

Lairg Community Council

Minutes of meeting held in Lairg Community Centre on Wednesday 4th May 2016 at 7.30pm

Present: Jeff Norrie, Chair (JN), Andrew Mackay, Vice Chair (AMK), Hector MacLennan, Treasurer (HM), Jackie Young (JY), Sandy Allison (SA), John Sutherland (JS)

Apologies: Iain Mackay (IM), Cllr Hugh Morrison (HMN), Tom Campbell, NHI

Invited guests: Douglas Gibson on behalf of North Highland Initiative (DG); Alasdair Marshall, Loch Shin Sailing Club (AM); Magda MacDonald, LDCI Project Officer (MM)

Police Scotland: None present

Also present: Highland Councillor George Farlow (GF), Leslie Pope, Secretary Ardgay & District Community Council, Sheena Skinner, Gary Thompson, Rita Orr

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder (MG)

Item 1. Welcome/Apologies (as above)/Police report. Opening the meeting, Chair Jeff Norrie extended a special welcome to the guests and there being no police representative or report, invited Douglas Gibson to address the meeting.

Item 2. North Highland Initiative – NC 500. Douglas Gibson explained that although he was not employed by NHI he worked closely with them and he expressed apologies on behalf of Tom Campbell who does work for NHI in the NC500 office in Wick. DG works in tourism and project co-ordination for Visit Wester Ross, through which he has become involved in the work of NHI in setting up the NC500. As background to the current NHI position he explained that initial discussions were held some two years ago which gave rise to the suggestion of a long distance tourism route in the far north. The proposed route is five hundred miles in length which provided the perfect marketing title of the North Coast 500. There are currently no employees of NC500 although that is set to change very soon. Launched officially last May on social media, the Facebook page now has 18,000 followers and spin-off sub-pages dealing with information of what there is to see and do along the route, and off it. DG stressed that NHI is very keen to work with groups from ‘off route’ areas and to help promote the attractions to be found by taking time out from following the main route around the coast; it is understood that the route cannot go through everywhere. A new guide to the route will be produced shortly with the intention of compiling a pack of information with relevant smaller guides for each area linked to the route. All local businesses wishing to benefit from the increase in tourist numbers are encouraged to comment on the Facebook page and to self-promote within their local areas. A figure of eight sub-route, taking in all the areas around Lairg and the Kyle of Sutherland was suggested. It could link to the main route from several access points. It is expected that in addition to the main guide there will be around seven individual ones. On the Black Isle a new tourism group is being established, now with forty members, a website and local guide, etc and something similar could be established here. The Geopark in Assynt also has a similar set-up. A date for a public meeting, to which local businesses will be invited, was agreed for Tuesday 14th June at 7.30pm in the Lairg Community Centre; Lairg CC will stand the cost of the room hire with LDCI Project Officer making the booking and circulating information. LP will take the outcome of this meeting to A&DCC for discussion at their meeting next Monday. DG advised that since the setting up of Visit Wester Ross and its involvement in the early stages of NC500 the tourist season there has been extended with bookings now regularly running into November and occasionally even later. With the reminder that local

businesses must be pro-active in this project, DG left the meeting at 8.15pm with the thanks of all present.

Item 3. Loch Shin Sailing Club. Alasdair Marshall advised that the LSSC devised a project to create a bunkhouse and club facility but then discovered that HighLife Highland was considering a similar project at Ferrycroft. This delayed progress but as it has now transpired that HighLife Highland is not progressing their idea LSSC is now hoping to commission a feasibility study with the plan to apply to the Commonwealth Legacy Fund by September with a deadline for applications in place for January. There will be nineteen projects considered for funding but the club hopes to build a good business plan for consideration. Public meeting/exhibition and consultation will be held between now and September. HighLife Highland has agreed to support the plan and to promote outdoor activities around and on the loch. As well as providing facilities for locals the aim is to make Lairg a destination rather than a place passed through. Linking to the NC500 is another excellent promotion strategy. AM will keep the CC updated and also liaise with Highland Cllrs Morrison and Farlow. He left the meeting at 8.25pm having been thanked for attending.

Item 4. Adoption of Minutes of April meeting. The Minutes of the April meeting were adopted as a true and accurate record. Proposed: Andrew Mackay; seconded: Jackie Young.

Item 5. Matters arising. (1) GF advised that the fence at the public toilets has been repaired. (2) Nothing appears to have been done to tidy up the Station Yard. **HMN Action.** (3) Cosy Homes East Sutherland's Rhionna Mackay was invited to attend the August meeting but she will delay accepting until it is clear what funding will be available by that time.

Item 6. LDCI update. Project Officer Magda MacDonald gave the detailed report from LDCI. Many projects are ongoing and further details are available directly from her. GF commended the path to Lairg station project and MM will liaise with him to seek out all possible funding sources. Funding has been secured to progress the Church Hill Woods project. Further research is being conducted into the proposal for a community owned and run nursing home in Lairg. This is an ambitious project requiring much research into community land buy-out possibilities, specialist advisors would be engaged, Big Lottery funding will be sought, with the initial stages of enquiry taking place this week. A comprehensive feasibility study and business plan would be worked up to take the project to the next stage. If successful in fulfilling the concept this would be the first community built and run nursing home in Scotland. It would be operated under a social enterprise initiative and could bring a much needed facility and many local jobs to Lairg.

Further details of all projects are available from the Development Officer.

Item 7. Community Council website. MM is liaising with Emma Armstrong in hopes to continue with the previous domain name registration. She is also working with local graphic designer Eilidh Price to build an attractive and informative site which will involve local businesses through links, etc.

Item 8. LCA update. The recent meeting of the board did not have enough members present to conduct business for the centre. A public appeal is made for people to come forward to join as LCA members; without an effective board the centre cannot function. Many interesting projects could be considered with an active and vibrant committee. This will be stressed in the summary in the Northern Times. **MG Action.**

Item 9. CALL update. No update available. Grave concerns were raised that SSE is not communicating with the community and that without proper discussion the pylon transmission line route preferred by the company may be put through by default. This route is strongly opposed by the community running as it does run in close proximity to many residencies in the village and surrounding area. No word has been received regarding the proposed meeting between SSE, MP Paul Monaghan and all interested parties, apparently scheduled for the end of May but with no definite date agreed. GF will try to get an update

from the local MP and Fergus Ewing MSP. The CC will write to the Head of Planning at THC to elicit THC's position. A letter will also be sent to SSE requiring urgent updating with regard to community involvement in the route choice decision. **MG Action.**

Item 10. Lights for Air Ambulance update. This matter is now drawing to a close. The appropriate paperwork is now in place and it is expected that the funding can be released and the invoice paid. This will no longer be an agenda item. **MG Action.**

Item 11. Falls of Shin update. It is understood that the last portion of funding is now in place and that the project is going forward accordingly.

Item 12. Financial report. (MG) Treasurer's Account balance stands at £2699.61; two payments made in the last month: to Lairg Community Centre for room hire for CC meetings, one to Faclan Word Service. The annual payment from Foundation Scotland for administration fees has been received. The Windfarm account stands at £1,039.76 reflecting the outgoing payment of last month's approved micro grant award. The Project account balance is unchanged at £104.73. The accounts are presently with John Forbes for the annual audit and preparation for submission to THC.

Item 13. Planning applications. The regular Planning notifications are now going directly to JN. Nothing relevant this month.

Item 14. Windfarms. All quiet. No decisions expected from Scottish Government until after the election.

Item 15. Correspondence. (1) East Sutherland Deer Management Plan. CC contacts and comments requested. No further comments; contact information will be supplied. **MG**

Action. (2) West Sutherland Deer Management Plan also received but no comments required. (3) Information posters regarding vacancies on the SSE & E.ON Rosehall Windfarm Community Panel circulated to members for display locally. If required an election will be held ahead of the next CC meeting on 1st June at 7.30pm.

Item 16. Any other competent business. (1) **Ward Manager.** Following the retirement of Andy Mackay the CC will consider appropriate action to mark his service to this community.

Agenda item. (2) **Roads.** GF confirmed changes in management structure within the department and also that monies will be devolved to local THCs to prioritise and co-ordinate local works. (3) **Disabled parking.** The question was raised as to when the white line marking of the disabled parking area on Main Street will be carried out. **GF Action.** It was stated that disabled access at the back door of the Community Centre is not a legal requirement but that perhaps ramp access could be considered.

Item 18. Date and time of next meeting. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 1st June 2016 in the Lairg Community Centre. This will be the AGM with the regular meeting to follow. The room is already booked.

Item 19. Lairg Windfarm Ltd – Lairg Community Fund. At private session, a Micro Grant awards were made to Lairg in Bloom for £192 to help purchase compost and to Lairg Gala Week for £200 towards the costs of buoyancy aids for use at the raft race.

Meeting closed at 10.15pm.