

Arisaig and District Community Council – Chairman’s Report 2023-24

Introduction

This year’s annual report is for the period from April 2023-March 2024. The Community Council has had another busy year, with elections in October to appoint new Community Councillors, and work on-going on various projects, most of which are outlined below.

The Community Council

The current Community Councillors are:

Iain Macniven (Chair)
Gerry MacDonald (Vice Chair)
Val Stuart-Orchard (Secretary)
Sheila Kingswood (Treasurer)
Megan Milligan
Hannah Waterston
Arthur Whittaker

Meetings

During the year in question, the Council held the full complement of one AGM and nine ordinary meetings, there being no meetings scheduled in July, August or December in any year.

Summary of the Year

There follows a brief note on many of the key issues which occupied the Council’s time in the year in question. Following Community Council elections, there was a significant change to the Community Council board – with Sheila Kingswood and Val Stuart-Orchard joining as new members. Shortly after the elections, they were joined by Megan Milligan and Arthur Whittaker. The Community Council is very grateful to have had the continuing support of Councillors Liz Saggars and Angus MacDonald. Thanks must go too to outgoing board members – Secretary Susan Carstairs, Treasurer Maureen McColl, Ann Baillie and Morag Keenan.

Burial Ground

The burial ground remains an issue of huge concern. There are no lairs available in Arisaig – and residents are currently having to be buried elsewhere. The land adjacent to the Church originally proposed Bereavement Services at Highland Council is not suitable due to drainage issues. Alternative options are being sought.

Mackintosh Centre

Despite community pressure, the Mackintosh Centre remains closed to both residents and daycare clients – apparently due to a lack of staff. Regular meetings have been held with representatives of the 3 local Community Councils, Friends of the Mackintosh, Kate Forbes’ office and NHS Highland to try to find a way forward. Encouragingly, at the most recent meeting at the end of May, NHS Highland committed to re-opening the Mackintosh for

daycare clients from September – if the next recruitment drive does not provide sufficient staff to re-open as a residential home.

Belford Hospital

There have been monthly meetings to try to push forward with the building of the long-promised new Belford Hospital. With the Scottish Government putting a hold on all new procurement/building until 2025, it seems there is little that can be done. The Community Council has supported the 'Back the Belford Campaign' – and encourages all individuals to do likewise.

Defibrillator

Thanks to Gower Trust funding, the Community Council was able to organise new batteries to keep the three defibrillators in the village functioning.

Bonfire Night/Fireworks

Always a popular community event, the village fireworks and bonfire almost didn't happen last year due to lack of funding. Thanks entirely to huge, last-minute efforts by Megan Milligan, her team of helpers and an anonymous donor, the event went ahead and was a huge success. Plans are already afoot for this year's bonfire night.

Christmas Lights

Over the years, the village Christmas lights have fallen into disrepair but not been replaced. This meant that there were no lights, other than those at Arisaig Hotel this past Christmas. Many people in the village were unhappy about this – and solutions are being worked on. Applications are underway for monies from Highland Council's Discretionary Fund and a donation has been promised by the (now defunct) Agricultural Show. It is likely, however, that there will still be some shortfall in funding and that some form of fund-raising will have to take place if lights are to be back in the village again this year.

Swing Park

The Community Council is keen to upgrade the current Arisaig Swing Park. Funding requirements are likely to be significant – meaning this will be a long rather than short-term project.

Lochaber National Park

There have been very mixed feelings about the advantages and disadvantages of Lochaber being made into a new National Park. Despite this, Lochaber was taken into the next phase of planning for a National Park. This phase should include widespread community consultation – and the Community Council encourages everyone to have their say.

Local Place Plan

Scottish Government is keen that all areas have a Local Place Plan – essentially highlighting the wants/desires of all sections of the community for their area. It is important because Councils will have to take note of community priorities as stated in Place Plans. Pulling together a Local Place Plan is a huge undertaking – and the 3 local Community Councils have

started a working group with a view to creating one Local Place Plan for the whole area as we share many facilities. Whilst it is unlikely that we can meet the September deadline for this round of applications, a draft plan (which would still have influence) may be possible by then. Anyone interested in any sort of involvement in this is encouraged to come forward to any of the local community bodies (with no obligation to commit to anything).

Community Buy-out of Church Of Scotland

A community survey is being held to find views on a possible buy-out of the Church of Scotland, with a view to using it as an events space, place to hold fitness classes etc etc. It is vital if this goes ahead that any new venture does not clash with activities already held in the Astley Hall.

Meetings

The Community Council is keen to work more closely with Arisaig Community Trust and the Mallaig and Morar Community Councils. To this end, we are trying to put regular meetings in place.

Conclusion

As ever, I would like to thank the Council members for their support and commitment to the work of the Council during the year. We also benefit hugely from the support and guidance which we receive from our Ward Manager, Dot Ferguson

Finally, I must thank all members of the local community for their input throughout the year. We are always receptive to new ideas and fresh input. Whilst the current board is in place until the next Community Council elections in October 2027, we do still have space for co-opted members and would encourage anyone interested to get in touch and find out how they could become part of our activities

17 June 2024