

Shieldaig Community Council



DRAFT

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 8 February 2024 in the Shieldaig Hall

Present Community councillors - Jim Alexander, Hugh Gosling, Ian Livingstone, Laura Mackenzie, Richard Munday, Daniel Sharp.
Highland councillor – Christopher Birt
Highlife Highland– John West
Woodland Trust – Malcolm Turner, Caz Austin
Members of the community – Gordon Drysdale, Roger Hodgson

Apologies Julia Boger

Condolences

Chris was asked to convey the Community Council's condolences to the family, friends and colleagues following the sad death of Julie Whileman

Minutes of the meeting held on 7 December 2023 - approved and signed

Matters arising – The work to repair the cattle grid to the south of the village had now been completed. Chris and Malcolm Turner were thanked for their contributions to getting this done.

Future of the West Ross Mobile Public Library

John West (Director of Culture and Learning, Highlife Highland) was thanked for travelling to attend the meeting to discuss what was a very important issue for Shieldaig and other local communities. There was real concern about the possibility that the current vehicle would not be replaced when it came to the end of its economic life. The funding pressures that the Highland Council and Highlife Highland faced were fully appreciated. But before final decisions were taken, it was essential to factor in the unique and highly valued service which the mobile library provided to local schools and isolated individuals in remote rural areas like West Ross. The visit of the library was a social lifeline for many people as well as a thoughtful provider of books and DVDs. The high quality of the librarian was a key feature of what was an outstanding service.

John and Chris made clear that they too fully supported the service and understood the very strong feelings of the West Coast communities. But the funding pressures they faced were acute. Although there were no guarantees, prospects would be improved if more economical and efficient ways could be found to deliver the service without undermining its special qualities. Possibilities might include smaller vehicles, somewhat reduced frequencies, revised networks and leasing rather than buying the. John said that he was setting up user groups to offer advice about possible options for each of the library van areas and wondered if Shieldaig might provide somebody who could join the West Ross group. The Community Council welcomed the opportunity to do this and said that they hoped to provide him with a name.

Financial Report – Jim reported that he and Richard had now been added as signatories for the Community Council's bank account. Hugh agreed to continue as the 3rd signatory. Other signatories remaining from previous community councils were in the process of being removed. The account was now active and the balance stood at £15,086.

It was agreed that the Community Council would retain £5,086 for its own operations and the remaining £10,000 would be transferred to the Shieldaig Community Association with £5,000 to be used for their own community resilience work and £5,000 ring-fenced for the Shieldaig Parents Council for similar work in support of the school. Chris said he would check the position on the payment of the Highland Council community council grant.

Measures to improve safety round the school. - Ian confirmed that the Free Presbyterian Church was happy for the school - including parents delivering or picking up children - to use their car park during the working week. With the link to the "safer route to school" this could be a significant contribution to children's safety, particularly during the tourist season. The church was thanked for this. Ian would be the contact for the school for any detailed issues that might need to be sorted out.

Community Development and Consultation – The meeting confirmed the importance of early action to ascertain the views of the Shieldaig community about the priorities for the Community Council's work.

A sub group of Richard, Ian and Daniel was set up to take this forward and report to the next meeting. An important element would be to make effective use of IT as well as traditional face to face discussions. This would then feed into local development planning as well as providing guidance for the Community Council in other areas.

The sub-group [with Hugh as an additional member?] would recommend what equipment the Community Council should acquire to meet its IT needs; establish [or re-establish] a Community Council e-mail system and web-site and consider how it might use social media.

This then led to a discussion about the draft Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan which had been circulated to community councillors. The meeting was unanimous that it was not appropriate for this local plan to include or look to develop plans and policies for the Shieldaig area. The plan had properly identified a number of important "cross border" issues where good consultation and co-operation between the 2 community councils was essential and Shieldaig would be happy to do all it could to help. But on a range of issues, the draft plan highlighted the point that even neighboring communities could take very different views on some matters and the relevant community council was best placed to understand its own circumstances. Those issues with more commonality of interest, which required a more co-ordinated approach across a wider area, should be identified and the best way forward agreed normally in discussion with the Highland Council. Community transport was one such area where effective arrangements were already in place. [The issues to do with the improvement of the marine environment in Loch Torridon might also needed to be addressed through a wider forum.]

New Phone Masts – The Community Council noted the progress which had been made since its last meeting about the Shared Rural Network. Malcolm Turner briefed the meeting about the proposal for a mast at Loch Lundie and the developers offer to visit and consider locations which would provide better coverage for the community. In discussion it was agreed that the priority was for Shieldaig village itself and for parts of the coast road where current mobile reception was either poor or missing altogether. The Community Council would be happy to find somebody to join Malcolm for the site visit. [Jim ?]. **Action Richard**
Chris noted that changing the location of one mast in the proposed network might well have knock on effects on others, so at the end of the day a review of the wider network would almost certainly be required.

A possible national Park for Wester Ross and Lochalsh– Daniel reported back on the results of his research and there was a brief discussion about the stance that the Community Council should take on the Scottish Government's nomination process for a new National Park (or parks). While there were almost certainly advantages in terms of additional funding and a higher priority for the environment, there were disadvantages too; eg additional bureaucracy and its associated costs, and the diminution of local control and accountability. As so much would depend on the particular structure and powers selected for the park authority and the availability of funds, it was very difficult to take a confident view for or against. The Community Council therefore decided to sign up to further exploring the potential of a national park for the area but to leave a substantial decision on the merits of designation until it was better informed. **Action Daniel**

Any Other Business

1. Woodland Trust issues. There was agreement to Ann Barton's request to take aspen cuttings from within the village for the Woodland Trust's new nursery at Couldoran. Ian and Jim might also be able to identify other acceptable local sources of cuttings.
2. There was a brief discussion about a possible proposal by the Woodland Trust to put in a car park at the south end of Loch Dughall. A distinction was drawn between a controlled car park for Woodland Trust use and a public facility which would be much more difficult to manage and could have significant environmental impacts. It was agreed to leave a substantial discussion for a future meeting possibly as part of a wider presentation on the Woodland Trust's proposals for their estate. It was agreed **this would be taken at the Community Council's next meeting.**
3. The secretariat function. It was agreed that in line with the approach taken by other community councils, we should divide the secretary's job in two. Laura would continue as the minute secretary and Hugh kindly agreed to take on the liaison role.

Date of next meeting – Thursday 11 April in the Shieldaig Hall.