

Assynt Community Council

25 April 2019

Lochinver Village Hall

7.30pm

Draft Minutes (Amended May 3rd)

1) Present:

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

Others Present:

M Bridgestock - John Gilbert Architects (MB), A Pellant - Assynt Development Trust (AP)

2 members of the public

2) Apologies:

L Taylor (LT), J Thomas

3) Expressions of Interest:

None.

4) Minutes of March Meeting and Matters arising:

Matters arising were as follows:

i Toilet Closures Update

There has been an U-turn regarding the proposed sale of Kylesku toilet. R MacLeod of Unapool has been informed they will now remain open.

W Gilfillan has yet to update the ACC on this change of heart and there has been no further information relating to the planned upgrade of Achmelvich toilets.

ii Stoer Old Cemetery Wall

Action: MH still to approach David MacPhail or David Tyson for quotes.

iii Lochinver Bottle Bank

PJ has replied to the complainant on the ACC's behalf and suggested he pursue the matter directly with HC.

iv Deer in the village

VL recently attended a meeting of the West Sutherland Deer Management Group on behalf of the ACC to express our concerns regarding the number of deer roaming at large within the confines of Lochinver. She gave a brief report on the meeting then read out a statement of support from Gordon Robertson, chair of the deer management group.

Elaine Macaskill is currently exploring ways of obtaining grants to fund new fencing. All local landowners agree in principle that there is an ongoing problem with deer gaining access to public areas. One of the problems is that existing deer fences have been cut to allow passage for walkers because there are not enough stiles or gates in place. Gordon and Elaine will attend the May ACC meeting to present a plan of action.

There is a long-term need to educate people that deer are not pets and should not be encouraged to feed within the boundaries of the village. Lochcarron has suffered a similar problem and an exercise was carried out to reduce the deer population by various means, including culling. Many feel this is too extreme a

measure, but given the potential danger to the public all options need to be considered.

Action: VL to thank Gordon for the group's invitation and their helpful response to the ACC's concerns.

v Elphin Speed Limit

PJ has received no reply from Joanne Sutherland regarding HC's plans for the 30mph limit once the 18 month trial period is over. The electronic sign has already been taken away as it was only a temporary measure.

Action: PJ to chase this up again in September.

vi Dog Fouling

Posters have been drawn up and placed on the ACC notice board, in the Spar and Bog Shop, in the Leisure Centre and in the Assynt News. As far as we know LT has yet to order paint but it was agreed the campaign to identify and highlight deposits of dog poo should continue.

KA proposed the draft minutes be approved and RK seconded.

5) Presentation by Matt Bridgestock on behalf of John Gilbert Architects:

MB had been invited by the Assynt Development Trust to look at ways of utilising various pockets of redundant or derelict land within the confines of the village that HC might be looking to offload under an asset transfer scheme.

Following a Housing Needs survey commissioned by ADT and conducted by the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT), it was identified that there is a need for more affordable housing in Lochinver. MB gave a detailed and instructive presentation highlighting the sites available for any proposed housing development as well as potential sites for relocated industrial/commercial premises that might free up more land, create better access and improve the overall appearance of the area. Three possible scenarios were considered - each more ambitious and costly than the previous. Workshops have already taken place in Lochinver to gauge local needs and concerns, and there are plans for an on-line survey and further presentations at the end month, including one at Drumbeg.

6) Financial Report:

KA gave the latest figures: Business Current acc - £118.22 and Instant Access acc - £8489.05

7) Correspondence:

PJ has received an email from Phil Tomalin pointing out that the swings at Drumbeg playpark are now considered unsafe and will have to be removed. The ACC has already agreed in principle to pay for a new set - with a cost in the region of £1600-£2000 for supply alone. VL asked how many children lived in Drumbeg. It was thought that the youngest were teenagers, but that play equipment would still be used by visitors. PJ has researched potential suppliers and is awaiting a response to his query whether anyone in Drumbeg is prepared to oversee the project.

Action: PJ to make this an agenda item for May's meeting which is to be held at Drumbeg.

Action: PJ also to ask Phil Tomalin if the HC would be prepared to install the new swings if any are purchased.

KA also pointed out that the wooden skirting surrounding the climbing frame in Lochinver play park is in a bad condition and either needs repairing or removing. It was once intended to contain the bark floor covering but most of that has now disappeared.

Action: PJ to carry out a physical check and report back.

8) Response to Planning Applications:

PJ responded on behalf of the ACC with an offer of support for the application for a change of use of the Visitors' Centre in Lochinver to a bar/restaurant.

9) Response to Muirden Energy Presentation

Plans by Muirden Energy to develop a wind farm project on the Croick Estate, close to Rosehall and Ardgay were brought to the attention of the community council earlier in the year and a presentation was made at January's ACC meeting. The general feeling was that this could well provide employment at Lochinver harbour and also bring in much needed funds. With this in mind it was unanimously agreed that the ACC are in full support of this project.

Action: PJ to contact Muirden Energy's representatives and HC to record our support.

Action: PJ to invite Muirden Energy to make a public presentation to the local community if they so wish, but there are no plans to conduct a survey to gauge the number of people who are for or against the wind farm development.

10) Bus Timetables:

Concerns were expressed in January that pupils from Assynt looking to attend after-school activities are not always able to obtain public transport home from Ullapool, partly due to the size of the bus being used for this late service. There is also a situation where passengers travelling from Inverness on a Saturday afternoon are unable to continue to Lochinver because the service timetable has been changed in line with a later ferry departure time.

Action: DS to check back with David Summers on the current situation and also to look at the availability of local drivers (given the driving hours constraints).

11) Community Services:

MH has yet to receive any further response from Tracey Urry.

It was pointed out that the cattle grid on the approaches to the village has not been replaced despite promises this would be done in time for the 2019 holiday season. One of the cattle grids at Balchladich is also in need or repair.

Action: PJ to chase up these items with Joanne Sutherland.

Action: PJ also to remind LT that it was agreed the proposed signs advertising the electric car charge points should also direct all campervan and caravan owners to park at the back of Cruamer rather than in the doctor's car park or on the main street. This is already a problem and will only get worse as visitor numbers increase.

12) AOCB:

PJ passed on a complaint from a local resident regarding the recent removal of the picnic benches from Culag Park. MH offered to explain but felt she should declare an interest in the issue and be excluded from the discussion. It had been suggested the ACC write to the Assynt Development Trust, requesting clarification on how the decision came about.

PJ explained that of the 10 benches originally in place outside An Cala, the 8 purchased by the proprietors had been removed and sold because the ADT had informed them these benches were encroaching on the football pitch and were encouraging people with dogs to enter the park when in fact dogs are not allowed on the field. When there was a public outcry on social media, the ADT's response was that An Cala no longer had any need for the benches, when in fact they had been instructed to remove them by the ADT.

DS asked that the discussion be halted to allow one of the two members of the ADT present to give their reasons why the benches had to be removed. He had already spoken to Willy Jack, Chair of the ADT, and his understanding was that two of the benches are now back on the field but there were sound technical reasons why the other benches had to be taken away.

AP said the decision was made during a board meeting but the minutes have yet to be circulated and he remains sketchy on the actual details. MH volunteered to explain the background further. There had been initial concerns about dogs on the park as part of a campaign to make the field safe and secure which had already gained much public support. However, the main reason for the removal of the benches (which had not been made public) were the strict conditions attached to the sale of the park when it was originally purchased by the ACA. The pitch was to be retained as a recreational space for the benefit of the local community but there were to be no commercial operations at all allowed on the field. That meant that the benches put in place by the proprietors to join the two already donated by the Assynt News should not have been allowed, but this legal stipulation was initially overlooked in error and the situation escalated. An Cala intend expanding their business and are due to adapt the 'marine centre' space to accomodate more tables for those customers who wish to bring their dogs indoors with them while eating. The ban on dogs on the field will remain in place - apart from on Games Day when an annual exception is in place.

It was felt that many of the derogatory comments on Facebook aimed at the ADT were based on misinformation. But it was agreed the situation might have been avoided if the ADT had issued a statement explaining in full why a decision to remove the benches was taken in the first place. The oversight allowing an increase in benches only came to light when the sale documents were recently re-examined. Willy Jack intends making a statement on social media in the near future clarifying the situation and the next ADT meeting will be open for members of the public to attend.

DS and MH both felt that many of the hurtful comments posted on Facebook were unwarranted, given the efforts the ADT have made to engage with the public and the vital importance of development groups in this area as a mechanism for promoting change and area as a mechanism for promoting change and growth. DS asked that sight should not be lost of the bigger picture which was the need for a development group to work toward countering population decline. He cited the 11% projected decline for Sutherland reported recently in the NT and the projection of 20% for the remoter coastal areas of NW Sutherland.

However, PJ pointed out that the ADT were as much to blame for the way the situation got out of hand by failing to react to the initial enquiry on social media and then posting a statement unfairly diverting the focus of attack onto An Cala.

DS continued to assert that most of the Facebook comments were based on incorrect information. It had been made clear in the ADT's response on Facebook that An Cala's lease was restricted to the building rather than the field. But PJ pointed out that claiming An Cala decided to sell the benches because they no longer had any need for them made it seem as if they no longer wanted people to be able to sit outside and were removing what was seen as a popular community amenity purely for commercial reasons. The fact is, Jason and Julia were given no choice by the terms of their lease but to remove the benches in question.

It was to be hoped that this potential misrepresentation has not harmed the goodwill they have built up over the years. MH agreed the ADT were at fault for not publicising their intentions before the benches were sold. It was agreed the ADT needs to put more information out into the public domain and hopefully learn a lesson from this lapse in public relations.

VL thanked MH for her explanation and said the reasons for the removal of the benches were now clear. She further expressed her disappointment at the negative attitude of some ACC members towards ADT, given the importance of social and economic development to the community. Rather than distancing ourselves from ADT in case negative feelings about them reflected on ACC, we should have a close relationship with them, and, if we feel they are on the wrong track, advise them accordingly.

The meeting closed at 21.15. The next will take place on Thursday 30th May at Drumbeg Village Hall.

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

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>		

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