

Minutes of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council Meeting held in Torridon Hall on Wednesday 12th June 2019 from 7pm - 8.15pm

Our thanks to Celtman for allowing us space and time in the main hall when they had already booked it and for trusting us with their supplies.

Present : Terry Doe (Chairman) Anne Macrae (Secretary) Margaret Smith , Colin Stevenson, Carol MacIver, Cllr. Alex MacInnes, Seamus MacNally - NTS Manager , 5 Members of the public, Ian Jackson - Education Officer , Norma Young - Area Education Manager West.

Apologies : Andrew Peacock, Jonnie Petrie, Cllr. Derek MacLeod

1. Welcome from the Chair.

Terry welcomed all to the meeting, getting going swiftly

2. **Financial Report** As Andrew was not able to return to the hall no financial update was available.

3. Correspondence

Minutes from other Ward 6 Community Councils continue to be circulated by Kenny MacLean.

E mails to and from Alistair Christie regarding the planned Joint CC Meeting on Saturday 8th June at Inverness HQ which has now been cancelled.

E mail regarding proposed Windfarm at Kirkan. Any comments need to be in by 14th June.

E mails to and from Ian Jackson regarding meeting up to consult on future options for Torridon School.

4. Updated Minutes of the May meeting, including Wester Alligin Grazing Committee's comments of concern over wild camping were agreed and signed.

5. **Matters arising**

Roads

Jonnie had been unable to contact Ian MonCrieff in order to set a date for him to come out to visit Kinlochewe regarding proposed traffic calming measures. Cllr. Alex MacInnes will try to speak to him.

The poor condition of cattle grids close to Glen Cottage is continuing to cause concern.

Three bars are now loose and drivers are advised to go round through the open gates if possible. We need to find out if there are plans to fill the grids in or repair them.

Memorial Bench

As we have now been waiting over nine months for a reply on whether the Hickman Trustees are willing to contribute towards the cost of a new memorial bench by the Kinlochewe War Memorial , Terry took the opportunity to ask Fiona Price , the Chair of the Trust if any decision had been made by the four Trustees.

Fiona replied that no decision had been reached though the Trust were not saying no.

She would now like the Community Council to present a quote of how much would be needed before the Trustees made any decision.

Fiona referred to an e mail she had sent our Chair at the beginning of September 2018, questioning the use of how a £500 donation we had received from a film company working in the area was to be used and in which she had falsely accused the Community Council of misappropriating funds. Our Chairman, Terry had responded immediately confirming that the £500 was banked. There were no stipulations on how the money would be used but it would be for the good of both Torridon and Kinlochewe. At our last meeting in May it had been agreed that £250 would be donated to the Out West Community Trust to help towards improvements planned for Kinlochewe Toilets including baby changing facilities and a new hot water boiler. NB. Our Treasurer keeps a detailed account of all money coming in and out and all Community Councils publish audited accounts on an annual basis.

6. **Future of Torridon School and Play Park** Living in the Schoolhouse , Anne declared an interest.

For a number of years there has been growing concern that there has been no review of Torridon School as promised in 2012 when mothballed and at the lack of any maintenance to the building by Highland Council.

Earlier this year parents approached Norma Young, Area Manager (West) wishing to make use of the school for Playgroup sessions and to have the Nursery reopened. Mrs Young had not responded to a Nursery

Placement request but an apology was later made by the Acting Director of Education, Mrs Campbell, who promised it would be looked into. (NB. Mrs Campbell has since resigned and is still to be replaced.)

At our March meeting held in Torridon, a parent had attended to bring up the subject of reopening the Nursery in Torridon School and ask for our support. We had noted her concern, also keen to review and discuss the use of Torridon School and Play Park with Highland Council officials.

Mr Ian Jackson then wrote to parents to arrange a meeting at 5pm on 12th June to discuss future options for the school saying that he was also informing locally elected members which we took to be The Community Council. Mr Jackson then contacted us by e mail, confirming the 5pm meeting and saying that he and Mrs Young were willing to stay on to attend the Community Council meeting at 7pm to meet the public and to help facilitate this, we had moved our meeting from Kinlochewe to Torridon. As this was seen as a follow up to our March meeting when parents had requested support, it was agreed that Terry our Chair and other Office Bearers Anne and Andrew would attend the 5pm meeting to have an accurate picture of parents' wishes and options being proposed by education officials for the future of Torridon School.

The meeting held between the previous Community Council and Mrs Young in 2012 had been behind locked doors with members of the community, staff and parents refused entry. Seven years on we still seek clarification on many points raised then and promises made but not kept to, so we had welcomed the chance for open honest discussion regarding the school and future options for its use.

Parents had indicated that with older children settled in both Shildaig and Kinlochewe Schools now for most of their years, they were content to continue till leaving in p7 but that there was a wish to make use of the building for preschool and nursery education.

Currently families with children in both school and nursery are required to make up to three 20 mile return journeys a day due to different times for starting and stopping. New families have indicated their wish to move into the area if the school or nursery were reopened.

It was with some shock therefore, that on arriving at the hall with parents for 5pm, Community Council Officials found themselves refused entry to the building by Mrs Young and the Centre Manager who locked the door in our faces stating we were not welcome. Mrs Young then returned to open the door stating she would speak to us in first 5 minutes, then 90mins then 30. Disgusted at the rude reception and being told we were not welcome, Community Councillors left to return at 7pm for the usual monthly meeting. Terry outlined how members had given up their own time earlier in the hope of a productive open discussion and had been left wondering what was going on and what could be so secret about the options being outlined by Education Officials. Having given up work to attend at 5pm Andrew was unable to return at 7pm but Terry stated that like others Andrew himself may be a parent in the future and the Community Council felt let down that any discussion had been far from open. Seven years on and Mrs Young was once again meeting behind locked doors.

Mrs Young denied this, saying that it had been a surprise to her that locally elected members had turned up and that then had not waited outside for the next half hour. She claimed parents were unanimous in saying they wanted a private meeting, however this was later denied by parents who felt a deliberate wedge was being driven to separate the community with which we agree. It was noted that doors were locked on our arrival, prior to Mrs Young even speaking to parents who had a good relationship with Community Councillors. Once again the community were left wondering what the situation was.

No formal minutes were taken but Ian Jackson agreed to send on a record of his notes.

Sally Cooke who attended the meeting, had also taken notes and would share them once written up.

It was Mrs Young's opinion that it would be detrimental to other local schools to reopen Torridon and she stated that Highland Council did not intend to open any new nursery units, She considered preschool provision could be made at the village hall. However it was pointed out that Torridon School already accommodates a Nursery class with excellent space and resources, including child sized toilets. Previous Playgroup resources at the Torridon Centre had been thrown out by the hall manager, into an old container and damaged to make room for larger more profitable functions such as Weddings and Celtman. The play park by Torridon School offers attractive surroundings for young children to enjoy play and learning whereas the hall is surrounded by roads with the danger of cars coming and going by all doors. Current

management also restrict use of the extended Centre rooms and toilet facilities are not as appropriate for little ones to use. Play equipment and displays could not be set up for prolonged periods as they can be within the school building where facilities and resources are more appropriate for young children.

It was pointed out that families wishing to move to the Torridon area have been put off by the lack of education facilities. Lack of affordable housing is a problem for the area but there are plans to build more family houses. Mrs Cooke was a perfect example of someone ready to move to Torridon now if there was nursery provision for her child. Far from being 'new', Nursery provision had existed in Torridon School since the idea was established in the 1990s with children from Shildaig and Kinlochewe also attending sessions. There were now concerns over lack of available space in Shildaig School due to rising number of children.

In 2012 we were led to believe that Torridon catchment area was to be included in that of Shildaig School. Mr Jackson clarified that as Torridon School is not officially closed the catchment area remains the same as it was for all surrounding schools. Since 2012 parents have been given no option but to transport their children to Shildaig or Kinlochewe or to home school. Any family in Diabaig would be required to make at least two 36 mile round journeys each day which with winter maintenance cuts had proved not to be sustainable. Anne asked why parents transporting children to Shildaig were being paid but those taking children to Kinlochewe were not being refused any allowance towards cost of fuel, expensive if having to make three 20 mile journeys a day. Mrs Young claimed to be unaware of the situation and said the parents should get in touch with her to sort this out.

A member of the public who had previously been Chair of Torridon Primary when mothballed in 2012 asked for clarification on required maintenance of the school building, pointing out that Torridon School was one of the best maintained when mothballed and the fabric was suffering since due to neglect, despite assurances made by Highland Council in 2012 that the building would be cared for.

Mrs Young acknowledged that all heating had been turned off and she would ask for this to be looked at. She felt the storage heating was not financially viable within the classroom though no mention was made of the overhead fan heaters which are most needed by the toilets in the old wing, nor that the school is connected to twenty solar panels placed on the Schoolhouse roof generating power that could be used.

Mrs Young stated her intention that the school continue to be mothballed for another year before further discussion in June 2020 to allow for any changes in population, housing etc.

There was the possibility the building could be transferred to the community as a Community Asset in the future but it would need to be formally closed first, a process that can take up to a year.

Colin asked how this tied in with Duncan Darroch's wishes in the 1910 Deed Charter stating that the building should only be used for teacher housing and educational use. It was Mrs Young's view that Highland Council might be able to get round this using a Scottish Government Act from 2001 but neither she nor Mr Jackson knew more about this when asked to clarify.

Mrs Young then asked Seamus MacNally, NTS Ranger whether he knew anything about the Act or the Estate affirming interest in the Feu Charter stipulations but as this was the first he had heard of such an Act, he was of course not in any position to answer her.

Anne pointed out that it was Highland Council themselves who had presented the Charter which both educational officials agreed.

There then followed a discussion on the high number of vacancies and changes within senior management of Highland Council and who we should get in touch with for information. Following the resignation of Shiela Campbell, there is no current Director of Education but Mrs Young indicated any queries can be addressed to Donna Manson, Chief Executive or James Vance, Interim Head of Education.

She said Robert Campbell, Estates Manager and Robbie Bain, Ward Manager can give advice on building or infrastructure issues.

Eight new Chief Executive posts are to be filled with a salary of £91,500 each.

We will await notes from Ian Jackson and Sally Cooke before consulting the community and Council further as we wish to have open, honest discussion as promised and see the building maintained properly and used productively now instead of being left to deteriorate further.

6. Any Other Business

Mess at Glen Docherty Viewpoint Bin

There continues to be a problem with mess and litter spread at the Glen Docherty Viewpoint Car Park. There is currently one small green bin with a hole in the lid to deposit small articles. People are leaving bags of rubbish by this bin which then get spread by wind and birds. Discussion on what to do included suggestions of more regular collections on a weekly basis, having a bigger bin or no bin there at all. It was noted that one of the new style funnel bins has been placed at Inverewe Garden Car Park which is wider and might be better in windy conditions but it is not thought this can be emptied into the Council lorries. Cllr. Alex MacInnes will look into options available across the area.

Noise from Clay Pigeon Shooting at Torridon Hotel

Terry will contact the Hotel regarding residents concerns about increased noise from Clay Pigeon Shooting.

Kinlochewe Toilets

It was noted that the donations tin by the toilets had been broken into on the same night that the Gairloch Golf Course Café was broken into. It is not thought that much would have been gained as the tin is emptied on a regular basis throughout each day. A new stronger box will be put in its place.

A member of the public, Tom, recalled the ground where the picnic tables are situated being handed over for £1 many years ago and he thought it should be recorded in past Community Council minutes. We will try to find out whether this was the case and if so who is responsible for the picnic area.

Road Safety

A member of the public, Alan, let us know that he still has a supply of pamphlets detailing how to drive safely. It was suggested some could be dropped off at the shop and that car hire should also give them out.

Overhanging trees and bushes are needing trimmed so that road signs can be clearly seen, especially the blue ones giving advice on using passing places. Road verges by Cromasaig remain a concern to the residents there with soft ground beginning to collapse alongside the fence.

A Torridon resident commented on the number of camper vans parking, worrying that caravans or campers might use the campsite. It was confirmed that the campsite, run by Highlife Highland is for tents only. Some do park by the junction, still close to the toilet facilities which include showers.

More advice needs to be available to campervan drivers on where within the area it is acceptable to park, fill up with water and discharge waste. Diabaig saw to its cost the results of damage caused by wildfire last year.

It was pointed out that the sign saying Annat 1 mile is too close to the junction when approaching from Kinlochewe, leading some people to turn right expecting Annat to be 1 mile down the Torridon road. Colin will look at seeing if it can be shifted.

7. Date of next meeting

It was agreed we would continue with the schedule of dates noted at our AGM.

14th August and 9th October in Torridon and 11th September in Kinlochewe.

As there will be no meeting held in July our next meeting is planned for Wednesday 14th August 2019 at 7pm in Torridon Hall.