public safety. Change was unavoidable. Double yellow lines were painted along Ness Road. Highland Council took the decision to introduce seasonal/flexible parking charges from the 2018 summer season as a traffic calming measure. As Chair of the Stakeholder Group I suggested formalising permission to trade, with just ice cream sales tendered to avoid multiple outlets turning up. Maureen Stewart – a local business – was awarded the tender and is enjoying a successful season.

To provide an alternative to car use I organised for D & E coaches to trial a licensed (Dolphin) Shuttle Bus. This required a significant financial investment on their part.

With a tiny budget, the ability to promote the service has been limited. I have informed/updated relevant web sites. I also organised the production of a leaflet which has been distributed into some key outlets where visitors will pick it up. Disappointingly (for me, but especially for D & E), is that the parking meter has only just been installed by Highland Council. Ideally we'd hoped the scheme would have been 'live' in June before the Scottish school holidays.

### **The Future**

Following the recent Highland Council budget review the grant allocation to this community council has been reduced by 60% which leaves us an annual grant (after insurances are paid out) of just £400.00.

This requires us to adapt and reduce our formal activity. Here's the agreed plan of action to continue operating:

1. Any reserves we currently have will be spent for community benefit and not for operational purposes. Sadly, this means we can therefore no longer afford to retain a Minutes' Secretary. Isla Mackay has done a fantastic job for us. We are unhappy having to let her go.
2. Meetings will be as follows (inc. AGM): August, *September (late in the month/informal)*; November, December, February, March, May, June/AGM. CC members will take turns to write up and distribute the minutes.
3. We will meet as required on specific issues. Communication with the public on immediate concerns will happen more frequently via Facebook and on notice boards. Surgeries for residents will also take place informally and in response to demand or by request.
4. Monthly meetings can only take place in 'free of charge' venues.
5. The Community Council will take a stall at St Boniface Fair to fundraise for the Fortrose Xmas tree and lights.
6. 50% of the community carol singing event will go towards community council funds in order that we can afford to run public meetings and photocopy newsletters. The other 50% of the carol singing proceeds will go to a nominated local charity.
7. We can no longer afford to print a newsletter but can produce one for access online with photocopies made available in key local outlets.

As I step down from 2 busy years as Chairperson (remaining as a community councillor) I wish my successor all the best. Despite the cuts to our grant, for the rest of its term this community council will strive to make our voice heard so that the views of our community are listened to and respected.

**Sarah Atkin**  
Chairperson  
July 2018

### **Planning Review – by Dr Tom Heath**

There have been no major planning applications during the past year but those passed in previous years will continue to affect the community.

**Chanonry Park:** Building continues at the Chanonry Park development and, the Developer having been allowed by the planners to build at a higher density than agreed in the Master Plan. We hope that the current wasted land around the play park will be put to good community use.

**Parklands Care Home:** The construction of the Parklands care home is scheduled to commence in the autumn but as I write this Parklands has yet to take ownership of the field. There have been concerns that its location in the “clear green space” between Fortrose and Rosemarkie will lead to further applications on this site but these are unlikely to find favour with the planners.

**Greenside Development, Rosemarkie:** the construction of the Greenside Farm project is also scheduled to start later this year. The Highland Council has agreed that it is important that discussions between interested parties are held before traffic management plans for the new junction between Courthill Road and the A832 are finalised and yet the detailed plans seem to be being developed without any such discussion. Despite numerous reminders from the community council and repeated promises from the Highland Council to set up a liaison group between developer and residents this has not to date been done. We will keep pressing the Highland Council.

The community council considers that additional traffic from new developments is placing an unacceptable burden on the road infrastructure, particularly Fortrose and Rosemarkie high streets, with an ever growing danger to pedestrian users of the high streets and an increasing number of dangerous potholes in main and side roads.

The safety concerns expressed by the community council in respect of the narrow pavements and traffic volume are generally not taken on board because, as yet there have been no fatalities and this **appears** to be what ‘safety’ is judged by. We do not consider this to be satisfactory.

The relationship between the community council and Highland Council with regard to planning matters remains somewhat strained. We were delighted, therefore that Cllr Maxine Smith, Chair of the Planning Committee at Highland Council accepted our invitation to meet community councillors from across the Black Isle and listen to our thoughts and concerns. Her input and insights and general advice were excellent. The reality is that communities have to be engaged well ahead of any local plans being drawn up and make sure there is genuine local input into this process.

The process of consultation more widely is, in our view unsatisfactory and so often disregards local opinion.

Our view is that presenting a 'done deal' on any development is not real consultation. If there's dialogue and genuine engagement early on in the process then it's my view that a more satisfactory outcome will be achieved.

Planning is the most important area of life involving community council input because it does have such a massive impact over the long term. It is expected that the community council will resist further major developments in our area and continue to press the Highland Council to improve the local infrastructure, particularly in respect of road maintenance.

**Dr Tom Heath**

**July 2018**

**ENDS.**