

ARDGAY & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Minutes of meeting held on Monday, 11th May 2015 in Culrain Hall at 7.00pm

Present: Elected & co-opted members: Marion Turner, Vice/Acting Chair (MT), (TL), Alan Lawrence, Treasurer, (AL), Teresa Langley, Secretary, (TL), Phil Olson (PO), Betty Wright (BW), Bob Sendall (BS), Silvia Muras (SM)

Apologies: David Hannah, Chair (DH)

Police Scotland: No representative

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder (MG)

Also present: Highland Councillor George Farlow (GF), THC Ward Manager Andy Mackay (AM), Anne Henderson (AH) Steve Buskie (SB), Alison Andrews, Sheila Lall, Kate Alexander, Robert Henderson, Liz Cormack, Janet Mackay, Peter Wright, Tom Tomlinson, Leslie Pope, Rupert Haig-Thomas, Ingebjorg Smith, Janet Charge, Geoff Milne, Paul Ramage, Anthony Lester, Andrew & Yhje Whiteside, Mary Campbell, Alison Young, Rachel (R)

Items 1/2. Welcome/Sederunt & Apologies. As above.

Item 3. Open Session – Culrain. Acting Chair Marion Turner opened the meeting which took place immediately following another between the local Culrain community and MSP Rob Gibson, Stuart Black THC Head of Development, several Highland Councillors, representatives of HIE and others, held to discuss the proposed development of Carbisdale Castle and the sale of Forestry Commission Scotland land adjoining the Castle grounds. MT began by stating the CC's constant endeavour to work with and support the widespread community of Ardgay & District, an area of approximately 570sq km with a population at the last census of 627. A brief summary of some of the projects and issues that the CC has worked on was given, notably the Invershin cycle ramp, changes to train services, the proposed new pylon route, flooding, and the recent Service Point and Transport consultation. Tonight's attendance by Culrain residents is with particular regard to the proposed development of Carbisdale Castle and surrounding woodlands. MT stressed that members of the CC had no knowledge of any discussions between the developer and SYHA and FCS and therefore had no involvement prior to receipt of an email from the Culrain & District Hall Committee on the 18th April 2015, in which the CC was accused of holding meetings with the developer and FCS. On 19th April the Secretary replied stating that there had been no involvement of the CC. AH disputed the date of the first communication from the Culrain group which had been sent on 27th March but investigation revealed that this had been sent to a wrongly typed email address and therefore had been placed in a 'junk' mailbox in the CC's system. The Culrain group wrote on 23rd April wanting to meet with the CC before the Developer's public meeting on 29th April 2015. This was not possible as CC members were not available to attend a meeting, due to holidays, other commitments and illness. In addition, there were no facts about the development in the public domain. This was explained to Culrain in an email dated 25th April 2015 in which the CC suggested that as the CC was scheduled to meet here on 11th that could be used for discussion. CC members became aware of proposals at the same time as the rest of the community at the public meeting on 29th April, called by the architects engaged by the developer. The Freedom of Information request from the Culrain group was responded to promptly on receipt but there were no documents or correspondence to supply. From the floor Rachel stated that the group had been told by DH that he had had a meeting at the Castle regarding the sale of public woodland. This would have been in contravention of the articles of the CC Code of Conduct. She urged that this meeting should be one of collaboration and not adversarial. AH stated she had defended the CC at the public meeting of 29/4/15 and it was understood that DH had acted as a private individual. She hoped that the group and the CC can meet and work together. SB said the matter of governance of the CC was a serious issue if DH was acting as a private individual while being understood by others to be in his role as Chair of the CC. AH told the meeting that the Culrain group had written to the architects/agents advising that a correctly annotated map had not been supplied when requested but that the group wished to hold further discussions to seek the best way forward. This appeared to be accepted. However on Monday 4th May the architects wrote issuing a deadline of 6th May from the developer with regard to the Culrain group's position on the disputed 56 acres. This demand was deemed unreasonable by the Culrain community which again responded seeking the discussions previously agreed. No reply has yet been received from the architects. For the Culrain group AH stressed that the community is in favour of the Castle development as outlined so far, the only concern is over the woodland. BW pointed out that under the Outdoor Access laws in Scotland no-one can deny access or fence off any such area. It was felt that the developer has failed to understand this Scottish Access legislation. In summary SB

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felt that the earlier meeting had been fruitful with good discussion. Stuart Black left in a good position to explain the community's stance to the developer and that the community wishes him to go ahead but with full co-operation between himself and the community. Over the last ten years a full network of paths has been established in the woodland and it is hoped to set up a Forest Trust to continue and improve its management in amicable agreement with the developer. To this end the community has held back from furthering their Community Right to Buy actions meantime. The community's various plans for the land in the future include a micro-hydro system, a bio-heating plant to use product from the forest project, a small fishery, wind turbines, and recreational activities, hoping to build on previous uses established at the hostel. BS indicated that it would have been most beneficial if the Culrain group had been in regular touch with the CC over the past months as this would give the CC a better understanding of the community's plans and also help the CC to support them in any way possible. SB hoped that the Castle project and the Forest Trust could progress together to mutual benefit. MT reiterated the thoughts of SB and hoped that this evening's meetings will lead to a successful conclusion both for the developer and the community. AM concluded this part of the evening noting that everyone is clearer on who is who and that a distribution of information, ideas and communication in general should be greatly improved as a result. Everyone is pinning hope on the discussions that Stuart Black will now have with the developer. This session ended at 8.15pm when most members of the public left the hall. Liz Cormack and Steve Buskie remained for the rest of the CC meeting.

Item 4. Minutes of last meeting. The minutes of the March meeting were approved as a true and accurate record, proposed: Teresa Langley; seconded: Phil Olson.

Item 5. Matters arising:

- (a) Invershin Cycle Ramp. THC has received the method statement. It is hoped by Matt Dent that this will be approved by THC and then sent on to Network Rail.
- (b) Culrain junction flooding. GF stated that THC engineers have reported there will always be flooding at this point due to the lie of the land. He is due to discuss this and other matters with William Gilfillan THC/TECS and will report back to CC. **GF Action.**
- (c) Pylon line – Beauly – Loch Buidhe. It is understood that the proposed 'central corridor' is the most likely route but no decision has been communicated by SSE as yet. In the longer term undergrounding of such cables would prove cheaper requiring far less maintenance and the community is encouraged to push for that option. Fears are held locally that taller pylons be erected following the exact line as the existing ones.
- (d) Village flower tubs. In hand. With new and planted tubs now replacing the old there are ten tubs to be recycled. Some are in need of refurbishing but are basically sound. Free to anyone willing to collect them from DH, or they will be burned next winter.
- (e) Gledfield School warning signs/Safer routes to School. It was reiterated that the plan must be done by the Head Teacher. TL has requested a full risk assessment by THC.
- (f) Sutherland Transport Survey. Submitted by CC after a lot of work by CC members.
- (g) Service Point Consultation. Submitted by CC. The request for statistics on footfall and actual savings made by changes in the Bonar Bridge Service Point produced the wrong information. GF will attempt to get the accurate figures though salary confidentiality and cross-usage of Service Points can cause confusion. **GF Action.**

Item 6. Police report. None received nor any representative in attendance.

Item 7. Newsletter. (SM) Deadline for copy/advertising for the next issue will be 25th May. The proposals and discussions regarding Carbisdale Castle will be the main story, also the proposed development at Falls of Shin. Contributions to the newsletter are welcome and should be submitted to the Editor as soon as possible. The September issue will carry information regarding the Community Council elections due in November. SM and AM will liaise nearer the time. The CC continues to seek representatives from all areas within its boundaries and the Culrain residents present tonight were encouraged to try to help find one from their area.

Item 8. Secretary's report/correspondence. An invitation from Dornoch Academy to attend the annual prize-giving will be answered. Unfortunately no CC representative will be available. **TL Action.** Ardgay Public Hall is seeking raffle prizes for a fund raising event to be held on 27th June.

Item 9. Financial report. (AL) The Treasurer's account had a cleared balance of £3612.67 owing to a deposit of £2,000 from the Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Ltd. Activity in April reduced this to £3536.67. The Projects account stands at £6989.52. The current cleared balance in the Toilets account is £11.65. It is hoped to consolidate all future activity on the Treasurer's account and that the Annual Accounts will be ready and audited in time for the AGM in June.

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AL proposed a discussion should be held regarding the remuneration for the cleaning of the toilet block as this rate has remained the same for four years. Discuss at next meeting. **Agenda item TL Action.**

Item 10. Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust report. (MT) Development Officer's report has not yet been received although it has been prepared. Issues/events currently underway include the Falls of Shin proposals exhibitions in the local villages this week, Greening Kyle Project Day on Saturday 16th May, setting up of the Keeping Active Together Team. Full report expected by email in the next couple of days.

Item 11. Highland Council. (GF) Upcoming meeting with THC Director of Community Services, hoping for improvements in communications across the board. Ardchronie road works should be carried out this summer as the land issue is believed to be resolved. Previous month has seen fewer THC meetings due to the run up to the general election.

Item 12. Windfarms. Braemore – with the Scottish Minister as present, decision expected before the end of the year. Possible tax changes by the new Westminster government may affect future developments.

Item 13. Arrangements for the Beinn Tharsuinn awards. The flow chart indicating the procedure once established with KoSDT was approved. A new separate mailbox will be set up for electronic applications. Mailed applications to the Secretary will be forwarded to KoSDT. The application form will be redesigned.

Non-agenda item. Community and Renewable Energy Scotland conference report. (BW) This conference, aimed at energising Scotland's communities, covered issues including small hydro and wind turbine schemes which could feed local energy needs, problems and solutions, community benefit discussions, saving energy initiatives, shared ownership schemes and lower energy bills.

Item 14. AOCB. (a) Ardgay Hill footpath. DH has spoken to Matt Dent who is pursuing the illegal closure of this signposted footpath. The issue has arisen due to a local crofter fearing his cattle are being/will be poisoned by dog waste left on the path. Such issues should be reported to the Dog Warden at THC Public Health in Golspie.

(b) Christmas lights. The Christmas tree support hole needs re-doing as it is broken caused by storm damage last winter. Paul Whittock will also require a box of connections from the frame work to the lamp post, and LED rope lighting in blue, red, green and white. Secretary to contact THC Street Lighting. The use of a cherry-picker to avoid working with ladders is to be considered before the next meeting. Hiring is possible in Tain but perhaps there is such a vehicle locally which might be utilised more cheaply. It may be possible to share use with Creich, sharing costs. **Agenda item TL Action.**

(c) Sutherland District Health, Care & Community Safety Partnership Information. Members had received information from this group and a paper copy is with the Secretary.

(d) Creich & Lairg CCs Minutes. The system of sharing Minutes amongst all three CCs is working well and appreciated.

(e) Lady Ross. An email has been received from Mr Colin Ross via AM stating that he now intends to put the site on the open market for sale. He remains open to any suggestions the community may have meantime.

(f) Litter pick with Gledfield School. Date agreed as 28th May. Volunteers welcome.

Item 15. Date and time of next meeting. The next meeting will also be the AGM and will be held in the Ardgay Public Hall at 7pm on Monday 8th June.

Meeting closed at 9.00pm