

Assynt Community Council

31 January 2019

Lochinver Village Hall

7.30pm

Minutes (Approved 28th February)

1) Present:

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

Others Present:

J Moisey (Muirden Energy) (JM), A Pellant, (Assynt Development Trust) (AP) and 3 members of the public

2) Apologies:

J Thomas (JT), K Currie (Highland Council) (KC)

3) Expressions of Interest:

None.

4) Minutes of November Meeting and Matters arising:

DS proposed the draft minutes be approved and MH seconded.

Matters arising were as follows:

- **7 ii Parking outside the Surgery and the Caberfeidh:**

PJ has brought this issue to the attention of Graham MacKenzie along with a request for the existing speed restrictions to be reassessed due to increased traffic volumes and the additional street lighting. PJ has also passed on a list of other outstanding Community Services jobs to Graham.

Action: In view of Graham Mackenzie's long-term absence from work PJ to forward his original email to KC who will progress these matters with those officers concerned.

- **11 Toilet Closures Update:**

There are rumours an offer has been made to purchase the Kylesku toilet block as the cleaner has been given notice to quit should the sale goes through. But there is no sign of the facility being advertised for sale. MH has asked for further clarification but up to the 15th January has only received a response from Alan Henderson who has passed on the query to William Gilfillan. Local crofters' representative Rodney Macleod of Kylesku is pressing HC for further information and has been assured of the full support of the ACC should it be required.

The toilet at KLB remains closed despite the replacement facility being unfit for purpose, and their local community council is continuing to push for it to be reopened. HC say they are unable to act on any criticisms for 6 months now the decision has been made. There are no further updates regarding the replacement of the Achmelvich toilets. The Gairloch project which should see their existing toilet block moved to Achmelvich is still very much in its early stages. It was also noted HC propose employing a team of mobile cleaners to service the toilets in Sutherland so this might be the reason why they have given notice to terminate the existing cleaner's employment.

- **10 Centenary Fields Status**

Phil Tomalin has offered to assist MH with her application for playpark funding since the site belongs to HC.

- **v Bus Timetable**

No further action has been taken to date.

Action: DS to contact David Summers once he returns from his holidays and the item to be included again on the agenda for March.

- **10) Clashnessie Footpath**

Action: The new sign is not yet in place. VL to chase up.

- **12) AOCB ii Cost of Fuel**

MH has not been in touch with Timothy Vestey. It was generally felt the ACC should not be challenging local businesses on the prices they charge for various commodities. It was pointed out that prices do fluctuate and there was a recent occasion when Lochinver prices were cheaper than in Ullapool.

Action: In the meantime LT to research fuel prices from various suppliers when the contract is next up for renewal. There was some concern who makes the decision when tenders for supply of fuel are invited.

- **12) AOCB v ACC Website**

It was agreed that AP's kind offer to assist in administering the ACC website should be taken up.

- **9) Proposed Closure of Unapool Polling Station**

PJ has reported ACC's concerns to the Elections Team and received acknowledgement of our response. We have not yet been told of the outcome.

- **10) Community Services i Winter Gritting Programme**

This will be discussed further under Community Services.

- **10) Community Services ii Litter**

MH passed round a set of leaflets advertising various types of litter bin the ACC might consider purchasing to solve the problem of roadside litter at the area's popular beauty spots. MH is also awaiting a reply from HC at Dingwall regarding the supply of larger bins for the summer months. Hiring larger bins might be an option, again from HC (although there might be a charge involved). There is also the issue of being charged for them to be emptied.

Action: MH to follow this up with Andy Shaw at Golspie if any charges would be made by HC, and to request further details regarding the deal in place for Ullapool's recycling bins.

- **10) Community Services iii Stoer Old Cemetery Flooding**

MH referred to a report emailed to her by KC prior to the meeting. She has been assured by a number of officers that this issue is being dealt with and will get an update when it becomes available.

- **11) AOCB i Dog Poo**

DS has been told the issue of dog poo is particularly bad along the All Abilities Path but the problem is also prevalent along the village road and in the harbour area.

- **11) AOCB ii Condition of buildings along Lochinver Main Street**

PJ has received a positive response from the owner of the Old Bakery stating that quotes have been requested for replacement windows and work will commence once a supplier has been agreed upon. It was pointed out that there remains another building along the approaches to the village centre with boarded windows.

MH was unsure this was an ACC matter. AD pointed out that the Vestey's are in the tourist industry which is why he wished to prompt them to maintain their staff accommodation in better condition.

VL also felt it was not up to the ACC to pursue these issues. MH felt it might be a matter for the local tourism group to act. The community council had recently agreed to approach Tony Usher regarding the condition of the old HC units opposite Peets' close to the harbour, for instance, but for the time being it was agreed no further action should be taken. VL pointed out that anyone concerned about the problem should contact HC directly.

- **11) AOCB iii Grant Applications**

Funding applications are invited twice each calendar year - in June and in November. VL and PJ have already discussed the current system of granting funds to local causes who apply for financial support following a request by the Drumbeg Development Group for further information on the process.

Action: PJ to place a reminder in the Assynt News two months before the next funding applications are due to be reviewed.

5) Muirden Energy Presentation:

JM apologised on behalf of his colleague Angus Elder who was unable to attend the meeting before giving a brief presentation regarding Muirden Energy's plans to construct a wind-turbine development on Meall Buidhe close to Rosehall and Ardgay. It is intended to be operated in partnership with the Croick Estate and will consist of 9 large turbines in total. There will be an offer for members or groups within the local communities to invest in the project if they so wish and Meall Buidhe Renewables are also committed to contributing financially towards the local community.

The proposed project will not impact directly on the community of Assynt, but the developer is looking at the larger components being landed on the west coast (possibly at Ullapool or Lochinver) before being transported by road to the construction site.

A full environmental impact exercise has been carried out on the proposed site and a number of adjustments made to limit the impact on the surrounding area following local consultation. It was pointed out that the proposed Caplich Windfarm development had been rejected by the local community and there would as likely as not be a number of objections to this one as well. Submissions are due to be made to HC this summer with a view to a 2022 build date. In the meantime JM has promised to return to answer any questions once the ACC has had an opportunity to discuss the matter further.

Information is available on-line at www.meallbuidhewindfarm.co.uk.

Action: Matter to be an agenda item for discussion at the next monthly meeting to ensure the ACC are seen to be proactive.

JM left the meeting.

6) Financial Report:

KA gave the latest figures: Business Current acc - £139.75 and Instant Access acc - £5980.37

7) Correspondence:

i MP Jamie Stone has passed on the ACC's objections to Marine Biopolymers' plans for industrial-scale kelp dredging to Fergus Ewing, Cabinet Secretary for the Rural Economy who has noted our objections and agreed to take our concerns into consideration when the item comes up before Scottish Parliament.

ii PJ has written to a number of national newspapers on behalf of the ACC regarding the continued failure of HC's Winter Road Maintenance policy and pointing out its flaws. An article is due to appear in the latest Northern Times but none of the other papers have indicated a response so far.

iii A request has been forwarded to Andy Hume at HC by a local resident that the bottle bank adjacent to the kirk in Lochinver be removed to another site - preferably close to the harbour - due to the constant noise disturbance caused by bottles being deposited there or by the collection vehicle. It was mentioned this has been in place for eight years and the volume of noise has not increased.

PJ asked what would happen if there was no bottle bank already in place, and HC offered to provide the village with a recycling point. Would the ACC select the current location as the most ideal site?

The general consensus was that the current location works best. It is central and convenient for all concerned. There were concerns that, regardless of the cost and logistics of any relocation, siting the banks at the harbour would dissuade some from bothering to recycle due to the extra distance involved. MH felt there should be more recycling banks to encourage recycling. VL also pointed out that visitors to Suileag Bothy are asked to deposit their empty bottles next to the kirk as they leave the village. There is less chance of anyone doing this if they have to travel as far as the harbour. It was agreed to leave things as they are.

Action: PJ to submit an official reply to Andy Hume recording the ACC's decision.

iii MH referred back to KC's emailed report

The main points were as follows:

KC has been busy with the Community Planning Partnership and locality plans are coming along well and the children and adults plans are looking close to being completed. The remaining ward discretionary funding has included projects in Assynt.

Support is being given to recruitment campaigns for both the police and Scottish Fire and Rescue service in the ward, which are both proving to be successful. The roll out of Scottish Fire and Rescue's pilot project of attending falls if they are closer than the ambulance service is also under way. It is working well and the service are actually looking to extend this nationally.

Steps have already been taken to push for more information in terms of spending and budgeting in education and to stop HC cutting a key budget for vulnerable children.

All three Highland councillors are still receiving limited information about the proposals for the budget for next year and there are quite a few issues, particularly for transport and early years childcare that KC is worried about at this stage.

8) Response to Planning Applications

There were no issues to discuss.

But VL was concerned about an email received on 16th January from HC's planning department asking if the ACC had any input to give relating to a planning application for a viewing platform at Clachtoll Broch. The deadline for responses was 30th January, the day before the proposed monthly ACC meeting. At the time it became clear that most community councillors were happy to leave it to individuals to respond rather than to present a combined view. However, VL felt the ACC should have asked for a public meeting at Stoer so the matter could be discussed in greater detail between Historic Assynt and the local community and individuals could make their feelings known.

Historic Assynt had already consulted the local community several times since the project was first suggested, though it became clear that they failed to pass on details of their final design following the last public meeting which took place some twelve months earlier when there were objections to the proposed walkway. Historic Assynt came up with a new design but failed to hold a meeting to advertise the changes. Permission had already been given for the project so it's likely they saw no need for a follow-on meeting.

RK pointed out that any member of the public is at liberty to organise a public meeting. VL had already asked Historic Assynt to hold a public meeting but they refused. PJ added that any individual opposed to the plans still has more than a week to record their concerns on-line on HC's planning website - and to date there is only one complaint which relates to the parking arrangements for visitors and site access rather than the design of the platform.

VL proposed that in future if HC asked for a comment from the ACC on a matter such as this and the deadline falls before a scheduled meeting, the ACC should ask for more time to discuss and consider. This is particularly important regarding such issues as the proposed windfarm on Meall Buidhe.

MH was not aware the walkway was such a contentious issue and no member of the public had approached her asking that the ACC arrange a public meeting to discuss this matter but appreciates that concerns have been passed on to VL. Given the time limit it was agreed there is nothing the ACC can do now, regardless of public opinion. The responsibility to arrange a formal public meeting to discuss changes to the planned structure lay with Historic Assynt rather than the ACC (especially as we were unaware of the situation until HC sent the email earlier this month). But MH feels the two month gap between ACC meetings from November to January is problematic.

9) Proposed Tourist Tax:

A local accommodation provider recently raised concerns regarding HC's proposal to conduct a consultation relating to the introduction of a Tourism Tax. Permission has now been given for local authorities to implement a tourist tax and following a brief discussion on the pros and cons of such a system the ACC voted by a majority of 6 to 1 to support HC's plans to raise extra funds this way.

Action: PJ to inform HC that the meeting voted in favour of this scheme.

10) Community Services:

The following were discussed:

i Winter Road Maintenance

DS passed on his thanks to MH for keeping community councillors updated regularly on problems relating to road conditions following wintry weather. Despite instances where certain individuals involved have taken criticisms of HC's winter gritting policy personally, if the ACC hadn't continued to badger HC we would not have been given extra resources to service the roads to Achmelvich and Inverkirkaig, and it's likely the new salt dump storage facility would still not be in place.

Given the latest series of service failures, a meeting has been arranged between Tracey Urrey and members of the ACC at 11.00 on Wednesday 6th February. It was suggested other individuals directly affected by HC's unhelpful responses be invited to attend such as the local bus drivers, care workers, and parent representatives whose children have suffered most from lost school days due to the roads not being cleared in time.

LT asked it be minuted that there have been some service improvements this year due not least to the efforts of the local gritting crew. But evidence remains that they are being instructed by their line managers to operate in such a way that the roads are not cleared effectively. It also appears they are being discouraged from using their initiative when it's clear certain sections of road need a heavier application of grit than that stipulated by a manager sitting in an office 100 miles away on the east coast. For example, pre-gritting at night is only done on the return trip from Ledmore to Lochinver rather than in both directions because the officer responsible for road maintenance claims he cannot calculate whether or not there will be enough salt on the vehicle to grit both sides of the road.

Action: It was agreed the main issues for discussion on Wednesday should be the need for timetable changes during adverse weather conditions to ensure the roads are bladed clear of snow and gritted by 07.30 before the school buses begin their journeys and the need for all local gritter drivers to be allowed to use their initiative and encouraged to utilise the equipment to its full potential when conditions require it regardless of the cost.

Action: VL has produced a map identifying where the bus drivers are based and where the pick up points are in relation to HC's gritting timetable so it is made clearer how the current system does not enable gritting to take place before local children are due to leave for school. This will be passed to the HC officials for drawing up the gritting timetables.

Action: MH to extend invitations to any relevant individuals to attend Wednesday's meeting.

ii Traffic Lights

PJ has already reported the fault but LT has since taken up the matter with Robin Pope.

iii Electric Vehicle Charging Points

LT reported that the purchase order has been completed for installation but an upgraded power supply will be needed so this could mean a delay of a further 3 months.

11) AOCB

i MH passed on a request relating to a nursery school aged child from Stoer who is unable to travel on the current school bus to Lochinver school because there is no facility for getting him home half way through the school day. MH has since been in touch with Lynn Ross, Local Transport Officer, who agreed to look at the options available. It was agreed it would be inappropriate for a four-year old child to travel by bus if unaccompanied.

One suggestion was that the local Dial-a-Taxi be used since it is a HC initiative.

PJ has also been asked by a member of the community to pass on other concerns related to the local transport network.

Connect Assynt is a community run operation that has recently had its funding cut resulting in the threat of reduced day trips to outlying towns. It was pointed out that since its inception this has been an invaluable resource for a large number of local residents.

The Dial-a-Taxi scheme covers the same area and on occasion duplicates the regular Connect Assynt routes but rarely carries a full complement of passengers. The taxi is meant to operate as an on demand service but there have been numerous instances of clients telephoning to book a ride being told it's not available. This is partly because it already runs a pre-booked weekly schedule serving a limited number of regular patrons who mainly use it for visiting the local shops.

The complainant was under the misapprehension that Connect Assynt and the Dial-a-Taxi scheme are both funded by HC. But the issue remains whether Dial-a-Taxi provides value for money the way it is currently operated.

MH felt it would be unfair to react in response to anonymous complaints, but one member of the public present at the meeting confirmed there have been numerous occasions when his own mother was unable to book the Dial-a-Taxi from 4 miles outside Lochinver to the local surgery because it was already pre-booked that day.

Action: MH agreed to pursue the issue with Lynn Ross.

ii MH has been given information from the ADT regarding a Housing Survey due to be conducted soon. A leafleting campaign will be undertaken shortly inviting feedback from locals and anyone looking to move to Assynt who might be in need of somewhere to live.

iii In view of David McBain's recent resignation as community councillor and vice-chair of the ACC, KA suggested the meeting pass on its formal thanks for his involvement over the last few years.

This was agreed.

iv A Dickson asked if the ACC had considered an use for the abandoned salt dump. He was also concerned that there appears to be no plans to dismantle the old ice plant now the new one is operational.

Action: PJ to write to Tony Usher requesting information on HC's intentions regarding the old ice plant.

v AP gave a number of update relating to the Assynt Development Trust.

- Seaweed Farming - a search is under way for prospective participants in a joint venture involving growing seaweed on ropes and harvesting the growth for commercial purposes. VL suggested more information should be made available before the ACC considers getting involved.
- Highland Wireless are looking at ways of 'bouncing' broadband from existing fibre-optic facilities to communities that do not enjoy a similar standard of service.
- The ADT is continuing to look at identifying sites for community asset transfer. Grants have already been awarded for Design Workshops but further funding is required under the match funding scheme. It was suggested ADT could use their own existing revenue but AP felt this cash would be better held in reserve in case of future cash flow problems.
- A grant has also been obtained for the e-bike scheme but again there is an expectation for match funding. VL felt there might be more chance of further grants if it was made clear the bikes are meant to provide transport for local commuters rather than as a means of obtaining cash from tourists which could be run as a private venture by any individual willing to take up the challenge.
- Scottish Water has agreed to handle the grey water waste from the proposed Cludgie facility adjacent to the Leisure Centre, but any other waste must be stored in a separate tank for future disposal.

The meeting closed at 22.00

The next meeting will take place on Thursday 28th February at the Committee Room of Lochinver Village Hall at 19.30.

PJ February 2019

Contact us here - assyntcc@gmail.com

Follow us on Facebook - Assynt Community Council

or visit our website - <http://www.assyntcommunitycouncil.org.uk>

Proposed dates for 2019 ACC meetings (subject to change):

March 28	Elphin Village Hall	April 25	Lochinver Community Hall
May 30	Drumbeg Village Hall	June 27	Lochinver Village Hall (including AGM)
July	<i>no meeting</i>	August 29	Lochinver Village Hall
September 26	Rhu Stoer Hall	October 31	Lochinver Village Hall
November 28	Lochinver Village Hall	December	<i>no meeting</i>