

Assynt Community Council
29 June 2017
Drumbeg Village Hall
7.30pm
Approved Minutes

1) Present:

A Dickson (AD), M Hutchison (MH), P Jones (PJ), R Kerr (RK) , D McBain (DM), L Taylor (LT)

Others Present:

K Currie (KC) (Highland Council), S Collie, A Haines, D Haines, K Matheson, M Macleod (MM), A MacCrimmond, N Millar, G Robertson (GR), F Saywell (FS)

2) Apologies:

K Anderson (KA), V Ling (VL), B Pursey, R Pursey, D Slator (DS), M Stringer, J Thomas (JT)

MH chaired the meeting and welcomed everyone.

3) Expressions of Interest:

There were none.

4) Minutes of May Meeting and Matters arising:

Scottish Water Update: Remedial work to the Leisure Centre car park has still not been carried out. Sections of road have been tarmacked following Scottish Water's work and there is now an area of flooding along the road to Achmelvich that wasn't present before. John Clark is currently investigating the matter.

Action: DS to chase up the Leisure Centre work.

Strone Hill Plaque: The Assynt Crofters have now placed their plaque at the viewpoint and the Geopark plan to install another plaque identifying the individual landmarks visible from this site. This will be done when sufficient funds become available. The Geopark geopod for Assynt will be sited at Ardvreck.

Ice Plant Relay Station: A new TV relay station will replace the existing transmission mast when the Ice Plant is dismantled.

Campervans: It is becoming increasingly evident that there is an urgent need for local facilities to allow campervan owners visiting the area to dispose of their waste. This will hopefully avoid the practice of chemical toilets being emptied at the roadside or into local waterways. The old salt stance on the approaches to Lochinver might be one potential site, but there are Health and Safety considerations and there is insufficient drainage to handle sewage.

GR reported that the Assynt Foundation are considering a similar facility close to the walkers' car park along the Glen Canisp road and have investigated the feasibility of an underground sump tank to accommodate any waste. This could also generate revenue as the use of the facility would incur a small charge.

MH mentioned the system in place at Kinlochbervie Harbour and felt a similar facility close to the RNLI Station in Lochinver would be an option, even though there are objections from the Harbour due to the potential increase in traffic. The ACA Development Group and Discover Assynt are also believed to be pursuing the matter. DM felt this was one particular issue where HIE should be involved, since it might provide an opportunity to generate revenue. An important factor, given the extra burden being placed on an already fragile and under-funded local infrastructure by the NC500.

Benches: Steps are already being taken to replace the broken benches in the village.

Action: PJ to chase up Nick Gorton's offer to replace the bench at the bottom of Lodge Road.

Parking: The problem of inconsiderate parking along Lochinver Main Street has already been brought to the attention of Graham Mackenzie (HC Roads Operations Manager) but he is yet to report back with the options available given the legalities of restricting parking to local residents.

AD proposed the draft minutes be accepted and MH seconded.

5) Financial Report:

PJ read out the figures provided by KA from the latest statement.

Business Instant Access Reserve Account: £4274.11 Business Current Account: £172.35

6) Correspondence:

PJ passed around copies of the June Planning Applications.

7) Local Issues (Drumbeg):

Road Signage:

There is a shortage of signs along the B869 advising drivers of the correct use of passing places to allow overtaking. This is especially problematic given the increase of tourist traffic. LT has already put in a request for more signs to be erected along this stretch of road.

Action: AD to speak to Hugh Morrison to ask if discretionary funding can be used in the interim to speed up the process.

Clashnessie Beach Access:

Both paths leading onto the beach have recently become badly eroded and undermined making access difficult from the roadside.

AD confirmed that John Clark has already carried out repair work on the verge, but the path is not the responsibility of the Highways and Transport Department.

Action: RK to contact Matt Dent (Footpath Officer HC) and to also approach the Crofters' Trust with a view to their possibly contributing to part of the cost of repair.

B869 Road Surface:

Concerns have been expressed about the poor state of the surface along various sections of this road, and the dangerous condition of the rock verges close to the Unapool crossroads and at Clashnessie. John Clark has inspected the road and is of the opinion that there is not a significant problem with pot-holes, but has agreed to carry out minor resurfacing work where necessary. This is likely to be carried out during the next 3 months, depending on weather conditions.

Action: AD suggested someone from Drumbeg community mark out on a map those sections where the road surface or edges are most in need of repair and scan a copy to him so he can forward this to John Clark.

Litter:

AD has been in touch with HC Waste Management department and the current policy is to reduce the number of waste bins for public use at various locations within Assynt. Given the volume of visitors and the amount of litter being left adjacent to existing bins because they are full, it was felt this is not necessarily helping combat fly-tipping.

Historically, Clashnessie and Drumbeg communities opted to remove litter bins because they encouraged visitors to dump their litter on the ground next to the bins if they were already full. If there are no bins, most considerate visitors take their litter away with them.

KC acknowledged that the NC500 has contributed to the scale of the problem. Currently HC does not have sufficient funds to respond to the extra demands for road maintenance, litter collection, public toilet facilities, etc. created by the increase in tourism, and the NC500 organizers are not obliged to contribute financially as they are a separate commercial enterprise.

A document analysing the impact of the NC500 on local communities is due to be produced by the end of this summer so these issues can be tackled in a more strategic fashion. HIE are currently unwilling to make any financial commitments. GR pointed out that the increase in tourism is vital for the area to thrive. AD agreed but made it clear that more money will need spending in order to maintain the local infrastructure.

Broadband:

PJ passed around a document prepared by Willy Jack on behalf of the ACA outlining the current situation.

KC referred to a scheme set up in Ullapool to buy increased bandwidth and suggested this be studied in more detail before any decisions are made to explore alternative solutions in Assynt.

Action: KC to put more pressure on HIE to combat the problem of poor internet coverage as well as the impact of the NC500. AD suggested both matters could be brought up during the regular meetings of the NW Sutherland CC Forum.

Cattle Grid:

MM has already informed the Service Point of a damaged gate at the cattle grid between Drumbeg and Culkein Drumbeg.

Action: AD to check with John Clark.

Late Bus:

FS asked for an update on the late bus serving Lochinver and Drumbeg.

DM reported that the late bus had been cancelled at the beginning of last school term. During school holidays an alternative service will operate, but following a meeting on 29th May between the ACC and David Summers (Principal Transport Officer HC) it was agreed HC were at fault in cancelling the service in the first place due to an apparent lack of tenders. The matter was discussed again at a recent HC meeting and the ACC were informed by email from Tracey Urry (on behalf of David Summers) that the Committee agreed to the restoration of the service. Tenders have been invited but HC are also pursuing the option of in-house operation.

KC confirmed that the more cost-effective method will be adopted. She has also been informed that there was a typo in the initial correspondence, and the word 'retendering' should replace the word 'restoration'.

RK asked that copies of all relevant correspondence be sent to the ACC and it was agreed this looked suspiciously like the HC backtracking on a commitment made one month earlier to resolve a situation they were originally responsible for.

Action: KC agreed to pass on all documentation and to continue pestering William Gilfillan on this issue. There is an option to utilise the Lochinver School bus after hours if the tendering process is unsuccessful. HC have already agreed to fund the wages of a driver.

8) Community Services:

AD reported that a number of signs have now been delivered for placement along the road through Elphin and warning of sheep close to Skiag Bridge. The recruitment of a foreman to oversee the local road crew is also at an advanced stage.

DM expressed concern that Graham Mackenzie has yet to respond to the ACC following his assurances to report back on a number of issues brought up in the 29th May meeting.

Action: KC to chase this up with Graham.

9) General Upkeep:

PJ had been asked to bring up this matter on behalf of JT - the perceived poor level of maintenance within Lochinver village (litter collection and grass-cutting specifically) is of major concern given that we now have tourists visiting the area.

AD replied that the imminent appointment of a Village Officer to replace Ronald Fleming will deal with most of these issues. Interviews are due to take place early July.

10) Deer in Lochinver:

GR agreed that the best solution to the increased numbers of deer in Lochinver is to remove all deer from the village itself. MH added that the ACA are looking at fencing off Culag Park.

Elaine Macaskill is currently carrying out a survey for the Woodland Project which includes mapping all existing deer fences and their state of repair. She hopes to combine all deer fences, cattle grids and woodland planting schemes to restrict deer movement despite the number of different landowners involved. It will still be impossible to keep out all deer as they can cross rivers and jump the cattle grids. FS was also concerned on how the current deer population in the village is to be dealt with.

AD felt it important that the ACC offer their support to Elaine's efforts to combat the problem. GR pointed out that funding is available through the Forestry Commission Cooperation scheme, and MH suggested ward discretionary funding might also be made available given the scale of the problem.

11) CALLP Woodland Project:

GR gave a brief overview of the Assynt Foundation's proposed plans to reintroduce native woodland between Ledbeg and the Southern shores of Loch Assynt under the Woodland Trust project of which Elaine is a part.

12) AOCB:

a) AD gave an update on the film 'Edie' which recently featured in the Edinburgh Film Festival. The producer is looking for distribution later this year or early 2018 and it is anticipated the Screen Machine will feature the film locally at the same time as it is on general release.

b) DM reported back that permission has been granted for a geo-cache to be placed on land close to Calda House.

c) DM reported on SSE's plans to carry out major line replacement work between Inverpolly Fish Farm and Newton (Kylesku) later this year. This will involve disruption to power supplies, but there will be generators on site and full communication with the local community. There is a Priority Service scheme available to support vulnerable individuals who might be adversely affected by any power cuts (planned or otherwise).

Action: PJ to copy and distribute the Priority Service Register literature locally.

d) RK has approached the Crofters' Trust for funds to pay for an Automated External Defibrillator at Stoer. They are prepared to make a £600 donation to the charity organisation 'Lucky To Be Here' who supply defibrillators free of charge. Stoer Community Hall association have also agreed to match the donation made by the Crofters' Trust.

e) GR reported that Assynt Foundation has agreed to purchase the Glebe from the Church of Scotland. This might provide an opportunity in the future for affordable housing to be built as well as other community projects.

The meeting closed at 21.20.

The next meeting will take place on Thursday, August 31st 2017 in the Committee Room of Lochinver Village Hall.

PJ June 2017

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