

Ardgay & District Community Council



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Minutes of meeting held on Monday, 12th September 2016 in Culrain Village Hall at 7.00pm

Present: Elected, co-opted and associate members: Betty Wright, Chair (BW), Silvia Muras, Vice Chair (SM), Marion Turner, Treasurer (MT), Leslie Pope, Secretary (LP), Sheila Lall, (SL), Andy Wright (AW)

Apologies: Rob Pope (RP)

Also present: Highland Councillor George Farlow (GF), Anne Henderson (AH), Kate Alexander (KA)

Police Scotland: None present

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder

Items 1/2. Welcome/Apologies (as above). Chair Betty Wright opened the meeting particularly welcoming representatives from the Culrain community. Best wishes were sent to Rob Pope for his continued recovery from recent surgery.

Item 3. Minutes of last meeting. The minutes of the August meeting were approved as a true and accurate record, proposed: Leslie Pope; seconded: Silvia Muras.

Item 4. Matters arising/updates. (1) Community Broadband. Major disappointment was registered following the recent communication from Sarah Marshall, Community Broadband Scotland Adviser, and also the recent report by the Scottish Rural Parliament, in spite of the Scottish Government's commitment to reach 100% of premises in Scotland with Superfast Broadband by 2021. An Open Market Review (OMR) will take place later this year but fears are that this will take forever and simply identify the areas where commercial plans (namely BT as no-one else appears interested) might go ahead, but this will undoubtedly leave many of the local rural areas without the improved service. With an almost guaranteed uptake, it is hard to understand BT's reluctance to proceed, no matter what the 'rural' difficulties. BT's roll out should have begun in these poorly served areas with the well-provided for urban areas left till later. An efficient, speedy service is now a requirement for all premises, domestic and business, throughout the Highlands. In more remote areas the potential to improve health care and paramedic efficiency alone should be reason enough, not to mention those trying to run businesses, retention and attraction of population, etc. The quality of life is being seriously eroded without modern communications. MT agreed to write on this subject to MSP Gail Ross, cc to MP Paul Monaghan and Margaret Davidson seeking support for this now serious political issue. £5m was paid for the initial set up of CBS but little progress has been seen for such an investment. **MT Action.** (2) NC500. CC agreed to join Heart of Sutherland Tourism (HOST) to keep in the loop with any developments in tying-in the area, its businesses and attractions, to the main website of the NC500. It may be that the CC should appoint a representative to HOST; AW is willing to take this role if required/LP may also help with this. LP will work with anyone from Culrain to promote local places of interest. (3) Flower tubs. The local Growing Group has planted and watered the tubs throughout the summer had indicated it is hoping to keep going through the coming winter. The previous funding given by the CC to individuals to set up and care for the tubs can be redirected to the Growing Group if it continues with this responsibility.

Item 5. Police report. **Once again there was no police attendance or report available.**

Item 6. Christmas lights. Paul Whittock had hoped to attend the meeting tonight to discuss this further. With the soon to commence building works and regeneration programme in the centre of the village it is perhaps advisable to cut down on lights/displays at this time. The option to erect a tree on the green where an electrical connection exists seems to be the favoured idea for this year. The tree holder which was previously used no longer exists. A good tree with lights will help brighten the area while all the work goes on. AW offered to supply the tree and sort out the holder. He and MT will work together to purchase appropriate lights. The lamppost lights will not be used, mainly due to H&S issues when erecting and taking down as well as maintenance problems. These lights could be sold to help raise funds towards new LED tree lights. AH advised that the Culrain community has always had its own tree and will do so again. The Kyle of

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Sutherland Gala Committee is also planning a Christmas lights display within the Gearrhoille Community Woods which will add another festive attraction. **AWMT Action.**

Item 7. Rotary Club Fund. LP advised that East Sutherland Rotary Club has funds available for small, long lasting, local community projects. RP is a member of the Rotary Club. The siting of another bench within the Playpark might be considered a suitable project and would replace the older, damaged one which has been removed. A bench made of recycled plastic will be considered; BW will ascertain prices and options. **BW Action.**

Item 8. Steps at Playpark, Ardgay. Mr William Ross has written to both the CC and THC with his concerns over the safety of these steps. GF has passed the issue on and it is understood that this job is now out to tender for steps improvement and the dropped kerb which is required for access. The nearest parking to the Playpark is in Oakwood Place where an unofficial sign indicates that parking is for 'residents only'. This should refer specifically to the areas in front of the sheltered housing. An official sign would require a THC traffic order. GF will keep the CC appraised regarding the work on the steps/kerb. **GF Action.**

Item 9. Secretary's report. (LP) Correspondence. (1) The recent email highlighting the appointment of a 16 year-old to the Peebles CC prompted discussion to follow this example. Such an involvement for a young person would be a good addition to any CV. Perhaps someone with fledgling political interests could become a 'Student Member' with the addition of a Youth Representative's slot on the agenda. Chair will contact the Guidance Teachers at both Tain Royal Academy and Dornoch Academy. **BW Action.** (2) Bins at the Playpark. Via the website a complaint has been received that the waste bins are not being emptied by THC. Also there are dangerous nails and wires exposed in the surrounding fences. This should be reported via THC website front page. GF will pass on the refuse collection issue to Andy Shaw, Waste Management Officer. **GF Action.** (3) An offer has been received from Moray McCulloch, a serving fire officer, to give talks on fire safety to local groups. Contact details available. (4) When CC Chair, David Hannah acted as a representative to Highland Small Communities Housing Trust (HSCHT). As he has been put forward as a Board member by the CC, he will be asked if he will continue to keep the CC informed. **BW Action.** (5) Kyle of Sutherland Gala Committee has sent thanks for recent funding awards and included photos from the Gala Week events.

Item 10. Treasurer's report. (MT) The August 2016 balance at the bank is £15,907.78 of which £15,810.71 are restricted funds. The Admin/General Fund has £97.07 available to carry out the business of the CC. THC Admin grant of £896.54 (after CC insurance premium has been deducted) has been received. The balances of the restricted funds are: Toilet Caretaking - £1,086.00; BTWF - Community Projects - £564.53; Newsletter - £2,279.98; BNO - £11,080.20; EON Path - £800. The Beinn nan Oihgrean annual award of £2,500 has also been received and is included in the figure above. GF advised that the CC could be in line for an increase in its annual Toilet Grant due to the proposed changes in local facilities and because the grant received has remained unchanged for many years. Treasurer will write to request a rise in the grant payment. **MT Action.**

Item 11. Planning issues. Nothing controversial.

Item 12. Newsletter. (SM) Latest issue available tonight for distribution; another excellent edition. Advertising revenue has increased. It was agreed that a PayPal account should be opened with a Pay button set up on the website. A small item will appear in the next edition inviting those who live outside the CC boundaries to subscribe. Contributions for articles are always welcome. Interviews with local people could become a feature; perhaps something the new Student Member might be involved with in future.

Item 13. Website & Facebook. Nothing of note.

Item 14. Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust report. (MT) Demolition is expected to begin shortly on the Lady Ross site which has been fenced off as a construction site. The barn has to be professionally sanitised prior to any work commencing there. Work progresses on the Falls of Shin site. CHESS is successfully reaching out to many in fuel poverty with the funding available to help alleviate problems, making a huge difference for many residents. Funding now looks likely to continue to March 2017. This model of data collection has been commended and is being considered for use by the Scottish Government which might in turn lead to more funding being made available. KAT is working through its September/October programme of activities. Abigail Milne is now established as the Bonar Bridge Postmistress with effect from mid-October.

Item 15. Highland Council - priorities. (GF) GF attended the meeting today of the two Sutherland Wards. CC must itemise their priorities for attention. He suggested that Broadband should be at the top of any list as accessing Superfast Broadband will impact on every aspect of rural life, e.g. health, economy, development, tourism, population numbers, distance learning, to name but a few. After the fundamental requirement of effective Broadband speeds and service, transport, housing, etc should all be listed. CC should write to MSP, MP, THC and any other relevant bodies, stressing

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the urgent importance of the Broadband issues. Restructuring at THC continues but serious changes must be made to improve service providing slimmer, more efficient systems. There is still much duplication in departments leading to wasting of officer time. Community Works Officers (CWOs) should be authorised to get on with prioritised works and also be given the appropriate funding. MT agreed to send an email to GF with A&DCC's priorities also making clear that a change in thinking is needed regarding funding allocations. Allocation by population numbers is inappropriate in rural areas where numbers are lower but needs greater. It should also be stressed that there should be no loss of THC local jobs as these are an essential factor in smooth running and the local economy. The final point relating to THC was of the many rural, particularly single track, roads where verges have still not been cut with many roadsides also filling with young trees, all of which seriously threatens the safety of all road users. **MT/GF Action.**

Item 16. Windfarms. Braemore. Understood to be with the Scottish Government minister for decision. **Caplich.** Ready to be allocated to the Reporter for PLI. **Coire na Cloiche.** Construction on next phase starting with a completion date expected in 2018.

Item 17. Any other competent business. (1) KA reported that the 9am train to Inverness now no longer stops at the request stop of Culrain. Potential passengers have to travel to Ardgay to catch the train which passes through their village. Other services are still stopping on request, but this train is of major importance due to its time of day. CC recommended making contact with Frank Roach, based at Lairg station, and also Friends of the Far North Line (FOFNL). Timetabling reasons given can easily be overcome simply by commencing the southbound journey a few minutes earlier in Wick and amending the stops between there and Culrain. The line urgently requires more passing loops to assist with timetable issues. The Dounreay trains continue to travel through the local villages on a regular schedule; the decommissioning budget available should be tapped to pay for such improvements. Serious local concerns abound that ceasing access to one train will lead on to eventual closure of Culrain altogether. MT will also contact Frank Roach; BW will approach FOFNL. **MT/BW/KA Action.** (2) AW mentioned the high numbers of cyclists on the A9 and local roads. Designated cycle routes should be a priority. (3) GF suggested contacting local landowners directly asking that they cut back the roadside growth on their properties.

Item 18. Date and time of next meeting. The meeting will be held on Monday 14th November at 7pm in Ardgay Hall. Room to be booked for this and upcoming meetings.

Beinn Tharsuinn/Beinn nan Oighrean Community Benefit awards.

At the private meeting following the CC's monthly meeting, application by the Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust to the Beinn Tharsuinn Fund for funding towards the upgrading of Bonar Bridge Post Office was awarded £2,000; Kyle of Sutherland Gala Committee was awarded £622 towards its Santa's Magical Forest project. Application by Sutherland Sessions was rejected after review of further information received from applicants. Beinn nan Oighrean Fund. Gledfield Primary School Parent Council was awarded £250 towards Eden Court creative sessions. All applicants will be advised.

MG Action.

Meeting closed 10.28pm.