

ARDGAY & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING—MONDAY 13 JUNE 2011—ARDGAY HALL

Present: David Hannah (Chair), Alan Lawrence, Phil Olson, Marion Turner, David Laver, Jeannie Sparling, Peter Armstrong (Secretary), Cllr Linda Munro. *Members of the public:* Paul Whittock, Vicky Whittock

1 Welcome David Hannah opened the meeting with a welcome to those present.

2 Apologies were received from Doreen Gibbs, Alan Lawrence, Liz Cormack and William MacLaren.

3 Minutes of the last meeting held on 9 May 2011 were approved.

4. Matters arising from the minutes

Carbisdale Castle closure It was noted that none of the signposting to the castle had been amended to inform visitors of the closure, which is expected to continue until at least the beginning of August. This was felt to be very unhelpful to the public, who were having to travel all the way to the door of the castle to discover it was closed. Chair would contact SYHA.
New Migdale Hospital Over 200 people had attended a very successful open day to mark the completion of the new hospital in Bonar Bridge.

Gledfield schoolhouse Cllr Munro reported that the newly appointed cluster Head teacher for Lairg and Alt-na Harra primary schools would be renting Gledfield Schoolhouse. The news was welcomed by members.

5. Chairman's Report No update beside what was included on the agenda.

6. Secretary's Report

As part of a communications initiative, North Highland CHP (Community Health Partnership) had offered to send members of their management team to attend community council meetings. They had provisionally agreed to attend our next meeting on 11 July. The secretary was asked to liaise with Creich CC and the CHP to suggest the possibility of a joint meeting.

7. Treasurer's Update

Treasurer's account Current cleared balance £37.48 Outstanding liabilities £0

Projects account Current cleared balance £3557.63 Outstanding liabilities £0

The treasurer noted that a sum of £1362.59 had been paid into this account by Highland Council. He assumed this deposit to be in payment of the Community Council Administration Grant, noting that it was £79.60 less than last year's grant.

Toilets account Current cleared balance £460.64 Outstanding liabilities £189

Last year the Highland Council Grant of £1500 for the Toilet running costs was received in July.

8. KOSDT update

The new Development Trust had just produced its first newsletter, which would be distributed free to all local households. Lynsey Mailer had asked any groups planning events over the summer to contact her so that these could be advertised. A provisional development strategy for the next 3-5 years had been arrived at and would be presented to the public at a meeting in Bonar Bridge Hall on Thursday 16 June. One initiative already proposed was the provision of bike stands in the villages. Although some of these were already available at Ardgay Station, there were suggestions that additional stands could be erected on the grassy area in front of the public toilets. There was some discussion as to whether this land remained in Council ownership, or whether it had been transferred to the community at the same time as the toilets. It was also suggested that lockable bike boxes on the station platform might encourage rail users to leave their cars at home.

9 Windfarms update

A scoping opinion request had been received in relation to a windfarm development at Glencassley. Marion Turner agreed to draft a reply to the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit.

Members noted that the Achany windfarm, which had been subject to a closure order by Highland Council in connection with noise emissions, had been reopened within two days. Members felt there had been no attempt by Highland Council to keep local people informed about these developments. Cllr Munro said she would take up this matter with the Council

10. Awards from windfarms/procedures

Lairg Learning Centre An application for Beinn Tharsuinn benefit funding had been received from Lairg Learning Centre, who were asking for assistance in paying the salary of a centre manager. The request amounted to £3000 per year. Marion reminded members that we had recently rejected an application for recurrent funding. It was agreed to discuss the application again at our next meeting. Marion proposed a more structured approach to considering Beinn Tharsuinn fund applications in future. She suggested that applicants could attend to present their case if they wished. However, the members would discuss the application and decide whether or not to support the application in a private separately minuted session at the end of the main meeting.

11. Correspondence *Jonny Shaw petition* A letter had been received from Jonny Shaw seeking support for a petition urging action to reduce the risks of flooding in Strathcarron. It was agreed to write back in support of the petition.
Letter from Gledfield Primary School Parent Group The Chairman had received a letter seeking financial support from the community council for a school trip programme for pupils at Gledfield Primary. The secretary was asked to write back seeking more information about the group making the application.

12. B9176 Struie Rd Marion had read an article in the Press and Journal (May 27) about the possibility of certain roads being closed because Highland Council could no longer afford to maintain them. It was agreed to write to the Council to seek reassurances that the Strue (B9176) road would continue to be maintained given its importance for both commuters and tourists. It was felt that because of the damage heavy loads were causing to the road surface, the most effective way to reduce maintenance costs would be to introduce a weight restriction on the route. Cllr Munro will investigate this.

13. Newsletter The summer edition of the community newsletter had been printed and was ready for distribution.

14. Members' roles Jeannie Sparling had suggested that rather than take on responsibility for a particular area of work, members could be asked to represent the interests of the people living in their neighbourhood. The idea was felt to be a good one, but it was felt better to leave this kind of change until after the new elections in November. Cllr Munro agreed there was a need to seek the views of people who did not attend meetings. She suggested a 'knock and drop' strategy where questionnaires were distributed to households with the assurance that someone would call back to collect any comments at an agreed time. It was agreed to discuss the possible content of a household survey at our next meeting.

Cllr Munro said she would provide an update on the roles and responsibilities of our local Highland Council members (such as which committees they were members of). She also offered to write an article in the community newsletter highlighting the importance of local community councils.

Marion asked what training might be available to our members given the changing nature of our role. She felt we needed help not simply in how to operate a committee, but in techniques for engaging with the local community. Phil Olson felt we were amateurs taking on global operators such as Eon and SSE. He felt the Association for Community Councils had been of little assistance in supporting community councils in the work that was now expected of them.

15. AOCB

Business plans Paul and Vicky Whittock, owners of Ardgay Garage, had attended the meeting to share their plans for a new local business development, which they had already discussed with Lynsey Mailer of the Development Trust and Highland Council. They hoped to develop the site of the former filling station as a shop, noting that a recent survey had shown that local people wanted to see a new shop in the village. They were also considering additional facilities such as a cafe to cater for visitors. They may also be interested in the idea of providing a self service fuel pump through a scheme for which there may be financial assistance available. Paul also mentioned that one of the apprentices working at his garage may be interested in setting up a cycle business in the future. These plans were warmly welcomed by members.

Jeannie Sparling said she had spoken with Lynsey Mailer about the possibility of extending the Active in Ardgay project, at present aimed at younger people, to include adults. She felt there were a lot of local people who grumbled, but did not come to meetings. She thought many people like herself lacked information about the various agencies and groups operating in the area. Others felt the service point in Bonar Bridge worked well enough as a local information centre. Jeannie had agreed to train a local teenager in creating flower tub displays as part of his Duke of Edinburgh Award programme. She knew that one thing local young people wanted to see was an all-weather sports pitch, and wondered if this could be developed as a joint project with Gledfield School.

Ward Forum Marion reported on the forum held in Lairg on 28 May. Chief Inspector Matthew Reiss had talked about vandalism and wildlife crime in the area. He also highlighted the focus of police resources on resolving the issue of underage drinking in Tain. Highland Council claimed they had no influence on the outcome of Section 36 (electricity generation) planning applications. Local representatives from Bettyhill had raised the issue of lists of objectors to windfarm developments having included the names of people who had died or moved away from the area. Marion had been asked to suggest the possibility of holding Ward Forums on weekday evenings: the general feeling had been that with the long distances involved for many in getting to the meetings, the weekend was perhaps the only realistic option.

Forestry Commission Scotland Consultation Marion had also attended a consultation session in Culrain about future plans for Strathcarron and Carbisdale forests meeting in. Areas where trees had been felled recently would be left for 5 years and then replanted. Marion wondered whether a mountain bike track could be created there forming a network of such facilities locally. The FCS Recreation officer would be happy to attend a meeting of the community council to discuss ideas.

Jeannie Sparling wondered whether it would be possible to repair the railing outside Alladale stores which had been damaged in a road accident. It was agreed to approach John Clark of Highland Council to enquire about this.

The meeting ended at 9.15pm. Next meeting will be at 7pm on Mon 11th July.