

Assynt Community Council
26 January 2017
Committee Room - Lochinver Village Hall
7.30pm
Minutes (Approved February 23rd)

1) Present:

A Dickson (AD), R Kerr (RK) , M Hutchison - Vice-Chair (MH), P Jones (PJ), D McBain (DM), J Thomas (JT)

Others Present:

G Farlow (GF) (Highland Council), Malcolm Bangor-Jones (MBJ), Nigel Goldie (NG), Madeline Macphail (MM), Maureen Scott (MS)

2) Apologies:

K Anderson (KA), V Ling, D Slator - Chair (DS), L Taylor (LT),

MH chaired the meeting in DS's absence.

3) Expressions of Interest:

There were none.

4) Minutes of November Meeting and Matters arising:

4: 411 viii) DS has spoken to Ivor Souter. The bus shelters have been purchased and will be installed in the coming months.

4: 15 i) With regard to the Patient Transport Service a public meeting is due to be held in February.

Action: DS to confirm date and ensure notices are in place to advertise the meeting. PJ to include the PTS on the March agenda.

4: 7) DM has fitted the 'sheep scarer' at Stoer cemetery but this has since been removed by persons unknown. DM suggested that 'deer whistles' might be a better option as they are less likely to be stolen. They only operate above a certain wind speed, but the problem of sheep congregating in the parking area only occurs during stormy weather.

4: 8) MH has heard no more regarding the Education Governance Review.

4: 10) MH read out a brief statement regarding the use of First Responders to supplement the reduction in out of hours medical care. MBJ felt that the proposed system of having volunteer First Responders on call was not necessarily the right solution. There has been a slow response in volunteers willing to act as First Responders, presumably due to the high level of responsibility that comes with the position.

GF explained that First Responders are called out by the Scottish Ambulance Service to attend to a patient when an ambulance is not immediately available. Their duties would primarily be to stabilise the patient and provide a degree of comfort until trained personnel arrive on the scene.

With that in mind AD felt that the Ricky Laird, the Scottish Ambulance Service co-ordinator, should be approached again to explain in more detail how the First Responder system will operate. He added there are local organisations in place already such as Mountain Rescue and the RNLi who have individuals trained to respond to medical emergencies.

AD also suggested that grants already available from the SSEN could be used to provide defibrillators at a number of locations outwith Lochinver - such as the camp sites at Achmelvich and Clachtoll. JT pointed out that the system is designed to be used by individuals with little or no First Aid training.

Action: PJ to include First Responders Scheme to the March agenda.

4: 11) Following DM's on-line complaint to HC regarding faulty street lights, the necessary repairs have been carried out.

4: 6) No volunteers have come forward to participate in the Winter Resilience programme, presumably due to the level of training necessary before they are allowed to carry out their responsibilities (salting the pavements). As a result HC circulated an email explaining why they are therefore unable to supply the necessary equipment (spades and salt bunkers) allowing members of the local community to deal with icy conditions.

4: 7 v) MH referred to an email outlining the reasons why the road gritting carried out on 21st November was less than effective. Gritters had spend several hours salting the local roads but a sudden deterioration in weather conditions during the early hours made a second gritting exercise almost impossible given the time constraints.

4: 8) Unapool Old School Income and Expenditure will be discussed after the Geopark AGM takes place next month.

Action: PJ to include on the February agenda.

4: 9) Jeanette Maccarthy has confirmed that under the terms of the lease the ACC is not responsible for providing funds towards the security of the Rockstop premises.

4: 12) AD was concerned that the water mains work along the road between Lochinver and Torbreck has been halted before completion and instead work has commenced on the section between the bridge and Achmelvich. No other local councillors present had received complaints but it was generally felt that the original proposed work should have been completed rather than shelved.

It was suggested that one reason for the delay might be because Scottish Water had applied for the road closure to take place over an eight-week period and will now need to reapply since that time has run out. A delayed start to accommodate NC500 traffic, and adverse weather might also have contributed to the problem.

AD felt that a site meeting should be held between representatives of the ACC and Scottish Water to clarify the situation.

Action: GF to contact Scottish Water to organise a meeting.

4: 13 ii) LT has reported back that a number of local volunteers are looking to join the retained fire service. PJ added that he knows of two individuals who began their training earlier in January.

AD felt there is still a problem with attracting volunteers due to the strenuous level of training necessary - not all of it relevant to fire fighting in this particular area. He asked if other communities in the remoter parts of the Highlands suffer from the same problem, and if so could the requirements be adjusted to take account of the high number of vacancies and the likely level of training necessary to handle most emergencies in a non-urban environment. There is already a two-tier system in the Ambulance Service that works well enough so he felt the same could be applied for the Fire Service.

GF replied that the National Fire Officer is looking to be more flexible, but dealing with most road accidents and fires need the same skill set whether in a city setting or in the countryside.

4: 13 viii) MH has approached the Macaskill family and they are not unduly concerned whether or not the damaged bench at the end of the Inver Lodge road is replaced.

It was suggested the situation be re-examined when funds become available.

DM proposed the draft minutes be approved and AD seconded.

5) Financial Report:

PJ reported on behalf of KA.

The latest bank balances currently stand at £102.08 and £4338.45 (following receipt of £2164.51 from Innogy Renewables).

6) Correspondence:

PJ has already circulated the Planning Applications for December and January to all concerned. These includes detailed correspondence for the erection of two mobile-telephone masts close to Little Assynt Lodge and Drumbeg village on behalf of EE.

PJ pointed out that the format of information e-mailed to Community Councils from the Planning Department has recently changed from a single-page document (specific to each ward) to a 35-page pdf file covering the entire Highand Region. This makes it more difficult to extract and circulate the relevant information to community councillors each month.

PJ also referred to a briefing document informing the community council that due to the proposed relocation of Lochinver Post Office to the Spar store the local Registrar will be retiring. With immediate effect all those requiring to register a birth, marriage or death will be required to attend the service point in Ullapool by appointment.

AD read out sections of the document explaining that families will also have the option to register at any other Registration Office if that is more convenient. Where a customer is vulnerable and needs additional assistance HC will work with them to identify the best place to record the event.

AD asked if a current member of the local service point staff could be trained as a Registrar or if an advertisement could be placed for any local person wishing to be trained as Registrar could apply. MBJ pointed out that the legal implications of registering deaths, for example, are far-reaching and require significant training. GF felt this would not be feasible given that only 11 registrations were made in Assynt in 2016. MH felt it might be more cost-effective for the Registrar to travel from Ullapool to Lochinver if necessary than train someone locally. GF had also suggested the Citizen's Advice representative from Kinlochbervie visit the Drop-in Centre to offer assistance if necessary.

Action: MH to contact Diane Menzies to find out what duties are involved and whether training someone else locally is viable.

PJ passed a copy of the briefing note to JT for inclusion in the next issue of the Assynt News informing everyone of the changes.

7) Community Services:

i) AD has spoken to John Clark and work on the Salt Dump will continue once a JCB driver becomes available. John now has a squad of four in place including a trained HGV-driver.

ii) MS reported that the surface of the road at the approaches to the Inver Bridge (at the turning to Baddidarach) is sinking.

Action: AD to speak to John Clark.

8) ACA Report to ACC

NG gave a brief update on the latest developments. A Steering Group has been set up to re-examine the function of the ACA and encourage more members to join the proposed newly revamped ACA. 4 new members have already joined as co-optees: Madeline Macphail, Trish Bangor-Jones, John Venters and Brendan O'Hanrahan.

The next phase will involve looking at priorities, including the future of the Tourist Information Centre. One suggestion had been that the ACA register an interest in the existing building if and when it becomes available following representations to Visit Scotland. But the priority for now is to ensure there is a viable Visitors' Information Centre in place for the 2017 season.

MM pointed out that Visit Scotland has agreed to have a Tourist Information member of staff in place this summer even if the Centre is to be located elsewhere in the village.

JT asked if the original ACA still exists, and if so are there outstanding debts still owed under the original auspices.

NG replied that there are two outstanding debts. One relates to NPower and Assynt Community Trading. The bills were always variable and open to question, but £1000 of about £3000 has been repaid. Following a year's silence it's

likely Npower has written off this debt along with other customers' bills. A loan was also made to Assynt Community Trading by a private individual and this is still being repaid. Outstanding payment owed to a previous manager at Lochinver Mission is not the responsibility of the ACA and cannot be paid back as the debt was incurred by the Lochinver Mission Limited, a separate company running the café and bunkhouse that eventually declared itself bankrupt. As a charity the ACA is not allowed to make such payments as it would be unlawful.

9) Ranger Services:

MH was concerned about the renewed threat to the Ranger Service.

NG reported that the ACA has written to HC supporting the Ranger Service and DS has also written on behalf of the ACC.

GF explained that the possibility of reducing the service was discussed twelve months ago as a potential cost saving exercise. This was leaked to the press by the unions and it became a thorny issue. Savings were found elsewhere and GF is still committed to saving the service as the loss of two significant posts in this area would be catastrophic

Action: The next Budget meeting will take place on 16th February and GF will keep MH informed of the outcome.

10) Grant Funding:

DS had asked for this item to be included on the agenda but there was nothing to discuss.

Action: PJ to include on the agenda for February.

11) Local Groups (Assynt Leisure):

RK has been given a copy of the annual business report and he told the meeting that very little has changed. The Leisure Centre is still dependant on extra funding in order to survive. MH added that Highland Council funding has been withdrawn so alternative means of financial support are being sought.

AD has spoken to John Clark regarding the parking area. The site is not owned by HC but John is prepared to provide a breakdown of the costs involved in re-covering the parking area with tarmac.

12) Arms Trade Investment:

MH was appalled to discover that HC has investments in companies that participate in the Arms industry and asked for clarification.

DM pointed out that HC has investments in several companies, such as Rolls Royce, that have a broad portfolio of operations of which the Arms trade is often a small part.

GF explained that all investment is handled by an investment company in such a way that no individual councillor is able to influence where the investment is placed (thus avoiding any conflict of interests).

MM asked if the funds could be relocated into ethical investments.

GF pointed out that if steps were taken to re-invest in less well-known companies (which might well provide a lower return) the HC could find itself open to litigation by pension holders if their projected pension pots fail to reach expected levels as a result. I think item 12 should conclude with :

The majority of the councillors present felt this was not an ACC issue.

13) Campervan Facilities:

GF reported that Elphin has already taken steps to have a site in place.

Following discussion with Tony Usher it was felt that the proposal to have another facility close to the breakwater in Lochinver would be impractical despite the availability of a water supply and sewage disposal close by.

AD suggest the local tourism group pursue the matter further with Tony Usher. There have been several instances of drive-by campervan owners arriving at local camp sites, discharging their effluent for free then leaving shortly afterwards. It is also possible that a number of campervan owners already take advantage of the opportunity to illegally dispose of their effluent into the sea at the breakwater without being seen or incurring a charge.

14) AOCB:

i) DM gave an update on proposed Broadband enhancements to the area. Fibre-optic connection to the Lochinver exchange is due to be completed by April this year. For those outside the 2 Km radius who might not benefit from faster broadband speeds, there is already a 'Better Broadband' scheme in place whereby anyone looking to improve their internet connection can apply for £350 to help pay towards the upgrade.

NG pointed out that the erection of two extra masts by EE for emergency service cover might help improve internet coverage as well as mobile phone connections. DM had earlier suggested EE be approached with a request that any masts be disguised so they are less obtrusive. But if it was felt this would not be practical.

ii) JT asked if a new plaque could be placed at the viewpoint along the road between Lochinver and Clachtoll to replace the one that was stolen some time ago.

MS suggested the Geopark be contacted to provide similar ones to those along the road between Drumrunie and Inchnadamph but RK explained that the Assynt Crofters' Trust fitted the original.

Action: PJ to write to the ACT asking if they are prepared to replace.

iii) KA passed on a request from the Fire Service that the ACC pay an outstanding bill from the Assynt News for £15 to cover their recruitment advertisement.

MH proposed the ACC pay this and RK seconded.

iv) AD reported that there have been no further developments with the siting of the ATM at the Village Hall. The matter is currently in the hands of Mr Vestey's solicitors.

v) Following a request from KA, MH has spoken to Nicole Johnston regarding a plaque to commemorate her father. The family are delighted with the suggestion but the meeting agreed the request should be handed over to the ACA.

vi) MS asked if barriers might provide a better solution for the problem of sheep droppings at Stoer cemetery - and asked if someone could clean the parking area whenever an interment is due to take place.

DM has explored the possibility of purchasing removable barriers but the cost is prohibitive and not entirely feasible given the prevailing weather conditions. Sheep droppings are cleared away whenever a burial is due, but the problem is ongoing for anyone who comes to visit the graves at other times.

On a separate matter JT asked if the water butt has been installed. AD confirmed it has.

vii) MH referred to the HC's latest on-line initiative inviting members of the public to create their own budget.

The link is as follows:

<https://highland.budgetsimulator.com/>

Action: PJ to pass on details to LT so it can also be posted on the ACC's Facebook page.

The meeting closed at 21.45.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, February 23rd 2017 (not Wednesday 22nd as agreed in the meeting). It will be held in the Committee Room of Lochinver Village Hall.

PJ January 2017

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