

Lairg Community Council

Minutes of meeting held in Lairg Community Centre on Wednesday 2nd February 2016 at 7.30pm

Present: Andrew Mackay, Acting Chair (AMK), Hector MacLennan, Treasurer (HM), Jackie Young (JY), John Sutherland (JS), Iain Mackay (IM), Sandy Allison (SA)

Apologies: Jeff Norrie, Chair (JN)

Invited guests: Graham Macleod (GM), Steven Gorman (SG) Scottish Ambulance Service; Melvyn Mckeown (MM), Gemma Richardson, REG Windpower; Paul Adkins

Police Scotland: No representative

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder (MG)

Nine members of the public attended the first part of the meeting including Dr A Marshall, Sheena Skinner, Gary Thompson, Angela (LCA representative), Lena....

Item 1. Welcome/Apologies (as above)/Police report.

Vice Chair Andrew Mackay took the Chair in the absence of Jeff Norrie. There being no police representative present he invited the Scottish Ambulance Service representatives to address the meeting.

Item 2. Scottish Ambulance Service discussion. Graham Macleod gave a brief overview regarding the Lairg Ambulance Station and stated that he and his colleague were present to listen to the views of the CC and members of the public present with a Q&A session if required. As background he said that the Station provides seven days per week service by a mix of in hours and out of hours/on call working. There are currently only five stations providing 24 hour cover. Staff on shift are moving to a more integrated pattern, working with other health/social care services and also with GP surgeries to help free up time for other health professionals by increasing Ambulance staff skill sets. At present Lairg is staffed by Ambulance Technicians but it is hoped to upskill this in the future, with paramedic addition if possible. The aim is to keep patients at home whenever possible, reducing hospital admissions and ambulance travelling. Scottish Air Ambulance Service has two new helicopters in service which can be utilised for emergencies and to transport patients further afield when specialities require. This service is based in Glasgow and helicopters would be deployed with a doctor on board. Training is currently underway to allow for more night flying thereby extending the service, particularly helpful for road traffic accidents. Scottish Government has provided funding to further increase skills, and courses are available at UHI/Moray College which reduces the need to go to Caledonian University, Glasgow, where the main training is based. On joining the service basic training is for one year with a probation period, longer for paramedics who can continue to advanced, specialist and practitioner paramedic level. The move within the service is towards more home based care, away from the traditional model of simply tending for patients while en route to hospitals. Only 5% of calls are life threatening cases, the rest of the work is supporting other health professionals within the NHS and is community based. Advertising has been undertaken seeking qualified personnel in hopes of bringing in paramedic staff to Lairg from out with the area which will increase the skills in the community. Parties have shown interest from England and elsewhere. If this does not produce suitable candidates the advertising will extend locally, seeking untrained personnel willing to undergo training which would take two years starting from scratch. In Kinlochbervie local intake moved on quickly seeking more

advanced skills and opportunities. Recent past recruitment drives resulted in most applicants being placed in the Central Belt to cover the Commonwealth Games. Advertising in the press in the Highlands does work but is expensive, but the SAS aims to retain interested parties in the Highlands. The present advertising is internal and on the in-house website, specifying that Lairg is a part-time post. Kinlochbervie and Bettyhill are now full time stations with paramedic upgrading as staff undertake training. This has proved challenging in Lairg where staff are not keen to retrain and upgrade. Two staff members are sought, qualified paramedics or people willing to take training to that level, on a 33 hour contract. The staffing position will be re-assessed if the latest round of advertising fails to attract suitable personnel. Full time working with upskill training to paramedic was offered but not taken up at present by the Lairg staff. The upskilling programme was agreed between SAS and ACAS as part of their agreement to improve overall provision of service. SAS supports trainees through all levels of training, much of which is in Glasgow in return for the commitment by staff. Asked why the ambulance driver must be a qualified technician, GM stated that this move has been instigated across the service to provide better skills and improve care for patients. In some locations problems have arisen in the past when vehicle had an auxiliary driver only. To access potential personnel who do not have the necessary academic qualifications the service now trains entrants through SVQ Levels 3 & 4, with the option to continue further if successful, initially done through college and mentored hours to technician level. So far all trainees on this scheme have achieved Level 3 and are working through Level 4. Anyone who only achieved Level 3 would still be retained and would be better qualified than a driver with no relevant training. This operates in a similar way to a modern apprenticeship scheme. It was suggested that more than 5% of calls are in need or urgent/hospital care. SG replied that case records show more often ambulance staff remaining on scene to stabilise patients with transport to hospital less than in the past. GM advised that Scottish Government is providing funding to try to increase all staff qualifications to at least technician level. The closing date for the current recruitment drive is 9th February and it is hoped that the assessment of interest will be complete by mid-March. If qualified personnel have applied interviews should take place shortly thereafter. Failing that, advertising will be undertaken further afield, which could take another three to four months to produce results. SG will keep the CC informed of progress. The provision of the air ambulance landing site was welcomed and a survey is to be undertaken to assess the new football field which may prove more suitable for the new helicopters. SA advised that funding for the landing lights may well be withdrawn if the SAAS does not supply the appropriate invoice very swiftly. SG will expedite this invoice asap. With no further points raised this Item was closed at 8.10pm. Four members of the public left at this time as did SG and GM.

Item 3. REG Windpower Strath Tirry windfarm presentation. Melvyn Mckeown gave a short background to the company which was started in 1989 in Cornwall and now has eighteen operational projects with a further seven planned for the next two years. Strath Tirry, 9km north of Lairg, is now proposed to have four turbines each 125m to tip. A two year bird monitoring survey has been completed and a met mast was placed in situ approximately two or three months ago. The EIA is in draft, with the offer from SSE for the full connection expected in the coming week. The company will now consider the economic viability of the project, aiming to submitting Planning application in June 2016 and holding a public exhibition simultaneously. The Planning decision could be expected in January 2017 and if approved construction could start in October 2018 through to mid-2019. Grid connection would be to the proposed sub-station in Lairg with hopefully some 6.5km of underground cabling. The sub-station is expected to be in operation by 2020. One public consultation has been carried out so far along with canvassing in the local area. The community benefit offer would be £5,000 per megawatt, around £40,000 to £60,000 per year. The landowner, Paul

Adkins, also plans to contribute to the local community in various ways to reach the wider community with £60,000 over the first six years, £20,000 of that in the first year with £10,000 to local initiatives and £10,000 aimed at improving tourism facilities and attractions. He wishes to use his land to help revitalise the area, promoting outdoor activities, e.g. Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme, etc. The access route would utilise existing routes whenever possible with local contractors being asked to tender for any new construction. Local procurement would be the preferred option. The company will work with other companies, e.g. SSE, to share/minimise impact. REG will keep the CC informed via HM. The windfarm representatives were thanked and left the meeting at 8.20pm.

Item 4. Adoption of Minutes of December meeting. The December Minutes were adopted as a true and accurate record. Proposed: Sandy Allison; seconded: Hector MacLennan.

Item 5. Matters arising. (1) Gunn's Wood. Further fallen/damaged trees in the most recent storms. JN has been in touch with FCS. (2) March meeting. Confirmed the annual private meeting with Carol Elliot of Foundation Scotland will take place on 2nd March 7 – 8pm, immediately followed by the regular monthly meeting. Posters will be displayed locally regarding the time change to the public meeting. **JY Action.** (3) Angling Club – loch levels, jetty repairs etc. **Agenda item. MG Action.**

Item 6. LDCI update. None available.

Item 7. LCA update. (Angela) The AGM was held last night but was postponed to 1st March as only eight members were present. With fifty members, ten or twelve need to attend in March to make the meeting quorate. It was not possible to adopt the accounts. LCA is moving to become a Scottish Charities Incorporated Organisation which will make the running of the group easier. A new constitution will be presented at the March meeting. Fitness Room – the conservatory has been designated as the most appropriate location; Alasdair Marshall is the lead on this project. This will be a stand-alone facility. Funding needs to be sought now for this project to progress. SSE Resilience Scheme – LCA will host this scheme; seeking funding for equipment such as a satellite phone and generator. Many repairs and maintenance tasks have been completed including the floor of the main hall. Recent storms have removed/damaged signage. Eilidh Price has been commissioned to design new letterheads, logo and layout plans. The committee wish to encourage new members to join and to attend the AGM on 1st March. Angela left at 8.40pm.

Item 8. CALL update. Emma Armstrong had forwarded an email from MP Paul Monaghan which stated he has arranged to meet SSE directors and senior management responsible for transmission and projects in London on 25th February to discuss their development activity in the constituency, including crucially the Lairg to Loch Buidhe connection. He also hopes to visit the Loch Buidhe site in April. He understands that no final decision has yet been taken and he aims to impress the need to develop an alternative route. He continues to lobby SSE.

Item 9. Lights for Air Ambulance update. See at end of Item 2 above.

Item 10. Falls of Shin update. Big Lottery funding application decision expected by end of February.

Item 11. Financial report. (MG) Treasurer's Account balance stands at £2630.49; two payments made in the last month, for room hire for CC meeting, one to Faclan Word Service. Payment received from THC for £59. Windfarm Account balance stands unchanged at £389.76. Projects Account is also unchanged at £104.73.

Item 12. Planning applications. Nil of note.

Item 13. Community Council website. IM is prepared to try maintaining the website and will liaise with Emma Armstrong accordingly. **IM Action.**

Item 14. Windfarms. Caplich. GF advised local ballot rejected the proposed development. **Braemore/Strathy.** No government decisions expected until after the Scottish Parliament elections in May.

Item 15. Correspondence. (1) CASPLAN. Documents now available for comment; deadline 18th March. Responses should be made by both CC and individuals. **Agenda item. MG Action.**

Item 16. Areas of responsibilities for CC members. TECS – SA.

Treasurer/Forestry/Windfarms/Planning – HM. Website – IM. No other areas allocated at this time. LDCI, LCA have no allocated CC contact at present.

Item 17. Any other competent business. (1) Bank of Scotland signatories. AMK and JN to arrange adding AMK to existing list. **AMK/JN Action.** (2) **Ardgay & District CC.** GF advised that ADCC should be reforming in March with six members. (3) **THC Budget.** Still under discussion; voluntary redundancies being sought. Pressure for communities to take over more services from THC. Ardchronie resurfacing expected in 2016-17. (3) **Sallachy road surface** is in very poor condition; loose chippings at **Gruids** still a cause for concern as is the re-emerging bump on the ‘Lochies’ road (A839) near the E.ON windfarm entrance. All items to be passed to THC. **SA Action.** (4) **Term of office – Chair.** GF agreed to check as to how long one person may continuously hold the office of Chair, previously thought to be four years. **GF Action.** (5) **Bags for dog waste disposal** maybe purchased in various stores both local and national or sourced by contacting the THC Dog Warden. (6) **Drainage ditch at Lairg Cemetery.** Once again this ditch is full/overflowing into the cemetery; reported following a recent funeral. THC gravediggers advised that the blockage is on Lairg Estate land. Letter will go to Crispian Cook at Bell Ingram asking to have it cleared. **MG Action.** (7) **Flooding in field near Ord Place.** No drains are blocked here; flooding due to excessive volume of rain recently. (8) **Timber extraction at Ferrycroft.** It is understood that this is due to finish soon. (9) **Rumoured closure of Bonar Bridge recycling tip.** Members of the public have heard this rumour and if true wonder how it will affect the facility at Lairg. Concerns raised that fly-tipping and littering will greatly increase.

Item 18. Date and time of next meeting. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 2nd March 2016 in the Lairg Community Centre. The public meeting will commence at 8pm immediately following a private meeting at 7pm with Foundation Scotland. The room is already booked.

Item 19. Lairg Windfarm Ltd – Lairg Community Fund. At private session, a Micro Grant award of £100 was made to Lairg Joggers Group, via LDCI.

Meeting closed at 9.35pm.