

The Links, 2015 and beyond

It would be useful to clarify the situation about The Links and its closure to motorhomes and caravans.

It's important to point out that the land is privately owned. The majority is owned by Cromarty Estate and two small areas of the bank by adjacent house owners. Thus, the decision to close off the area has not been taken by Cromarty and District Community Council (CDCC) which has no jurisdiction over it.

Over the past few years, the numbers of motorhomes, camper vans, caravans and tents using the land has been increasing beyond anyone's expectation. At times last year there were between 30 and 40 vehicles at any one time parked there for long periods and one particular caravan stayed there for 3 weeks, not occupied for some of the time. Because it's 'free', some of the long-stayers are clearly avoiding paying to stay at licensed sites at Rosemarkie and Fortrose.

The incidence of humans fouling the banks has been extraordinary. Without going into too much detail, it has been quite upsetting and distressing to think that people cannot be bothered to walk some 100m to the public toilets. The primary school uses the Links for sports and recreation and this adds another dimension to this particular issue. The majority of this was probably from campers in tents but undoubtedly there has been waste emptying from caravans and motorhomes both on the banks and in the long grassed area by the beach as well as in the sea. Coupled with this, there has been an increase of littering despite there being bins provided and old camping equipment including tents and parasol umbrellas left on the grass.

In short, the amenity of the area has been spoiled during the 2014 season, both for locals and other visitors and which has caused a large number of complaints. In fact, at least two local dog walkers have been asked by 'campers' to leave the area as they thought it was a caravan/camp site!

And on this point, the fundamental issue rests. Highland Council has contacted Cromarty Estate and advised it that because the area is used for more than 28 days a year for motorhomes and caravans, it requires to be licensed. With this licence would come all the legal requirements such as spacing between vehicles, fire safety, sanitary arrangements and all the usual amenities of a camp site. The same council also said that there would be no likelihood whatsoever of it being granted a license. This, essentially, is the reason why the Links has had to be closed to motorhomes and caravans - because it would be breaking the law to allow the camping to continue.

Nobody wants to dissuade people from coming to Cromarty and supporting the local community and businesses.

The CDCC has debated this issue at length, including a suggestion made about charging a fee (which would ironically effectively turn it into more of an official campsite and thus need licensing) and this would in fact be extraordinarily difficult to manage 24hrs a day, 7 days a week for six months of the year, even with honesty boxes or using local businesses to collect charges.

There are two large well-established camp sites at Rosemarkie and Fortrose and there are other areas in and around Cromarty where the odd motorhome could be parked for shorter periods of time and that would not cause the same problems that we have been experiencing on the Links.

In the meantime, it is genuinely hoped that this will actually make Cromarty a more attractive place to visit, with the Links restored to an amenity for locals and visitors alike. Nobody is trying to stop anyone from visiting the town - there have been several new businesses that have opened recently which rely on visitors and actively encourage people to come here to share this unique place.

I hope you can see that the issues involved in this decision have been considerable and that the legal restrictions have effectively created a situation that left the landowners little choice.

If anyone complains about this, at least the full facts are available here to bring to their attention.

Jeremy Price
Chair
Cromarty and District Community Council