

**Assynt Community Council
22nd February 2018
Lochinver Community Hall
7.30pm
Minutes**

1) Present:

K Anderson (KA), P Jones (PJ), R Kerr (RK), D McBain (DM), L Taylor (LT), J Thomas (JT)

Others Present:

Kirsteen Currie - Highland Councillor (KC), M Scott, N Sibbett*

*arrived during item 7

2) Apologies:

A Dickson (AD), M Hutchison, V Ling (VL), D Slator

In DS's absence, RK chaired the meeting.

3) Expressions of Interest:

There were none.

4) Minutes of January Meeting and Matters arising:

LT proposed the draft minutes be accepted and KA seconded.

Matters arising were as follows:

i. ACC Website and Allocation of Funds:

Both were agenda items for February, but in VL's absence they will be postponed until March.

PJ has also delayed inviting Elaine Macaskill to give an update on deer fencing until next month.

Action: PJ to add all three items to the agenda for March.

ii. Gritting Issues and HC's Response:

To date KC has received no response from William Gilfillan.

PJ reported that Graham MacKenzie is expecting to reply with a written update on the situation, but not before February 24th.

LT wished to point out that Lochinver Harbour provides a substantial source of income for HC, so by rights the main route out of the village should always be given priority during gritting.

JT had been asked to bring to the meeting's attention that the school bus from Drumbeg to Lochinver was able to run most days despite the inclement conditions.

iii. Litter along the Lochinver foreshore:

LT has spoken to Andy Shaw and has been informed that Caroline based at the Recycling Centre is responsible for litter collection in and around the village.

iv. Rockfall between the Culag Hotel and Lochinver Leisure Centre:

LT had reported the road was cleared but this proved not to be the case.

LT asked that William Gilfillan, Caroline Campbell and the Highland Councillors address this issue as a matter of urgency, given that this short section of road has already been closed for six months or more.

Action: KC to pursue.

v. Clashnessie Beach Access:

Matt Dent has been back in touch with RK regarding the proposed work. Despite assurances that all was in hand, there are now concerns that the cost of the project will be greater than anticipated and the spend have to cleared with another HC official who is currently on leave.

Action: RK to continue chasing this up.

vi. Playpark:

JT reported that bark has now been laid in the play park, hopefully with a view to completing any necessary maintenance. The equipment in storage is still awaiting installation.

vii. ACC Noticeboard:

The scaffolding outside the Spar has now been taken away allowing access to the noticeboard and defibrillator.

5) Financial Report:

KA read out the latest figures.

Business Current account - £191.87 - Business Instant Access Reserve Account - £7474.86

The Maldie Burn grant accounted for approximately £2500 of total income, but there were concerns regarding the proposed reduction in HC grants to local community councils to £400.00 per year and the annual cost of Insurance of £403.00.

6) Correspondence:

PJ passed around a summary of the emails received relating to the proposed HC Budget cuts for 2018.

Northern Times journalist Carolien McMorran has already approached the ACC for any comments regarding the proposed cuts to community grants.

With this in mind, councillors Hugh Morrison (HM) and Linda Munro (LM) who voted in favour of the budget cuts had been invited to the February ACC meeting but were unable to attend.

LM proposed a number of alternative dates in March when she would be able to meet with CC members and it was agreed she be asked to attend the next ACC meeting on 29th March.

HM pointed out that cuts to community grants can be offset by applying for funds from the ward discretionary budget, but since this has already been cut by 50% it was felt this would not compensate.

D Haines had also been in touch with the ACC regarding a speeding issue brought up on his behalf by VL at the November meeting.

Action: It was agreed this be discussed in March under Correspondence when VL should be available to respond.

7) Proposed Budget Cuts:

KC gave a brief but impassioned overview of the recent Budget exercise held by the HC.

One contentious issue for Assynt is the proposed closure of a number of public toilets in Sutherland. The facility at Achmelvich beach has been selected for shutting on the grounds that it does not have disabled access, and the claim that it costs HC £7500 per year to keep open. There were doubts expressed by those present on the accuracy of this figure and disbelief at the HC's suggestion that visitors requiring relief could make use of the privately owned toilets at Achmelvich Camp Site instead, even though no approach has been made to the owners.

KC asked that all complaints or insider information regarding this 'arrangement' be passed on to her.

DM pointed out that there have already been complaints regarding human faeces left on other beaches in the area that don't possess public conveniences. Given that the NC500 is attracting more visitors, any closure is ill-timed and ill-conceived.

KC explained how elected Councillors attending the Budget meeting were only allowed to speak for 5 minutes in total and were restricted to a single question at each section. Despite HC's assertion that all

communities had been consulted before any Budget decision, it was clear they are being dishonest and have taken it upon themselves to dictate what savings will be made regardless of public opinion or expectation.

Councillors tried to be proactive by coming up with alternative solutions, but since the budget figures presented to them by the Financial Department are only ever accurate at the year-end, once any overspend by various cost centres have been buried within the final balance sheets, it is impossible to make any meaningful attempts at cost savings. This year's savings are necessary due to HC overspending in the past rather than on a reduction in funds received from central government.

DM suggested a vote of no confidence be taken against HC's financial director, given the unacceptable state of affairs. KC will be asking for quarterly financial updates in future, but as a paid employee rather than an elected official the financial director is untouchable even though he is incapable of providing accurate cost figures on a monthly basis.

KC is concerned that remote communities and vulnerable groups will be hit hardest by the proposed cuts to services and funding. HC are proposing to save a further £212,000 by reviewing all play areas. An executive decision will be made in due course, but to date there are no further details. The ward discretionary budget has been cut by 50% and community council grants by 53%. The ward discretionary budget could be spent ten times over with worthwhile applications already.

DM proposed HC be asked if business rates will be raised in Dingwall and Inverness by a sufficient amount to compensate West coast communities and businesses who are currently being treated unfairly.

LT fears that the 10% increase in the costs of the fish export licence to Lochinver Harbour as put forward by William Gilfillan and Caroline Campbell will have significant repercussions.

Action: PJ to write to HM and LM expressing the ACC's dissatisfaction with their decision to vote for the cuts and a proposed 10% tax on Lochinver Harbour, asking them to explain their actions, given that they are meant to represent the interests of Sutherland communities.

8) Dog Poo Bags:

Given the proposed cuts it was suggested that there might not be a need to replenish every dog poo bin in the village. The decision to order fresh supplies will be taken next month.

Action: PJ to put dog poo bags on the March agenda.

9) Cruamer Bench:

It was suggested that the memorial plaque on one of the benches needing repair be placed onto the bench outside the old Tourist Information Centre, even though that was not originally placed in any particular person's memory.

LT to check with Andy Summers who owns the TIC bench. In the meantime, Michael Scott will be asked to remove the plaque from the damaged one.

JT wondered if Charlie might be willing to carry out repairs rather than full replacement as a goodwill gesture.

10) Daymarks:

Following an approach to the ACC, VL suggested that a daymark or navigational beacon be erected above the shoreline at Culkein, Stoer.

Those present had no preference whether or not a daymark should be placed somewhere in Assynt.

11) Community Services:

PJ summarised the latest email sent out by AD.

i Gritting

As part of his investigation into this issue, Graham MacKenzie has asked to be informed on the number of school days lost this winter due to road conditions.

Action: DM to pass on this figure to PJ once available.

Mr MacKenzie is in possession of the contract for the new salt dump and is hoping the work will be under way before the end of March. The monies allocated for this project can hopefully be carried over to the new financial year.

KC was concerned that the relocation of the salt dump has been an ongoing issue for so long.

DM pointed out that the replacement of the Glac cattle grid is currently 19 years behind schedule.

ii Footpath between Kirk Road and Inverpark

This has been looked at by the Housing officer responsible and it is anticipated that something can be done to improve the footpath surface.

There had been uncertainty at the last meeting regarding who is meant to maintain this path, but JT has since confirmed that it was originally laid by HC so they are responsible for its upkeep.

iii Damaged and redundant signage

John Clark is hopeful that the two signs damaged during recent storms will only require replacement poles. The Skiag one was a design produced by HC's Technical team, so he will have to await further Instruction from that department.

Following last month's ACC meeting KC passed on her concerns to John Clark about the number of abandoned men-at-work signs along various sections of verge. These can prove particularly hazardous to drivers and John has been instructed to retrieve them. He has promised to carry out a check as soon as possible.

iv Other outstanding issues

Nothing further to report.

12) AOCB:

i. Potholes

KC asked that members of the community continue to pester HC with complaints regarding the conditions of the roads. Once a pothole is officially reported to HC, if anyone later suffers vehicular damage as a result they can make a claim for compensation.

The HC website is: www.highland.gov.uk/report

Action: PJ to publicise the HC website for complaints in the Assynt News and on the ACC's FB page along with another useful website to report faults: <https://www.fixmystreet.com/around?pc=IV27+4LE>

There was also concern that when potholes are filled in, the work is rarely done properly and the repair rarely survives because the tarmac is not tamped down. The trench across the road between the Caberfeidh and the Medical Centre is currently in need of attention.

ii. Roadside Verges

JT reported that the verges along the road between Stoer and Raffin are crumbling away because drivers are pulling off the road to allow other vehicles to pass instead of using passing places.

PJ added that the junction at the Glac is also a potential hazard to anyone driving from Lochinver and turning onto the Drumbeg road. Following work carried out by Scottish Water, the junction itself is now barely wide enough for two vehicles to pass. This is made worse by restricted visibility of oncoming traffic and the absence of white lining.

iii. Geopark Representative

DM has resigned as the ACC's representative on the Geopark and is inviting someone to take his place.

Action: PJ to put this on the agenda for March.

iv. SSE

DM wished to go on record thanking the SSE and their staff for the work carried out during the last few months.

Action: PJ to write a letter of thanks on behalf of the ACC and the local community.

v. Science Projects

KC together with the British Science Association has arranged for various projects promoting science to take place in remoter areas.

On Friday 9th March at 19.00 in Stoer Hall, Dr Howie Firth, founder of the Orkney Science Festival, will be giving a presentation on Science During the Iron Age. This will be followed the following week by a talk on Botany and the traditional use of local plants given by Anna Canning This will take place in the Rockstop on Thursday 15th March, again at 19.00.

vi. Postbox

KA asked why a postbox has not been placed outside the Spar shop as promised following the closure of the village Post Office.

Action: KC to pursue.

vii. Stoer Cemetery

LT has been told that recent flooding within the cemetery resulted in a number of graves being water-logged.

Action: KC to look at this and at the possibly of providing all abilities access.

The meeting closed at 20.55.

The next ACC meeting will take place on Thursday, March 29th at Lochinver Village Hall.

PJ February 2018

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Proposed dates for 2018 ACC meetings (subject to change):

March 29th	Lochinver Village Hall Committee Room
April 26th	Elphin Community Hall
May 25th	Lochinver Village Hall Committee Room (including AGM)
June 29th	Drumbeg Village Hall
July	<i>No meeting</i>
August 31st	Lochinver Village Hall Committee Room
September 28th	Stoer Village Hall
October 26th	Lochinver Village Hall Committee Room
November 30th	Lochinver Village Hall Committee Room
December	<i>No meeting</i>