

Shieldaig Community Council



DRAFT

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 10 October 2024 in the Shieldaig Hall

Present Community councilors - Jim Alexander, Ian Livingstone, Richard Munday, Daniel Sharp, Julia Boger, Laura Mackenzie and one member of the public – Kalie Wilkinson.
Highland Councilor – Chris Birt

Apologies Hugh Gosling,

Minutes of the AGM held on 19 September 2024 - approved and signed

Matters arising – SSEN Community Benefit fund : Julia reported that a meeting would be held in 3 week's time between the School and the Parents' Council to consider possible bids.

Discussion with Mowi and Bakka Frost about their operations in Loch Torridon. It was agreed that an early meeting with both companies could be helpful to develop a better understanding of their plans and current issues. Daniel will approach them about the possibility of attending the next Community Council meeting in November.

SCOTO Press Pause workshop. The material SCOTO had provided suggested a balanced approach to tourism issues which the Community Council welcomed, particularly given the responses about tourism in the recent community survey. However given the very important role of the Tigh An Eilean hotel, which was currently on the market, it was felt that the workshop should be deferred until the new owners could be involved. Daniel will inform SCOTO.

Financial issues – Jim reported that the Highland Council grant of £422 had been received and the current balance in the account was £5415. It was agreed the only justification for holding significant funds like these was if the Community Council had worthwhile and practical proposals for using them. The decision to use them to enable the Community Council to make arrangements for blended meeting – a combination of in person and remote participants - is recorded under any other business.

Follow up action on community priorities –

- a. **Housing** – Kirsty Campbell (Albyn Housing Society) had just confirmed the excellent news that work to rebuild the 2 houses which had been burnt down at Baile Shuas would begin on 21 October. There were also positive prospects for a further phase of 4 units of Albyn housing at Baile Shuas although further work was needed on buildability and costs before a final decision could be taken. Boyd Alexander (Highland Council) had confirmed that there was sufficient information from the housing lists to avoid having to carry out a full housing needs assessment. The agreed Shieldaig demand, based on 1st choices, was for six single person units and one 3 bedroom house or bungalow. The Community Council warmly welcomed this news given the acute shortage of

affordable housing in Shieldaig. Chris commented that the Highland Council were aiming for a build of 9-10,000 units of new social housing over the next 10 years with west coast communities one of the priority areas.

- b. **Road Maintenance** – the Community Council underlined the urgent need for major maintenance on the coast road to Applecross particularly the section between Fearnmore and the Shieldaig junction. Temporary repairs to pot holes didn't last. With the weight restrictions on the Bealach, this was the only route to Applecross for HGVs and the road took a pounding. It hadn't recovered from the lorries involved in the construction of the new hydro scheme at Callakille 2 years ago. Chris said that the need for more spending on roads maintenance was fully accepted by the Highland Council. The roads budget had been tripled from £7m pa to £21m pa. He knew the stretch of road in question and understood the risks to those on bikes and motorcycles as well as to those in cars. He would take away the comments from the meeting and see what could be done.
- c. **Road safety plan for the village** – Richard promised to send Chris the final version of the Community Council's road safety plan [now done]. This highlighted the serious risks to families with young children with the increase in traffic in and through the village due in large part to the North Coast 500. Chris thought that a key person to help with this in the Highland Council might be Lisa MacKelliach who was the lead on the 20mph programme. He would contact her about the possibility of her coming to a Community Council meeting or discussing the issues with one or two community councillors in Inverness.

Update on Highland Council Plans-

- a. **Local place plans** – Chris said that it was now accepted that the earlier deadline for communities to submit local place plans was unrealistically tight and this had been extended to February 2025. The Community Council felt that with the action they had taken to highlight the proposed location for social housing and the safer route to school in the area place plan, they would stick with their decision not to attempt to prepare a local place plan in this cycle.
- b. **Visitor Levy** – There was a wide-ranging discussion about the Highland Councils plans to introduce a visitor levy in 2026, including how the levy would be calculated, what it would be used for, and how the scheme would be applied to motor homes. Chris said that a visitor levy was now common in many countries on the continent and that training would be available for all businesses which would be affected. The Community Council said that it had no strong views about the principle of a tourist levy but it did have serious concerns about the possible impact of the scheme on small local businesses and the risk that it might displace motor homes from organized camp sites to informal overnight parking locations. They were particularly disappointed that there had been no consultation with community councils about the likely local impact of the scheme before final decisions were taken on the details.

Woodland Management Issues –

- a. **Kinloch Woodlands** – Richard reported that all the materials for upgrading the outer fence had now been helicoptered onto the hill and the work was programmed for November. This combined with the new fence which the Woodland Trust were building round their phase 2 planting scheme should prevent deer getting into the immature woodland areas from the open hill. The Kinloch Woodlands AGM would be held in the Hall on Saturday 26 October and all were welcome.
- b. **Woodland Trust** – Malcolm Turner was thanked for the update he had provided for the meeting. It was clear that the Woodland Trust was making a serious effort to manage their deer population which would be a real benefit to the village. However, the impact of deer browsing in the woodlands was still too high and the aim over the next few years would be to try to reduce numbers further to

reach a more sustainable level, with lower browsing impacts and more natural regeneration. The Community Council was pleased to note the Woodland Trust's awareness of local sensitivities about the potential impact of access improvements. But given the discussion at the previous meeting it was very concerned to learn that planning permission might not now be needed for a new access track in Glen Shieldaig. It will pursue this with Malcolm. [action Richard]

Planning Issues – Daniel reported that the Community Council now had access to the official Highland Council planning portal. Details would be passed to Laura so she could check for local planning applications.

Any other business – Chris said that it would be very helpful if the Community Council could set up facilities to enable remote access to meetings. He recognised the local preference for in person meetings but because of the long travel distances involved, it would be much more convenient for Highland Council staff in particular if there was an option to join the discussion on a particular topic by zoom. The Community Council agreed and Daniel offered to check and report back on what equipment would be required. Kalie Wilkinson said she would find out how Applecross had organized their remote meetings. Richard commented on the very efficient service recently provided by the Highland Council's bulky uplift service. This was important as part of the effort to minimize "fly tipping".

Date of next meeting – Thursday 21 November at 7.00pm.