



Lairg Community Council

Minutes of meeting held in Lairg Community Centre, Kinvonvie Suite,

Wednesday 4th September 2024, 7pm

Present: Steve Maclean, Chair (SM), Jamie Dick (JD), Robert Johnson (RJ), John Sutherland (JS), Catherine Macdonald (CM), Jacqui Young (JY), Cllr Michael Baird, Highland Council (MB), Richard Gale, SRI (RG), Kaye Hurrion, LDCI Chair (KH), Miranda Jones, Minute Secretary (MJ)
17 members of the public

Apologies: Louise Skinner, Iain Thomson

1. The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting
2. Declarations of interest were received from Catherine Macdonald and Micheal Baird for item 10, Lairg Battery Storage proposal
3. To confirm the minutes of the LCC meeting held on 5th June 2024 - proposed by JD and seconded by RJ
4. Matters arising from previous minutes, none advised
5. Cllr Richard Gale, Community Car. Mr Gale advised that he was not at the meeting as a councillor but as a director of SRI (Sutherland Resilience Initiative). RG explained that community partnership planning surveys across the county had highlighted transport as a barrier of access to services and was a contributor to depopulation. RG had chaired the SCP (Sutherland Community Partnership) and the Transport working group for a number of years as these issues were identified. As a planning partnership the SCP was not legally able to raise funds and proceed with plans to address transport issues. The SRI was set-up by Sutherland's six councillors in order to apply for funding as a community transport group. SCP, the planning partnership for Sutherland, also has working groups for Homes, Poverty, Employability, Well-Being, addressing

transport is a starting point for SRI to help Sutherland residents access services. [Everyone is welcome to attend the quarterly online meetings of Sutherland Community Partnership, where updates are provided from all the working groups.]

Funding was successfully granted for the purchase of 4 electric cars (Corsas) to be given to 4 communities within Sutherland, to provide transport to hospital and health clinics, and access to after school activities for example.

Going forward the aim is for the SRI to become the working arm of the SCP, and a de facto Chamber of Commerce for Sutherland, making sure that Sutherland has representation and is fairly treated when it comes to allocations of housing, employment opportunities etc. The Green Free Port catchment area extends up to Brora but no-one is saying to tech industries to come and invest in Sutherland. Such representation is what SRI aim to achieve.

RG then answered the following questions from the Chair of LDCI

- When was this project started?

Jan 2024

- Who do they think would be running the project?

Local community organisations, development trusts (as in Brora)

- Why were we not contacted at the start so that we could have worked with this group who were running the project in the same way the Far North group were.

There appears to have been miscommunication since the change of email address of the community council. There had been an expectation that community members from the council and development agencies would have been engaging with the SCP.

- Who is to be responsible for the car?

The receiving organisation takes full responsibility, arranges volunteers drivers, and looks after it.

- Who will do the booking system?

The receiving organisation. The SRI can give guidance, Golspie has a working model that can be replicated. Peter Allen more than happy to guide and advise.

- What finance package is in place to run this scheme?

There is no finance package to go with the car. It is a brand new vehicle, fully taxed. The receiving organisation will be responsible for charging. Go Golspie is funded by donations.

- Will it pay for another person to run it? (Our DO only does 22.5 hours a week)

There is no finance package to go with the car.

- Who will charge the car?

The receiving organisation

- Where will the car be kept?

This is for the receiving organisation to decide.

- Who will pay for the maintenance and upkeep?

SRI for 1 year. The car has a 3 year warranty, the battery 7 years

- Who will be driving it?

Anyone over the age of 25 with a full driving licence. Driver needs to be a member of SRI as will organisation. The receiving organisation can seek advice from Christine Ross, VGS. If children are to be transported drivers will need to be safety checked and a child protection policy will need to be in place.

- What happens if the designated driver lets the person down at the last minute??

This is for the receiving organisation to manage

- Who will insure it ? (Special insurance if it is a business??)

SRI pays for the insurance for the 1st year

- Have they talked to the local Taxi firm about displacement of his work?

There will be no displacement - our aim is to enhance services. People going to Raigmore are not going to use a taxi.

- Does the NHS patient transport cover hospital appointments to Lawson/Invergordon?

NO only if unable to walk.

Further issues raised:

SM: Issue getting volunteer drivers, don't they need a special licence?

RG: Nothing extra needed on licence, this is just a car - electric and automatic. The Corsa was chosen because of its range - 230 miles on full (less in winter).

If Lairg don't want the car there are 3 other communities who would like it.

JY: What if there are multiple patients with appointments at Raigmore on the same day, would the driver wait for them?

RG: It is not advisable to take more than 2 people. Transport is booked on a first-come, first-served basis. The receiving organisation will need to manage this. Cars are owned outright and we will give the terms and conditions of ownership.

With regard to the SRI, the 6 councillors who are the current board, want the organisation to be community-led. They are currently arranging an AGM and looking for board members from each of the development trust areas so that all of the county is included. SRI will not just focus on transport, but all the other factors that lead to depopulation. It is looking at building houses, childcare issues, and employment.

SM: Will you be going round groups to tell them this?

RG: Yes, we want a good representative board and a strong independent chair working together for the good of the county, the councillors will stand down when the new board is appointed and will support from outside.

KH: LDCI didn't know about the community car and was taken aback by the article in the Northern Times. We would need to consult with the community before accepting. LDCI itself does not have the capacity to run the car, could look at the KoSDT who could possibly manage the car. This is not a no, we have to make sure this is something the community want and whether we can work with another organisation to make it work.

RG: You need to get involved with the Community Partnership [SCP]. It brings together public sector organisations (it's chaired by the Chief Inspector of Police Scotland in the Highlands) and community groups such as yourselves. Before Covid we had open meetings held in Lairg and Golspie that were well attended. We've been working from Teams now but want to go back to in-person meetings, communicating personally, not through an internet chat. We hope to get back to face to face meetings and I encourage you to get involved.

There are 3 other areas wanting the car - if you are going to consult, I encourage you to do it swiftly.

KoSDT also have their own electric vehicle that they may be willing to offer to the scheme.

JY: I think the car would be well-used if we managed to get it going.

KH advised she had a board meeting the next day where they will discuss the issue, she would speak to David Watson at KoSDT and get back to RG. Her main concern would be finding the drivers.

10) Item 10 was brought forward by the Chair for the benefit of the public in attendance

Lairg Battery Storage Proposal - SM advised that he contacted the developers to see if they will hold a public meeting and was told that one is planned for mid-October. That was the last news he had had from them. He is aware of 4 battery storage plants planned for Lairg and asked the public present if he should contact all 4 to present. Consensus was that all 4 should hold a public consultation. SM asked the people present if they could submit any questions they had to the community council.

ACTION: The community council will contact the developers and SSE and arrange a joint public consultation.

SM was asked will Highland Council planning be there, MB advised it is for the community council to tell the Highland Council what the public think, are they for, against, or neutral.

SM advised that stage 1 would be the developers meeting/public consultation and getting questions answered, stage 2 would be communicating with HC planning department

The council was advised there were members of the public from Brora here tonight who have the same issues and same questions, could there be a joint meeting with Brora residents?

SM: The community council will arrange the public consultation. At the time of the meeting the community council had not had a chance to discuss the matter having not met since June

After discussion of noise, safety, and planning issues, there was general agreement among the members of the public that the location of the site, close to the village, was the main concern.

SM advised that he will get an exact date for the consultation from the developers and submit questions to them. LCC could hold a meeting to compile the list of questions. Will have an update at the next meeting.

ACTION: CC to decide how best to communicate with its residents re submitting questions for the developers, and announcing the date of the public consultation. SM to contact developers.

6) LDCI Report - Kaye Hurrion

Winterfest preparations on track, date Saturday 7th December

Ferrycroft Playpark due to be finished before the childrens' half-term. LDCI board to discuss how to mark the completion, Lairg Primary School keen to be involved in the opening.

Lairg Housing Project, thanks to LCC for including part of the site in the clear-up project carried out over the summer, strimming the banks, now looks really neat and tidy and residents are very happy.

Lunch Club has resumed. After 30 years Doreen has retired and a farewell dinner was held in her honour at the Stag in Golspie. As no-one had yet been found to run the club, Kaye would be running it until a volunteer was found. Currently there are 10 members and 7 helpers.

LDCI has been asked to take over the running of the Friendship Club that ran here until Covid and had 30 members at its height. LDCI happy to do this for them and have worked with OSCR to absorb the club into LDCI.

War Memorial - was entered into the Royal British Legion Best Kept War Memorial for the first time and received a Highly Commended which is really good for a first time effort.

Lairg Magazine is still going really well, circulation has been increased again.

HHF - LDCI continue to support members of the community who are struggling financially.

Lairg Food Larder, LDCI continues to work with the Learning Centre and Little Tykes as well as delivering their own service to those in the community they support.

7) Financial Report

Circulated to all Cllrs in advance of the meeting

Treasurers Account £4837.90

Wind Farm Account £2469.84

All Wind Farm Benefit Grants agreed at the last meeting in June had been paid

8) Highland Councillor's Report

Lots of work being done on area place plans, Lairg does not have a place plan.

MB to chase up the 2 trees in Ferrycroft that were to be removed.

Emails not being received by LCC due to address change

ACTION: MJ to ensure new email address is shared [lairgccc@gmail.com]

The Highland Council offer a Winter Resilience Fund for provision of snow shovels, high-vis, grit and grit bins. Sutherland does not have a good take up of this provision.

[Winter Resilience Community Aid | \(highland.gov.uk\)](http://highland.gov.uk)

MB to chase up replacement grates for the cemetery.

Issues with lack of strimming in the village and potholes being filled with tar planings.

Ferrycroft playpark, the hedge round it needs to remain but be lowered to fence height.

The Struie will be closed for 10 days over winter

9) Review of Lochside Clearance/Parapet

CC agreed the areas cleared by Niall look a lot better and the village more presentable.
. Job is incomplete as yet. To be noted that 2 complaints and 1 concern had been received re the strimming work at the lochside.

ACTION: SM to get a quote from Niall for finishing the job

ACTION: CC to consult with community re work carried out, whether further work is needed and should the work be completed again next year.

11) Correspondence: Letter from Crask Inn re speed of traffic

MB took their letter to the Deputy Chief Exec of the Highland Council and was advised the area in question did not include enough housing and was a single track road so wouldn't meet requirement for speed limit reduction.

ACTION: Community Council to write to the safety officer at the Highland Council supporting the concerns raised in the letter from the Crask Inn.

12) Any other competent business:

Issues raised - the passing place/layby area on Shinness Rd heading to Kinlochbervie, is being used as an overnight camping site

Fines at Shin Falls and overflowing rubbish bins at the camper van end of car park. MB to investigate.

ACTION: Community Council will write to Pure Leisure re bins and fines.

13) Date and Time of Next Meeting – 2nd October 2024, 7pm

Windfarm Community Benefit - Lairg PTA microgrant agreed