

Shieldaig Community Council

Email: ShieldaigCC@gmail.com Website: <https://www.shieldaig.info/communitycouncil>



Chair's Report

Overall

The Community Council had an active year, meeting on 7 occasions including the AGM. Because of the importance of a close working relationship with the Highland Council, we were pleased that Cllr. Chris Birt was able to be with us on 5 occasions.

We started the year by conducting a survey of residents in the community to discover what they wanted the new community council to concentrate on. We had a very good response.

The top priorities which emerged were

1. Tackling the shortage of affordable housing
2. Tackling the poor state of the roads
3. Improving safety on the top road and
4. Addressing the negative impacts of "overtourism"

While progress has been slower than we would have wished, we have made some practical progress (see below) and are continuing to press on other aspects of these priorities. Other problems and issues emerged during the year where we acted in what we saw as the community's best interests.

Specifics

To give specific examples

Housing

Because replacement of the 2 houses which had burnt down in Baile Shuas in 2023 seemed to be taking a long while, we engaged with Albyn Housing. We don't know whether it would have happened anyway, but we were pleased to see work start shortly afterwards and the rebuilding was completed in May. The derelict caravan which has been an eyesore at the entrance to Baile Shuas has also been removed following the CC's complaint. Again, following discussions with Albyn and the Highland Council, we were delighted to be told that a further 4 social and 3 open market houses had been included in the Shieldaig housing plans. However, the go-ahead for Albyn's 4 social houses depends on further work on buildability on the Baile Shuas site and on funding.

Roads and Road safety

Because of the very poor state of the Coast Road, particularly between Kenmore and Fearnmore, the Community Council, with Chris Birt's support, has been pressing the Highland Council to include it within the planned road maintenance programme. While funding has not yet been allocated, we are encouraged to be optimistic!

Despite pressing – and a helpful article in the West Highland Free Press – we have yet to make progress on a timetable for reviewing the 40mph limit on the top road and the need for signage highlighting the risks faced by children and others crossing the road at Baile Shuas.

Visitor Levy

Along with many other West Coast community councils we have made clear that we are not happy with the Highland Council's decision to introduce a visitor levy on local accommodation, certainly in the form proposed. The proposal to calculate this a percentage of the accommodation charge rather than as a flat rate would further increase the administrative burden on small local businesses. And the proposal to apply the levy to motor homes staying at organised sites and not to those overnighing at informal locations would make what is now an unacceptable situation at many informal locations even worse. Given the current financial and other pressures on small local accommodation providers, the Community Council asked for the introduction of the levy to be paused.

Woodland and Related Issues

The pine woods and the wider natural environment around Shieldaig are important to the community and we were pleased to hear of Kinloch Woodlands' and the Woodland Trust's plans for future management. We supported the Woodland Trust's large scale planting scheme in Glen Shieldaig with the qualification that we wanted the ground affected by access tracks restored to its natural state at the conclusion of the works. We were pleased with the more proactive approach to deer management being taken by both estates.

Community Emergency and Resilience Planning

Towards the end of the year the Community Council turned its attention to the question whether what seemed to be an increasing risk of damaging and disruptive emergencies such as power outages, wildfires and flooding suggested that it would be a good idea to review and update the emergency and resilience planning which had been done by its predecessors in the late 1990's. A small sub-group was set up to produce recommendations and it looks likely that the Community Council will decide to go ahead with the review.

Other Actions

The Community Council lobbied the Highland Council for the retention of a mobile library service and was pleased when it was decided to do so.

The Community Council had an interesting presentation from Bakkafrost about their local operations and wider plans. We recognised that fish farming is an important part of the local economy but were concerned that more needed to be done to protect the marine environment and local stocks of wild salmon and sea-trout. Bakkafrost explained some of the significant management actions and investments that were already in hand but accepted that more was needed. The Community Council looks forward to continuing its dialogue with Bakkafrost (and Mowi).

Richar Munday
(Chair)