

# ARDGAY & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL

## MINUTES OF MEETING—MONDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2011—ARDGAY HALL

*Present:* David Hannah (Chair), Alan Lawrence (Treasurer), Phil Olson, Marion Turner, Derek Matheson, David Laver, Jeannie Sparling, Peter Armstrong (Secretary), Cllr Linda Munro.

**1 Welcome** The Chairman opened the meeting with a welcome to those present.

**2. Apologies** had been received from Doreen Gibbs and William McLaren.

**3. Minutes of the last meeting** held on 11 July 2011 were approved. Marion wished to point out that though she had not been present at the previous meeting, she had sent an email to the secretary before the meeting including some comments and questions which she had wanted made on her behalf. The secretary apologised for having omitted to pass on this information, which is included with these minutes.

### **4. Matters arising from the minutes**

*New Migdale* Marion reported that a sum of £250 had been collected for the Stephen Mouat memorial fund through the tins in Ardgay, Bonar Bridge, Rosehall and Lairg. This sum would be added to a £100 donation from the local community councils and the residue of the Migdale 'fighting fund'. Liz Cormack had obtained a plaque which had been displayed at the Migdale Open Day. It would now be up to the CCs to liaise with the NHS about how to spend the funds.

*Struie Road* A press statement from Highland Council had warned that routes such as the Struie road may be at risk of closure because of maintenance costs. The secretary had written to Highland Council to seek assurances that the road would be kept open, possibly with a weight restriction to minimise maintenance costs, but had received no reply to date.

*Forestry Commission Consultation* Marion had spoken to Hazel MacLean of the Forestry Commission, who had said that with the current pressure on resources, there were unlikely to be new projects in the coming year, but did not rule out the possibility of help with signage or through providing help in kind with local projects.

*Association of Scottish Community Councils* David Hannah reported that this recently dissolved body now appeared to be preparing to start up again. It was felt that our community council had never benefited from the existence of the Association. Cllr Munro said our feelings were shared by all of the 11 community councils in her ward. It was felt that a possibility for the future might be the creation of an association in the Highlands.

*Ardgay Hill-Oakwood Footpath* Marion had made an application to the Ward Discretionary Fund to contribute to the costs of the work on the footpath. The application had been delayed over concerns for liability for maintenance. It was agreed to write confirming that the community council would assume this responsibility as a means of advancing with the project.

*Carbisdale Castle Closure* Following the announcement that the castle will be closed until the New Year, Lynsey Burns had met with the SYHA, who have agreed to do more to promote the castle and the surrounding area to tourists.

*Ardgay public toilets* The floor paint in the toilets had continued to deteriorate. The toilets were due to close for the year on 14 October.

*Planning application* The planning application for new signage on behalf of Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Society had been approved by Highland Council.

### **5. Chairman's Report**

*Bridge Project* John McMurray had written to report on what had been a very successful summer of activities for children and young people which had been supported by grants from the local community councils. The only negative aspect of the project had been the fact that only Bonar Bridge locals had attended. There were plans for youth club meetings to be held during the winter months. Mr McMurray had asked what the community council felt should be done with the grant made for transport from Ardgay, which had not been used. It was agreed to suggest that the money should go towards the group's next project. Phil Olson agreed to write to John McMurray to that effect.

*Local postbox relocation* Following a representation from a local resident, the question of whether the local postbox should be relocated had been raised, on the grounds that it was standing on property which may be sold at some time in the future. After a discussion of alternative sites, members agreed that any decision should be postponed, since the present site allowed safe vehicular and pedestrian access.

### **6. Secretary's Report/Correspondence**

Highland Council had written enclosing a letter from John Swinney MSP explaining the decision to cut government funding to the Association of Scottish Community Councils. In their covering letter, the Council said they remained committed to providing post-election training and support for community councils.

### **7. Treasurer's Update**

*Treasurer's account* the current cleared balance stands at £1900.08 with £300.00 loaned to the toilets account.

*Projects account* the current cleared balance stands at £4846.80 with the recent receipt of a £2500 grant from the Beinn nan Oighrean wind farm. The £350 grant to the Gledfield Primary School has been sent with receipt acknowledged.

*Toilets account* the current cleared balance stands at £4.65 but includes a loan of £300 from the Treasurers Account

The treasurer highlighted the fact that this year's Highland Council grant (£1500 last year) has yet to be paid with no information forthcoming on when it will be paid. If necessary, a further loan will be made to meet liabilities.

## **8. Dornoch/Tain pupil transport**

The Chairman read out a letter from Bill Couston, Education Officer to Cllr Munro regarding eligibility for school transport to Dornoch. Pupils resident in Ardgay were only automatically entitled to concessionary transport to Tain Royal Academy. Any pupils wishing transport from Ardgay to Dornoch Academy would only be entitled to concessionary travel if there was spare capacity on transport to Dornoch, and may lose the place should it be needed by new pupils living in the Dornoch Academy catchment area. These discretionary places would be allocated according to a set of priorities such as the existence of siblings attending Dornoch Academy. All parents who had requested transport to Dornoch had received a letter stating that concessionary travel was only available to the catchment school. In his letter Mr Couston offered to ask the service's Transport Unit to send us more details of the criteria used in awarding concessionary placements. It was agreed that clear information about how places were being allocated would be very useful for local people. Cllr Munro agreed to pursue this request on our behalf.

## **9. KOSDT update**

Marion reported on the progress of the new Development Trust. An events calendar had been produced for September which was available on the community website and had been displayed locally. A Kyle of Sutherland brand/logo had been developed which it was hoped to integrate in local signage. A website was also under construction. A feasibility study on a pilot apprenticeship scheme using funding from the Achany windfarm suggested a very positive response. One of the first apprentices under the scheme, Calum Smart, had won an Apprentice of the Year award. Lynsey Burns had been working with the Bradbury Centre to ensure they were getting any available support with their activities. The Trust were also investigating the inclusion of more local information on the brown tourist signs at sites such as the A9 at Clashmore. It was noted that the signs in question cost up to £10000 on account of the planning regulations involved. There was also felt to be a need for more local signage in and around the villages.

## **10. Windfarms update**

Marion Turner had written to the Energy Consents Unit in response to the Glencassley scoping consultation. She had also contacted David Cowie with regard to getting a composite map centred on Lairg and Ardgay of all the windfarms at various stages of development in our area. She felt this would be very helpful when responding to any future consultations, and had been disappointed by the lack of cooperation shown by the Council with requests of this kind. Cllr Munro asked Marion for details of the request, which she offered to pursue with the planning officers.

David Hannah said it appeared that Rosehall and Sallachy windfarms would be following the same route as Achany by administering community benefits through the Scottish Communities Foundation. He had written to local MPs and MSPs to propose the idea of a communities champion to coordinate the local response to future developments, but as yet the only response had come from Mary Scanlon MSP.

Marion Turner had been concerned by a minute of a meeting of Highland Council's community benefit working group. The document stated that the group would recommend to Council that "there be no cap on benefit accruing to a Community Council – the initial £100,000 local benefit should apply afresh in respect of each new windfarm and each extension to a windfarm to compensate for cumulative impact." She felt this implied the group had considered other arrangements, which she found worrying from the local point of view.

Marion asked if Highland Council had been able to provide a full explanation of the circumstances surrounding the temporary shutdown of the Achany windfarm.

## **11. Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Benefit applications**

Phil Olson asked whether members felt the current process for distributing grants from the Beinn Tharsuinn fund was sufficiently robust in terms of public accountability. At present it was unclear whether the groups awarded funding had to produce evidence of how it had been spent. It was likely that there would be increasing scrutiny of the procedures in future. Cllr Munro said she would seek clarification of the guidelines from Phil Tomalin, company secretary to the Board.

An application had been received from the management body for Lairg Learning Centre to assist with funding a managerial post for this facility. The application had been submitted to the community councils in Ardgay, Creich and Edderton, who were each being asked to provide £3000 a year of the £16000 required to fund the post. Phil Olson had written to the other community councils to say that while we fully supported the objectives of the project, it had not been our practice to support ongoing costs, particularly where the sum involved would represent a substantial proportion of the available grant. It was also unclear to what extent the Lairg facility would benefit people living in Ardgay. He had requested more information in this respect, but had received no response to date.

## **12. Community Council Elections 16 Nov 2011**

The chairman read out a letter from Andy MacKay, Ward Manager, concerning arrangements for the forthcoming community council elections. The elections would for the first time be open to residents aged 16 – though no one in the 16-18 age group will be eligible to vote or stand for election unless they had been added to a specially created Supplementary Electoral Register by 31 August 2011. The chairman also noted that nomination forms were still unavailable from the Council despite the closing date being only three weeks away.

## **13. AOCB**

*Works on Dounreay–Beaully pylons.* Phil Olson noted the commencement of work on restringing electricity pylons in the local area. Only a few residents were affected by the work, but those that were faced considerable disruption to their environment. At a meeting of the community council last September, Gareth Edwards of SSE had stressed the company's

commitment to repairing any environmental damage. It was agreed to write to the company to seek reassurances that reinstatement work would take place as promised. Marion Turner also felt the company should be made aware that many people from outwith the affected area use the local tracks under open access rights, and should be involved in any consultations over developments.

*Christmas tree and street decorations* Two local people had volunteered to help put up the overhead decorations this year. It was noted that when the decorations were removed last winter, the brackets had been removed as well. Liz Cormack would look into having these replaced and would also order the Christmas tree. Derek Matheson has the lights for the tree. The socket pole for mains supply has now been reinstated.

**The meeting ended at 9.15pm. Next meeting will be at 7pm on Mon 10<sup>th</sup> October.**

DRAFT