

Shieldaig Community Council



DRAFT

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 28th November

Attendees: Chris Birt (Highland Councillor), Julia Böger, Hugh Gosling, Ian Livingstone, Richard Munday, Daniel Sharp. Also: Douglas MacLeod (Bakkafrost) and 4 members of the public.

Apologies: Laura Mackenzie

The minutes from the last meeting (10 October) were approved.

Matters arising:

1. The Tourism seminar has been postponed.
2. CB reported that the coast road to Applecross has good sections and bad, and that funds for major maintenance on the worst sections have been approved for the next financial year.

Fish farming

The Community Council thanked Douglas MacLeod, area manager for Bakkafrost, coming to provide an update on activities and plans for Loch Torridon. Fish farming was an important industry, nationally and locally. But it still had some adverse environmental impacts and the community would be looking for continued improvements in tackling them.

An overview of the presentation:

- Bakkafrost employs 14 full-time people in the area
- Production will continue into June 2025 before harvesting then restocking in Q4
- Well boats are now being used to rinse the fish with fresh water (desalinated sea water) to deal with sea lice, which are captured and disposed of.
- A new netting system has been installed to prevent seal predation. No culling or acoustic repellent is now being used.
- Ongoing challenges are around staff and accommodation; recruiting locally has been difficult but the company is considering a range of solutions as there is an expectation that staffing, and therefore accommodation, will increase.
- Bakkafrost operates a community fund open to those within 20 miles. It runs 4 times a year with payments up to £20,000.
- Questioned about emamectin use, he reported that adding to medical feed earlier in the cycle has seen reduced use, compatible with the new maximum limits.

- Questioned about coordinating with MOWI around fallowing and treatment for lice in the loch, he said they try where possible to do so but it is not always possible due to the varying needs of each farm.
- Questioned about mortality rates, he said they vary from farm to farm and year to year; 2023 was a bad year for mortality as sea temperatures were higher whereas temperatures have been lower this year and so has mortality.
- Questioned about amoebic gill disease, he said they had previously treated this with hydrogen peroxide but not for 3-4 years as the fresh water treatment is superior.
- Questioned about the weight of smolts being put into sea water, he said they planned to increase the weight over time; until recently, smolts were put into the sea at c. 80-90g, this has now increased to c. 200g, and the goal for 2025 is more like c. 500g.
- Questioned about smolt production, he said that Bakkafrost were committed to raising all their smolts in contained, land based units. The new Applecross facility would provide all their smolts for the whole of Scotland.
- Questioned about marine escapes, he said this had improved significantly over the years due to superior netting etc.
- Questioned about black feeding pipes washing up on beaches, he urged those seeing these to contact the company for clean up.
- Questioned about light pollution, he said that the boats ran 24/7 during treatments, but they only light areas that need it to protect the safety of their workers. He offered to send out communications to the community about planned activities.
- In conclusion he stated that although the industry has made many improvements, he accepted that there was still more to do and the company was committed to the investment and management to deliver this.

The Community Council thanked DM for a thoughtful and constructive discussion.

Village road safety plan

An incident involving a child being struck by a car brings this issue into sharp focus. The CC has prepared a report that assesses the risks around the village. However, it is recognised that we need support from the Highland Council at this point. CB said that he was trying to arrange input from Lisa Mackellaich, Road Safety Manager, Highland Council. He appreciated the importance of the issue to the community and their preparedness to travel to Inverness for a meeting. JB confirmed that the children, and parents will from now on be encouraged to use the path down to the hall rather than the road.

Financial issues: Nothing to report.

Housing update

Albyn started work to rebuild the 2 houses in Baile Shuas in October as planned. The aim is to complete the work in about 6 months. RM reported that following the positive initial response from Albyn about the proposed additional housing, 'Buildability' work/research would be needed. The aim was still for a further 4 social houses with a total of 7 housing units for Shieldaig in the current Highland investment plan. CB re-emphasised that house building was a priority for the Highland Council, with plans to build 24,000 houses in 10 years, 7,000 of which

would be social housing. They were prepared to use compulsory purchase if necessary. CB reported that Albyn was not named among the group of Housing Associations listed by the HC and he would follow this up. There was a discussion about the legal situation around properties being granted use for short-term lets.

Woodland management issues

The Woodland Trust has confirmed that the Glen Shieldaig access track discussed on 10 October was only temporary and would be reinstated at the end of the work. The CC approved a request for a second temporary ATV track at the south end of Loch Damph, again to be reinstated afterwards. RM reported that deer fencing work at Kinloch is underway. He added that deer numbers within the fenced area of the community woodland have been higher this year, leading to the culling of 24 deer so far (compared to 11 deer in 2023). He warned of a particular need for drivers to be careful in Glen Shieldaig because of the displacement of deer by the current fencing works.

Plan for remote meetings – IT update

DS and Ann Barton reported that Applecross's audiovisual equipment to enable remote attendance at physical CC meetings was extensive and exceeded the Shieldaig CC's needs. He recommended a single device with multiple microphones and a tracking camera (such as an Owl device) and monitor plugged into a laptop. The CC discussed the need for dedicated equipment, with its cost weighed against expected use. It was agreed that the Community Council would investigate the purchase of a dedicated laptop in the first instance to see whether this would meet its needs. ACTION DS with HG and RM

Any other business:

1. A consultation into the **Visitor Levy for Highland** is underway and will run from 15 November 2024 to 7 February 2025. Responses have been requested from community groups. Information and access links to the consultation can be found here: https://www.highland.gov.uk/info/1457/tourism_and_visitor_attractions/1142/visitor_levy. Paper copies of the consultation documents may be obtained by leaving a message with name and address on the Visitor Levy Consultation Support Line (01349 781020).
2. **Highland Local Transport Strategy 2025-35:** RM stated that this was an important document. It has been reviewed by the Community Car Scheme, which will provide feedback as part of the consultation. This will highlight the need to ensure that the plans meet the needs of remote rural communities like Shieldaig which is a significant weakness at the moment. The proposals can be accessed here: https://www.highland.gov.uk/news/article/16311/transport_in_highland_-_a_chance_to_share_your_views. This consultation ends on Tuesday 3 December 2024. To request a printed copy, call 07909 277604.
3. **Draft Area Place Plan:** Comments/feedback should be submitted to the Ward 5 (Wester Ross, Strathpeffer and Lochalsh) Area Place Plan (APP) until 29 November 2024. Comments can be provided here: <https://engagehighland.co.uk/wester-ross-strathpeffer-and-lochalsh-place-plan>

Date of next meeting: Thursday 6 February, 7pm.