

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the Community Council held at 7.00 pm on Tuesday 3rd September 2019 at Roy Bridge Village Hall.

Present: John Fotheringham, Ross MacLennan, Liz Fotheringham, Brian Donald and Highland Councillors Ben Thompson and Denis Rixson, and 36 members of the public.

Statement by the Chairman: At our last meeting on 2nd July the meeting was disrupted by two members of the public who seem to believe that a Community Council Meeting is an open forum in which everyone can express their views however offensive. May I respectfully remind the public that under the Community Council Constitution I as Chairperson shall determine the order, relevance, and competency of all questions or contributions from the public, and if there is any repetition of such disgraceful scenes I will adjourn the meeting to a time and place I see fit.

Apologies: Councillor Allan Henderson

Conflict of interest Declarations: Ross MacLennan, Ian Langley and John Fotheringham are Members of the Stronelaig Wind Farm Community Fund Panel, and Trustees of Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO. Brian Donald is a Trustee of the SCIO. John Fotheringham is also a Community Director with the Highland Small Communities Housing Trust.

Previous Minutes: The Minutes of the Meeting held on 2nd July were approved.

Proposer: Ian Langley

Seconder: Brian Donald

Highland Council's Update on the Future of Roy Bridge Primary School:

Ian Jackson from Highland Council Care and Learning explained that when schools were mothballed, it was proper to examine periodically whether mothballing was still relevant or whether they should move to closure. Even then it was still a complex procedure and every school closure had to be approved by the Scottish Government.

The Community Council supported by many at the Meeting asked about the criteria necessary to reopen the primary school now that the number of pupils attending Spean Bridge Primary School from Roybridge was on the increase, and Spean Bridge itself had over 90 units available for development which may lead to an increase in demand from there. Mr Jackson explained that parents who wanted their children to return to Roy Bridge Primary School should approach the head teacher in the first instance and if there were sufficient numbers they would consider it. Such a proposal if adopted could lead to a staff reduction at Spean Bridge but the Nursery would not be a part of any transfer, nor would any pupils currently attending the Gaelic Medium School be forced to return. Parents have a right of choice regarding placement even in school catchment areas.

Assurances were given that the school building will continue to receive care and maintenance to ensure it doesn't deteriorate whilst further consultation takes place.

The Community Council's position is to support parents if sufficient come forward requesting the re-opening of Roy Bridge School, and if it is sustainable in the long term. If insufficient numbers request change we would support continuing with mothballing, but we are not willing to consider formal closure at this time.

The Chairman thanked Ian Jackson for his patience, and for the detailed explanation of the various complexities involved in each proposal.

Reports;

From 27 August 2019 Mobile Working will be introduced across Highlands and Islands Division of Police Scotland.

Mobile Working means that police officers will be operating mobile devices as part of their operational duties.

They will now be in possession of mobile devices which may be secured to their body armour / jackets adjacent to their radio.

This means that officers will be able to use their mobile devices to remotely access police systems which will increase officers' time working with the public and on incidents - or conducting patrols and preventing crime.

PC Scott Williamson gave the meeting an update on local occurrences,

Matters Arising:

Highland Council – Highland Council have confirmed that they will be clearing the vegetation from around the street lights on the path between the A82 and Altour Gardens in Spean Bridge.

The broken drain cover in Bohenie Road near to its junction with the A86 has still not been replaced and we will ask the Councillors to intervene on our behalf as repeated requests by us have failed to secure results.

We would like to thank Mrs Jenny Hastings and Highland Council for acting promptly in clearing the mess created by corralled horses at the Commando Memorial on Friday 30th August.

As our correspondence with Stuart Black and Donna Manson relating to consistent errors by Highland Council's Planning Department continues to be ignored we have written to both Kate Forbes and Kevin Stewart Minister for Local Government, Housing, and Planning in the earnest hope that someone will accept responsibility, and ensure no further mistakes.

Members of the public asked that we thank Highland Council for recent pothole repairs and the Chairman will pass on the appreciation.

BEAR and Transport Scotland – The Chairman met with Kate Forbes MSP last week and raised the long delayed A86 Inverroy Safety Report with her. He had subsequently written to both Transport Scotland and BEAR giving them 14 days to produce the Report or he would ask Kate to intervene again.

Resurfacing of the A82 at Altrua, some 6 miles North of Spean Bridge is scheduled to take place between Sunday 15 September to Thursday 19 September (both nights inclusive) between 20.00 and 06.00. The road will be closed throughout these times with an Amnesty every two hours at 22.00, 24.00, 02.00 and 04.00 hrs. Emergency vehicles will be able to access at all times.

Recycling Tailings and Scalpings – Following the outburst by a local Landowner at our Meeting on 2nd July the Chairman contacted the Data Protection Commissioner and BEAR Scotland. An examination of the circumstances found that the Roads Sub Contractor had consistently breached SEPA's rules and that recipients would need an exemption certificate for every location which many did not have. The Data Protection Commissioner was happy to take a formal complaint, and Transport Scotland were not amused about the contractor's conduct on a government contract. We have received assurances about the procedures to be followed on forthcoming local contracts and we will be monitoring adherence.

This is not a problem confined to one recipient but seems to have been widespread, but reselling such waste product is specifically outlawed as end use must be agreed with the producer.

Community Council Elections – The notice of Election for Candidates wishing to serve Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council for the next four years will be published on Monday, 23 September 2019 on the Highland Council Website. The deadline for submitting nomination papers is 12noon on Tuesday, 8 October 2019.

The new Community Council will be formed if 9 or less candidates apply on 8th October.

If more than 9 apply the election day will be on the 19th November and the existing Community Councillors will remain till that date.

The Code of Conduct for Community Councillors is based largely on the Code of Conduct for Local Authority Councillors and relevant public bodies as provided for in The Ethical Standards in Public Life etc (Scotland) Act 2000. As elected representatives of their communities, they have a responsibility to make sure that they are familiar with, and that their actions comply with, the principles set out in the Code of Conduct. Its principles, shall apply to all Community Councillors and those representing the Community Council wherever and whenever they are acting in an official capacity as Community Councillors. These principles are Service to the Community (Public Service), Selflessness, Integrity, Objectivity, Accountability and Stewardship, Openness, Honesty, Leadership and Respect.

The key principles of the Code, especially those that specify integrity, honesty and openness, are given further practical effect by the requirement for you to declare interests at meetings which you attend. The rules on declaration of interest are intended to produce transparency in regard to interests which might influence, or be thought to influence, your actions as a community councillor. In such circumstances you will be required to withdraw and refrain from any discussion where you or family member could be deemed to have a conflict of interest.

Correspondence:

1. A letter was received from a local landowner who no longer resides in the area. It made certain inaccurate allegations about the Community Council's involvement in a street name change, the 23 conditions imposed on Planning Application 16/05283/FUL, and our unwillingness to support the plans for a fenced off area in Spean Bridge. After due consideration and with the unanimous approval of the Community Councillors the Chairman had replied. It was clear that she had been misinformed that any street change was premature to say the least, Highland Council Planning Department never consulted us indeed often ignored our contribution, and the comments about the fenced off land would have had more credibility if there had not immediately been an attempt to sell the land to a neighbour.
2. Highland Council had relayed British Telecom's latest consultation on removal of the Telephone Boxes at Gairlochy, Tulloch and Stronaba. For some unknown reason the box at Bohuntin has disappeared from the consultation. Nothing has changed in the last three years, and we will resist their removal. The Chairman will write to Highland Council informing them of our decision, and the Chairman will circulate the consultation to any interested parties.
3. The Scottish Land Reform factsheet provides Scotland's Community Councils with advice about how local communities can have more of a say in how land is owned, used and managed. It also outlines the ways in which communities can use legislation to seek to become the owners of land, even where the owner of the land does not wish to sell the land to the community. The factsheet also provides an update on other land reform activities that will be of interest to community councils. We have passed the information to the Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO that have the financial capability to pursue such land ownership, and have already identified potential sites.

The Community Councillors agreed to note:

- a) An invitation to attend the Fort William 2040 Annual Workshop on 25th September.
- b) Highland Council's Amended Core Paths Plan West Highlands and Islands.
- c) Latest News and Opportunities from Local Energy Scotland.
- d) An invitation to the West Highland Community Rail Partnership AGM 2019 on 21st September.
- e) An invitation to the Highland Small Communities Housing trust Conference and AGM in Inverness Town House on 13th September.
- f) The Transport Forum's August Minutes.
- g) An invitation to the Resilient Communities Conference 2019 which takes place on 11th September at SFRS Cambuslang.
- h) The Asset Transfer of the land Spean Bridge Community Centre is built on including the Car Park from Highland Council to the Community Centre SCIO.

Treasurer's Report:

The current balance is £3960.82 following the receipt of our annual administrative grant. £1518.82 is Community Council Funding and £2442 is the balance left over for further allocation of Micro awards. As we are required to balance the books by 30th September in election year all current expenditure should be forwarded to the Treasurer by that date.

We are required to protect our SSE Micro Award funding and are discussion with SSE about transferring any funding left over in case the Community Council doesn't form

It is noted that a 'top up' grant application to help meet the administration costs of the Community Council has to be submitted by 7th October, but will only be paid if the Community Council can demonstrate that they will run out of their grant funds by 30th June 2020. Only Highland Council could run such a process in the middle of the Community Council elections as no one knows what is likely to happen until they know how the new Community Council intends to spend their funds.

Any Other Business including Date and Venue of Next Meeting:

The final Meeting of this 4year cycle will be at 7.00pm on Tuesday 1st October in Kilmonivaig Church Hall.

Killiechonate Woodlands are currently harvesting timber in the plantation bordered to the north by the railway to the west by Corriechoille Road and to the south by the River Spean which will involve temporary closure of the popular riverside walk. It is anticipated that the harvesting will take two months, warning notices will be posted, and clambering over stacked timber is dangerous, and should not be undertaken.

Licensing;

Notification of a Major Variation Application in respect of the Stronlossit Inn, Roy Bridge. As there was no concerns expressed from the Meeting the changes were approved.

Planning:

The Community Council monitors Planning Applications weekly to ensure we are able to respond within the 14day deadline.

During the last two months we have raised one objection relating to a proposal to build four camping pods in the Fort William Hinterland which we believe is contrary to the Supplementary Guidance in the Wider Countryside Siting and Design.

We noted that there had been a change at Tigh Aran but in the absence of any complaint from residents we were happy to allow it to proceed.

It has been our policy for some years to automatically object to applicants that put in retrospective Planning Applications. We will not reward those that fail to use pre planning or carry out approved plans. Two applications fell into this category this month.

Three Applications were approved.

Meeting closed at 21:00.

Dana MacLennan
Secretary