

Assynt Community Council
29th March 2018
Lochinver Community Hall
7.30pm
Approved Minutes

1) Present:

K Anderson (KA), M Hutchison (MH), P Jones (PJ), R Kerr (RK), V Ling (VL), D McBain (DM), D Slator (Chair) (DS), L Taylor (LT), J Thomas (JT)

Others Present:

Kirsteen Currie - Highland Councillor (KC), Hugh Morrison - Highland Councillor (HM), Linda Munro - Highland Councillor (LM), J Jennett, K Macleod, M Macleod (MM), S Macleod (SM), J Young

2) Apologies:

None

3) Expressions of Interest:

There were none.

4) Minutes of February Meeting and Matters arising:

VL asked for a few minor amendments to be made then JT proposed the draft minutes be approved and RK seconded.

Matters arising were as follows:

i. Litter along the Lochinver foreshore:

There was further discussion about the ongoing problem of litter along the foreshore, particularly in Ba-didarrach.

Action: LT to confirm with Caroline at the Recycling Centre whether or not she is responsible for collecting litter along the foreshore as well as elsewhere in the village. MH also to pursue the possibility of voluntary community participation in clearing litter.

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

The road between the Culag Hotel and the Leisure Centre has now been cleared.

iii. Clashnessie Beach Access:

RK confirmed that the material for the walkway and access ramp has now arrived on site and there are volunteers willing to help out with its construction once planning permission is granted.

VL was concerned that the design meet all the necessary safety and access requirements since the ACC will be responsible once it's completed. RK assured the meeting that this has all been taken account of.

iv. Playpark:

LT has now been informed that the Inverpark playpark will continue to be maintained by HC and the new equipment will be installed as soon as possible. The second playpark will no longer be HC's responsibility.

KC felt it was not up to any individual HC officer to make this decision. The community's wishes should be taken into account before being forced to take over responsibility for the other park without further consultation.

DM suggested someone at HC acquaint themselves with the 2015 Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act since no one currently in authority shows any indication of ever having read it. Handing over assets to a

local community for them to run it without adequate funding is unfair and an undemocratic abuse of power.

VL suggested the ACC scrutinise what powers they have and look at making more demands in future.

KA added that the village centre playpark is used by more visitors so it should be given priority. In the meantime, rather than cause any further delay, it was agreed that the new equipment be installed. JT was particularly concerned that nothing be done to stand in the way of the equipment being erected. Apart from it being in storage for well over a year, both her and LT were very conscious that many who had donated money, especially the ones who had given more when they found out it was specialised equipment, must be wondering what's happened to it.

v. Cruamer Bench:

KA confirmed this will be repaired as soon as possible.

vi. Footpath between Kirk Road and Inverpark:

Action: HM to check with John Clark whether or not HC is responsible for the maintenance of this.

vii. Redundant Road signs:

KC has received a report from Community Services regarding this issue. The only moveable signs currently on display and owned by HC are the two Ramp signs at the approaches to the Glac cattle grid. All the other abandoned hazard warning signs have been left in place by various contractors. It was felt there should be a procedure in place to ensure all signs are removed once work is completed, given that HC should still be held accountable by us, the tax payer, for all work carried out on their behalf.

viii. Damaged road signs:

New posts for the sign at the Glac are already in place and steps have been taken to re-erect the sign at Skiag. But there are now two others both in need of repair or replacement - one at Ledmore with nothing on it and a 'Welcome to Sutherland' sign further along.

Action: LT to pursue with Community Services.

ix. Post Box outside Lochinver Post Office:

Action: KC to chase this up but has been informed it will be put in place sometime soon.

5) Correspondence and Response to November Minutes:

Correspondence had been received from David Haines regarding the minutes of the November 2017 meeting, approved in January 2018.

In item 6, Vanessa Ling had passed on a request from David Haines that the CC consider asking for a reduced speed limit of 40mph on the B869 and associated roads. The minutes stated "He (David Haines) maintained that drivers are travelling along this route at 60mph". This was not a correct representation of what he had said to Vanessa. Vanessa has since written to David to apologise and has also apologised to the Community Council for not spotting the error before the minutes were approved.

The incorrect section quoted above should have been replaced with the following:

"David Haines said it was difficult to convince people who were driving too fast that they were doing so, particularly as they approached the lighthouse car park, since they could respond by pointing out it was within the speed limit."

VL has also been approached by Steve Colley, owner of the Drumbeg Stores, about the Drumbeg public toilets being closed in the winter and I suggested we discuss it with item 7 on the Achmelvich toilets.

VL has completed a survey circulated by the Director of Public Health, NHS Highland into the availability and purchase of alcohol in the Highlands. VL was concerned that the Consultant in Public Health, who was

the instigator of the survey, had indicated that they were seeking evidence for the over-provision of alcohol in the Highlands and that any attempt to reduce the number of outlets could have serious implications for the viability of our small shops. VL has made the shops in Drumbeg and Clachtoll aware of the survey and urged other members of the community council to complete it.

PJ has received correspondence (sent to KC from Transport Scotland) implying that reflective poles similar to those fixed alongside the A835 at Leckmelm might not be a long term solution to the problem of deer on the road. Deer quickly become habituated to them, and drivers who might otherwise be able to see the eyes of deer at the roadside are in danger of being distracted by the reflections from the poles.

6) Highland Council Budget:

Budgetary restraints have resulted in cuts to the community council budget and ward discretionary budget. Highland Councillors LM and HM had been invited to attend this meeting to explain their recent support of the proposed HC budget cuts.

Both pointed out that the decision was a difficult one and had not been taken lightly. Funding cuts are inevitable, and no matter how much pressure is put on HC the current situation is unavoidable. Emergencies will continue to supercede everything else, but LM felt these austerity measures might provide an opportunity to look at smarter ways of working - in some cases in partnership with other communities. She added that the ACC were well within their rights to question the decision to support these cuts, but Highland Councillors have a responsibility to make decisions they deem most practical.

HM added that the choices on where savings should take place had already been made before proposals were put to the Councillors so their hands were tied.

DM expressed the general feeling of frustration when HC appears to have ample funds for certain projects - such as the erection of 39 traffic signs along a short stretch of road through Elphin - yet they use the excuse of insufficient funds for other essential services that would benefit a wider area. He also pointed out that closing 17 toilets along the North West coast area will have a much greater impact on local communities than closing a similar number in Dingwall and Inverness where there are several alternative facilities already in place.

LT added that the 10% increase in the costs of the fish export licence to Lochinver Harbour doesn't benefit the local community in any way. LM pointed out that a local consultation exercise had been carried out before the current budget cuts were formulated.

VL's main concern was that HC officials who are our paid representatives are consistently patronising and unwilling to listen to reasonable suggestions from local communities. Many of their decisions are wasteful or inefficient and show little regard for common sense or local knowledge. In most cases they refuse to listen to or be directed by the public who employs them. The current system at HC is undemocratic since executive decisions are regularly made without consulting local councillors beforehand or the offer and consideration of alternative options that might have been more practical.

HM pointed out that every community's budget has been cut.

DS agreed this decision is inevitable if the emergency services currently in place are to be protected. But he felt that working smarter or devolving certain powers to local communities will never happen because Inverness is too protective of the status quo. It enjoys complete control of where funds are spent and any discussions between the ACC and Highland Councillors on this issue will ultimately serve no purpose.

LM explained that negotiating with HC involves a continual trade-off. Like any financially responsible administration, they give with one hand but take back with the other. A recent temporary reversal of HC's decision to close a number of toilets in the North West would appear to be a small win for now. It is up to each local community to prioritise what is worth fighting over and what is best shelved for a future date.

MH pointed out that this has already been done in Assynt. The number one priority had been to replace the damaged cattle grid along the approaches to the village, and 19 years after that decision was made and numerous promises given by HC to complete the work, the cattle grid has still not been replaced.

SM felt that Inverness seems to benefit from huge, costly projects at the expense of smaller communities

with lesser demands. HM pointed out that this is partly due to the high rates paid by many local businesses in the city. DM felt that this is one more reason why there will always be the long-term problem of funds not being diverted to where they are most needed.

KC was invited to explain why she had voted against the current budget. Her main concern was that HC are unable to control spending because they don't know how much money they have at any one time or where it is being spent. The situation is not helped by HC officials' paranoid and/or patronising attitudes whenever they are asked to justify their decisions.

7) Achmelvich Beach Toilet Closure:

Following the HC's budget cutting exercise, a recommendation was made that a number of public toilets in Sutherland be closed. The facility at Achmelvich beach was one selected for shutting partly because it has no disabled access, but also due to the high cost of keeping it open.

KC has since discovered that the decision to close this particular facility was made without any significant research into its use. Following public outcry, the proposed closure has been postponed until August 31st. But after that date, one of three options will take effect. The facility will be asset-transferred to the community for them to run it - or it will be shut down (but not demolished for the time being) - or it will close down and local businesses will be encouraged to participate in the Highland Comfort scheme which offers reimbursement of between £150 and £300 pcm in return for the running of a suitable service for visitors to the area. LM's advice was that asset transfer not be considered as a viable option. In the meantime John Mackay has requested further feedback from local communities on the impact of any proposed closures.

DS suggested it might be practical to look for closures elsewhere that will allow our own local facilities to remain open. The other option is to consider what action is best after the end of August. MH was of the opinion that the facility at Achmelvich is not worth taking over, given the current poor condition of the building. The alleged annual cost of £7500 for maintaining these premises makes no sense. An option to charge for use of the facility would help towards its upkeep, but this has already been rejected by HC due to the excessive cost of providing coin-slot mechanisms on each of the doors.

MM had not been aware of HC's proposal to direct visitors to use her camp site's facilities following the proposed closure of the public toilet at Achmelvich until she read about it the Northern Times. She feels HC are unlikely to contribute financially towards the water rates, the provision of toilet paper and the regular servicing of the site's septic tank.

VL raised the issue of Drumbeg and Clachtoll public toilets being closed in the winter. Steve Colley had contacted her one lunchtime in February to say he had already had 12 people asking for public toilets that morning but there was nowhere to direct them to. She asked him to keep a log of the number of requests. Following this, she spoke to Flossie's shop in Clachtoll and asked her to keep a log too. In the month since then the Drumbeg shop had averaged 3-4 requests a day and reported that people were using the car park opposite the shop. Flossie's had a similar number and said it was very embarrassing directing people to a suitable place in the dunes. VL added that any solution to the public toilet situation had to include planning for increased 'out of season' use.

8) Community Services:

DS suggested postponing discussions on this topic until a later date. Tracy Urry, Head of Roads and Transport, is due to visit Assynt next month to go through the list of outstanding issues.

HM asked for background information on the Glac cattle grid and has agreed to show Tracy around various other sites where remedial work has been promised but never carried out.

JT also asked that flooding at the cemetery be addressed. JT had already written to KC about this problem a month or so earlier and included photos of one grave in particular. KC was of the opinion she had emailed back but JT has not yet received a reply so has been unable to get back to the family with an up-

date on the situation.

Action: KC to pursue.

9) ACC Website Update:

VL reported that only one person had applied for the post of website developer for the Community Council and she, Nina Mackenzie, Achnacarnin, had been appointed. She was also willing to train VL in maintaining it, so that future expenditure could be kept low in view of the budget cuts. VL suggested that another one or two members be trained for continuity.

JT asked if the position of web designer had ever been advertised since she had already passed on Darren Gordon's name at the January meeting as someone who was interested in quoting for the website job. VL replied that it had.

10) Financial Report:

KA read out the latest figures. Business Current account - £116.87 - Business Instant Access Reserve Account - £7175.15

There was some concern about an annual bill for insurance since the ACC does not own any premises. There was a suggestion that this might be for the Rock Stop.

Action: KC to check further.

11) Allocation of ACC Funds:

VL had already agreed to formalise the process of allocating funds to local worthy causes who request support or sponsorship.

Action: Following a discussion on the processes by which applications for funding be invited, handled and awarded, it was agreed that this be looked at again at a later date. In the meantime, DM suggested VL put her proposals in writing so they can be considered by all community councillors in time for the next meeting.

12) Dog Poo Bags:

After much discussion it was agreed the ACC will fund the purchase of more bags this year.

Action: LT to order.

SM pointed out that the dog waste bin at Achmelvich has been removed and there are no other litter bins available for disposal.

JT agreed to continue filling the green bins with bags on a temporary basis until LT finds out if it's part of Caroline's job.

Action: LT to enquire who is currently responsible for emptying the dog waste bins.

13) Geopark Resignation:

It was minuted during the February meeting that DM had resigned as ACC representative on the Geopark and no community councillor has yet agreed to take his place. DS asked for volunteers but JT suggested the role be advertised to the wider community. The successful candidate would be able to represent the ACC (without being a member) and report back as and when required.

Action: PJ to add to agenda for next meeting.

14) Rock Stop Report:

DS reported that much work has already been carried out to the kitchen area of the building but there are issues with the external rear door which is the ACC's responsibility and the rotten floor boards also at the rear which will be repaired by the tenants.

The new external door fitted last year is also in need of remedial work as well as a downpipe that needs rerouting. DS has spoken to Mark Mackenzie and will arrange for a quote. JT asked about obtaining more than one quote.

Action: JT to contact other local joiners and if interested in quoting, tell them to contact David.

KC also gave a brief report on a recent meeting at the Geopark with an UNESCO representative regarding sourcing further funding.

15) AOCB:

- i. LT reported that a 24-hour fuel pump should be operational at the Spar by the end of April
He has also spoken to Open Reach about the condition of the road surface outside the surgery in Lochinver following their attempt to cover a trench.
- ii. Following Alex Dickson's recent resignation as community councillor, KA asked for it to be minuted how grateful the ACC are for his contribution to the community and to thank him for his hard work over the years. Alex made the decision to resign for personal reasons.
- iii. DM reported that the problem of sheep congregating in the parking area adjacent to Stoer cemetery now appears to have been resolved.
- iv. VL has been helping with a complaint regarding local weekend medical cover. The complaint was resolved this week at a meeting with the doctor and manager in charge of the Out of Hours service for Highland Region. Some things emerged from this meeting that were news to us:
 - When calling 111 we should mention that we are in a rural area. We should then be passed to a call handler in a rural area who has a better understanding of the appropriate response.
 - We have the right to be seen at the Lochinver Surgery as the doctor based in KLB has the keys and alarm codes and has it written into his/her contract that they will see people there.
 - If we are willing to travel to Ullapool, we have the right to be seen there.
 - Every resident here should have received a leaflet stating all this when the changes were made a year ago and one would now be sent out.
- v. PJ reported the growing perception on Social Media that Community Councillors are not addressing local concerns effectively enough. He believes this is due to the delay between monthly meetings being held and the publication of the approved minutes. For example, the issue of toilet closures has been an emotive one in recent weeks and has already been discussed at great length tonight, but the public will not be aware of the ACC's genuine concerns or the outcome until the end of April - at least five weeks later.
Action: PJ to include as an agenda item for further discussion.
- vi. DS hopes to place an update in the Assynt News regarding a meeting with a senior manager from the Scottish Ambulance Patient Transport Service.
- vii. DS has been asked to investigate why the Post Office's scheduled weekly visit to Drumbeg has not taken place in recent weeks.
There is an ongoing technical problem which means the PO is unable to process any remote transactions. BT are due to fix this as soon as possible.

viii. DS had always intended his tenure of the ACC should only be effective for a single term. With this in mind, he intends stepping down at the next AGM in June.

The meeting closed at 21.55. The next meeting is scheduled to take place on Thursday 26th April at Elphin Community Hall at 19.30.

PJ March 2018

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

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