

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Lochaber Committee** held **REMOTELY** on **Monday, 18 January, 2021 at 10.30 a.m.**

Present:

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| Mr B Allan | Mr I Ramon |
| Mr A Henderson | Mr D Rixson |
| Mr N McLean | Mr B Thompson |

In attendance:

Mrs C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place
Mrs D Ferguson, Senior Ward Manager (Ross, Skye and Lochaber)
Ms E Taylor, Assistant Ward Manager
Mr A Webster, Regeneration and Employment Team Leader
Mr A Maguire, Head of Development and Regeneration
Mr J McHardy, Housing Development Manager
Ms M Cameron Principal Housing Officer
Mr R Porteous, Roads Operations Manager
Mr A Lawrie, Principal Repairs Officer
Mr L Macdonald, Repairs Manager
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer
Mr C Howell, Head of Infrastructure
Mr S Farrow, Principal Engineer
Mr S Eastaugh, Access Officer, Inverness, Lochaber and Nairn
Mr A MacInnes, Administrative Assistant

Also in attendance:-

Chief Inspector J Valentine, Police Scotland (Item 3)
Acting Inspector N Hough, Police Scotland (Item 3)

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to the Committee.

Business

1. Interim Chair

The Chairman had submitted his apologies for the meeting and therefore Members were invited to appoint an Interim Chair.

Mr A Henderson was unanimously appointed as Interim Chair for this meeting.

2. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr A Baxter.

3. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following Declarations of Interest:-

Item 5 - Mr A Henderson (non financial)
Item 5,6,7 & 9 - Mr D Rixson (non financial)
Item 11 – Mr B Thompson (non financial)

4. Police Scotland Local Committee Performance Report Aithisg Choileanaidh Comataidh Ionadail Poileas Alba

There was circulated Report No LA/1/21 by the Lochaber Area Inspector.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- In relation to the issue of sharing sexual images by school pupils and persons being victims as a result, it was highlighted that this could have a devastating impact on the lives of young people and therefore the Police, Schools, Parents and young people would have to work together in addressing this critical issue. It was explained that usually these images had been shared consensually and then there could be repeat offences when these images were shared again. Therefore, there was work for Schools, Police and the families of the young people to inform and support those involved.
- It was noted that there were 72 missing persons reports that the Police in South Highland had to deal with. It was explained that the number of missing persons had increased through the period of lockdown and in particular there had been several missing person reports relating to vulnerable people, but thankfully they were usually found fairly quickly. Clarification on high risk and medium risk missing persons would be included in a future report.
- It was concerning to see a substantial increase in sexual crimes and domestic abuse. The Police continued to investigate these crimes and support victims.
- In relation to speeding offences there was a small reduction in the number of offences. It was explained that during the first lockdown there were few vehicles on the road and therefore the Police were not proactively undertaking speed checks. As lockdowns were lifted, Police did target their resources to catch speeders at key times and locations and were catching them regularly. A combination of education and enforcement would hopefully maintain good road safety standards.
- It was queried what the protocol was for diverting traffic along the A861 via the Corran Ferry when the A82 trunk road was closed between Corran and Fort William. Also, what was Police Scotland's views of the use of the A861 by HGVs during A82 closures, and would Police Scotland give a commitment to take part in a Stakeholders Group to review the situation and work with the local community to address their concerns and change any existing protocols with national agencies. In response to the queries, it was highlighted that Police Scotland had contacted Transport Scotland on these issues and it was advised that the diversion route was not meant to go over the Corran Ferry, given the congestion it would cause on roads that were inappropriate for large volumes of traffic. Police Scotland would welcome taking part in a Stakeholder Participation Group to discuss this matter to find a solution.

Thereafter, the Committee, **NOTED** progress made against the objectives set within the Highland Local Policing Plan 2020 – 23 Year 1, attached as Annex A to the report, for the period covering 1 April 2020 – 30 November 2020.

5. Town Centre Fund Maoin Meadhan a' Bhaile

Declaration of Interest – Mr A Henderson declared a non-financial interest in this item as an Adviser to Caol Regeneration Company and Chair of HITRANS but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interests did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/2/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

A summary was provided of the six proposals received by the Council for Lochaber Town Centre Funding and an assessment of their eligibility status.

Thereafter, Members proceeded to discuss the projects to fit the funding allocation of £84,156 which was available for the Lochaber area. Members were generally supportive of awarding funding for The Black Parks, Kilmallie Community Centre Car Park, Kilmallie Christmas Lights and The Parade, Fort William projects. In relation to the remaining two proposals, the main points raised were as follows:-

- In relation to the Puffer Pier and Slipway project concern existed about deliverability as Marine Scotland licenses were not in place. These had been submitted on 4 December, 2020 and could take a maximum of 14 weeks to determine. This would make it challenging for the tender to be awarded or the project to commence prior to the deadline of 31 March, 2021. However, the project did show good progress and there was the prospect of it being completed on time that it could be supported.
- In relation to the Caol Car Park project, this was a Council owned Car Park and it was acknowledged that it did need to be resurfaced. Caol Regeneration Company had taken the initiative to seek funding to resurface it. It was understood that the Council would be receptive to a grant award to allow these works to take place as there was no budget available in the capital programme to do it. The Council's preference was that they should carry out the works on their own asset rather than entering into a contractual arrangement with a third party.
- The Puffer Pier and Slipway project did not have obvious alternative funding should a grant not be awarded, whereas the Council could have the money available to resurface Caol Car Park, given the increased money available to fund road repairs.
- It was proposed that the Lochaber Committee writes to the Council's Roads Service and ask them to work up a scheme to resurface the Caol Car Park. If there is delay in the Puffer Pier and Slipway project then funding could instead be diverted to the Caol Car park project.

Thereafter, the Committee **AGREED** the following projects and amount of funding from the Town Centre Fund:-

- Puffer Pier and Slipway -£29,478
- The Black Parks - £15,000

- Kilmallie Community Centre Car Park – £23,556
- Kilmallie Christmas Lights – £722
- The Parade, Fort William - £15,400

The Committee also **AGREED** that the Lochaber Committee writes to the Council's Roads Service and ask them to work up a scheme to resurface Caol Car park. This would be the reserve project for funding should the Puffer Pier and Slipway project not proceed.

6. **Housing Performance Report** **Aithisg Choileanaidh Taigheadais**

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No LA/3/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, the following main points were raised:-

- The work of the Housing Service was much appreciated and their support to tenants, particularly during the Covid period, was commended.
- In relation to the issue of fuel poverty and access to reliable heating it was queried if there was a sufficient emergency supply of wood pellets for tenants and what were the support measures for tenants with wood pellet boilers i.e. was there a replacement scheme in place. It was advised that the Council did have a good supply of wood pellets that tenants were able to access if required. Further, there was not a programme for boiler replacement, but each request for heating replacement was assessed on its merits.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April 2020 to 30 September, 2020.

7. **Housing Revenue Account: Garage Rents 2021/22** **Cunntas Teachd-a-steach Taigheadais: Màil Gharaidsean 2021/22**

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Lochaber Housing Association but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/4/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

In discussion, Members noted that a 2% general rent increase was being recommended to the Housing and Property Committee on 27 January 2021 and were supportive of this same level of increase for Garage Rents in Lochaber.

In terms of the strategic framework for dealing with garages in Lochaber, a comprehensive report on the condition of all garages and garage sites had now been

completed and would be submitted to Members for consideration in due course. Tenants would thereafter be consulted on any proposals.

The Committee **AGREED** a 2% rent increase to apply to Lochaber Garages and Garage Sites.

8. Strategic Housing Investment Plan Plana Tasgaidh Taigheadais Ro-innleachdail

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council’s representative to Lochaber Housing Association and the Isle of Rum Community Trust but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors’ Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/5/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members commended proposals for the programme of affordable housing accommodation in Lochaber and it was welcomed that more new houses were proposed for rural areas of Lochaber. In particular, it was great news that Fort William, Upper Achintore Phase 1 had been approved as this would have a considerable impact in meeting housing needs in Lochaber. Phase 1 would also provide an opportunity to open up land at this site for further housing in future. The project at Lochaber House, Fort William was also to commence soon which was great news for the town centre regeneration.

A request was made for more details on timescales and engagement with local communities. For example, what was the timescale for the Lochaber Housing Association feasibility study for the Kinlochleven site and what discussions have been held with the local Community Council. Also, the Strontian Dalmore site had uncertainties over what will happen to the vacant school building. In this connection, it was queried what arrangements are in place if the adjacent village hall was needed for the community; what discussions had there been with the village hall committee; what plans are in place for the future demolition of the school and timescale for decisions on future use of the site. It was explained that the feasibility study on the Kinlochleven site was on hold as a site visit was required and this would be done once Covid restrictions were relaxed to allow this. A response to the other issues would be sent to Members after the meeting.

It was advised that the main issue with regards to increasing the availability of rural housing was the lack of land that was readily and economically available to deliver new housing solutions. There was sufficient land in the highlands for house building, but there were issues with difficult land conditions, getting land that was sufficiently close to services and acquiring land so as to build at affordable rates. Funding was also required to open up the infrastructure in rural areas and it cost more to build houses in rural areas.

Thereafter, the Committee **NOTED:-**

- i the Highland’s draft Strategic Housing Investment Plan; and
- ii the progress with the developments highlighted within section 5 of the report and included as appendix 1.

9. Claggan Quadrangles Update Cùirt-lios Ceàrnagach a' Chlaiginn

There was circulated Report No. LA/6/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

Members were generally supportive of the draft design to help improve the aesthetics, amenities and functionality of the Claggan quadrangles as well as alleviate parking problems. However, there were some concerns regarding lack of greenery and play facilities. An undertaking was given to amend future design plans to incorporate more greenery, play areas and play facilities.

It was noted that overall there had been a positive response to the design proposals from residents. It was queried what the main comments were from those residents who did not like the plans. In general, some respondents did not want any work done or cars in the quadrangles. Overall respondents were very enthusiastic about the proposals. An undertaking was given to provide Members with the detailed comments from respondents.

It was queried what was the future for this Estate in the long term as the closes were poor and the heating system in the flats inadequate. Also, it would be good to have some Forum set up to discuss these issues. It was advised that by regenerating the quadrangles, it would highlight repair works in other areas of the Estate e.g. external painting.

The Committee:-

- i **APPROVED** the design concept illustrated in Appendix 1 and progress project to full design stage. Also, that future design plans would incorporate more greenery, play areas and play facilities;
- ii **NOTED** a funding options appraisal will be presented to Members at a future briefing; and
- iii **NOTED** that further resources will be committed to developing a full technical design.

10. West Highland and Islands Amended Core Paths Plan Review Ath-sgrùdadh Plana Prìomh Cheuman Atharraichte na Gàidhealtachd an Iar is nan Eilean

Declaration of Interest – Mr D Rixson declared a non-financial interest in this item as the Council's representative to Isle of Rum Community Trust but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/7/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

In discussion, Members supported the contents of the report and the recommendations and highlighted the importance of Core Paths for exercise during the Covid-19 pandemic and that it was important they were kept open and available to the public.

Officers support to the Lochaber Local Access Forum was much appreciated. There was a good mix of community and landowner interests represented on the Forum and there was good debate at meetings. There was not always consensus regarding some

of the proposals brought forward, the majority of which related to the impact Core Paths would have on forestry work.

A recommendation of the reporter in the Public Local Inquiry into the first Highland Core Paths Plan was that more remote routes should be considered in future. This was an overriding feature of this review of Core Paths in Lochaber.

Reference was made to Community Council consultation on Core Path signage. It was requested that if there was not a constituted Community Council, then signage proposals are submitted to a Lochaber Ward Business Meeting for consideration.

The Committee having acknowledged the significant work undertaken by Officers on the Core Paths plan review:-

- i. **APPROVED** the Amended Core Paths Plan for the Lochaber area of the West Highland and Islands with outstanding objections on 9 proposed core paths outlined in the report.
- ii. **AGREED** to modify the amended core paths plan to include changes to 5 proposed core paths and the removal of 3 proposed core paths;
- iii. **APPROVED** a six-week public consultation on the modifications to the Amended Core Paths Plan; and
- iv **AGREED** that if there was not a constituted Community Council then Core Path signage proposals are submitted to a Lochaber Ward Business Meeting for consideration.

11. U1122 Creag Aoil Quarry Road, Torlundy Partial Deletion Dubhadh Às Rathad fo Urra

There was circulated Report No. LA/8/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

The Committee **APPROVED** the proposed partial deletion of the U1122 Creag Aoil Quarry Road, Torlundy.

12. Banavie Primary Safer Routes to School Slighean nas Sàbhailte dhan Sgoil

Declaration of Interest – Mr B Thompson declared a non-financial interest in this item as his children attended Banavie Primary School but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that his interest did not preclude his involvement in discussion.

There was circulated Report No. LA/9/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

Members were supportive of the proposal for a footpath widening scheme for Banavie Primary School. This proposal was something that parents and the Parent Council at Banavie Primary School have been campaigning for some considerable time. In terms of the objections to the proposals, it was understood that these were not necessarily about this specific project, but concern whether in the long term there would be a significant development down that road. However, it was unlikely that any development would happen in this area in the long term and given the significant access issues with the bridge, it was unlikely that any development would happen at any stage. Also, it was felt there was a need to reduce the volume of traffic on this road to make the environment more pleasant for residents and school pupils.

Officers were commended for the lengths they went to in order to try and resolve the objections to the Scheme and their comprehensive responses to objections.

The Committee **AGREED** the implementation of the footpath widening scheme for Banavie School Road, Banavie, Fort William.

13. Invercoe Bridge Replacement Scheme Update
Aithisg Drochaid Inbhir Comhann

There was circulated Report No. LA/10/21 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment.

It was explained that the Invercoe Bridge Replacement Scheme was required due to the condition of the existing bridge and was a top priority in the Council's list of structures due for replacement. A summary was provided on progress to replace the bridge.

The Committee **NOTED** the update report.

14. Minutes
Geàrr-chunntas

There were circulated for information the following Minutes of Meetings, the terms of which were **NOTED**:-

- i Lochaber Committee held on 28 September, 2020; and
- ii Special Lochaber Committee held on 11 December, 2020.

The meeting ended at 12.55 p.m.