

Shieldaig Community Council



DRAFT

Minutes of the meeting held on Thursday 11 April 2024 in the Shieldaig Hall

Present Community councillors - Jim Alexander, Hugh Gosling, Ian Livingstone, Laura Mackenzie, Richard Munday, Daniel Sharp.
Highland councillor – Christopher Birt
Woodland Trust – Malcolm Turner.
Members of the community – Ann Barton, Roger Hodgson

Apologies Julia Boger

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 February 2024 - approved and signed

Matters arising -

- a. West Ross Mobile Public Library. Julia was thanked for her work completing the questionnaire about the importance of the service to the Shieldaig area. Chris reiterated his strong support for the service; said that no final decisions had yet been taken about its future and that a meeting was planned between Highlife Highland and the Highland Council in May to decide what should be done in the light of current funding constraints.
- b. Mobile Phone Masts. The potential developer was still considering possible sites which might be more beneficial to the community than the original proposal at Loch Lundie. Once options were clearer a site visit would be arranged to which Jim would be invited. Richard said that it would be sensible to consider possibilities on Kinloch Woodlands ground as well as on the Woodland Trust's.
- c. Payment of the Highland Council community council grant. Chris had followed this up from the previous meeting but his e-mail had gone astray. He explained that as the Community Council had been operating for about 6 months in the 2023/24 financial year, it should be eligible for half of the annual grant. This was normally paid after the AGM and the approval of the statement of accounts. The full annual grant should be payable for 2024/25.

Financial Report – Jim reported that the £10,000 grant from SSE for resilience work had now been transferred to the Community Association account; £5,000 for use by the Community Association and £5,000 for use by the Primary School Parent Council. The current balance in the Community Council account was £5028.

Community Association and Parent Council Issues – None had been raised. But it was good to know that the Hall was being well used and to hear of the plans for further development of the all-weather sports court.

Consultation about community priorities – Hugh was thanked for preparing an excellent questionnaire. A number of small amendments were agreed – including under environment, a reference to climate change, highlighting the importance of anonymity in the responses, and making clear that the questionnaire was primarily intended for local residents. Paper copies of the questionnaire would be circulated to local households and an on-line version would be prepared as well. Further thought would be given to how best to collect the completed paper questionnaires. Once all the results were in and collated a drop in session would be arranged in the Hall. It was agreed that it was important to get the questionnaires out quickly before the peak holiday season and to get an early feel for the community's views about priorities to enable an informed input to the discussions about the Area Place Plan (below).

Area Place Plan – There was discussion about the material received from Louise Pearson (Wester Ross Biosphere) about the preparation of an area place plan for the Highland Council Ward 5. Because Shieldaig had been without a community council for some time, it was behind with its local planning work, which made proper engagement with Louise on the Area Plan even more important. And the timetable for consultation was tight. It was therefore agreed that Daniel should make early contact with Louise to discuss when and how the Community Council and the wider Shieldaig community could best make their inputs into the preparation of the plan. The list of priority issues suggested for the area plan seemed sensible but it would be important to check them against the results from the Shieldaig survey.

Community Council IT plans etc - Daniel reported on his helpful discussions with Ann Barton about how the Community Council could use the existing facilities on the Shieldaig community web-site and the Community Association social media page to get information about its activities out to a wider audience in the local community. It was agreed that using these existing facilities, in close cooperation with the Community Association, was the most practical way forward for the Community Council, certainly in the immediate future, rather than attempting to develop its own web-site etc. Implementation would be immediate.

There was a brief discussion about equipping the Community Council to conduct future meeting in blended form with both in person and remote attendance. It was agreed that the technical requirements needed further thought and a decision was deferred.

Woodland Trust Presentation – Malcolm Turner was welcomed to the meeting to give a presentation on the Woodland Trust's ongoing work and plans. The 2 papers submitted in advance of the meeting are attached as annexes to the minutes. A number of issues were highlighted during discussion.

Anecdotally, community councillors felt that deer numbers had increased significantly in the Wester Ross area over the last 2-3 years. They warmly welcomed the good work which Del Ross, the Woodland Trust stalker and wildlife manager, was doing to get a grip on the situation in the more local area.

They also welcomed the Woodland Trust's phase1 fencing and planting programme. There were mixed views about the major new access road. But there was little point in further discussion as the work was almost complete and the new access to the west shore of Loch Damph would almost certainly be appreciated by local and visiting walkers.

Phase 2 of the fencing and planting programme in Glen Shieldaig was also welcomed and because of its location would probably have a greater – and beneficial – local impact than phase 1. the 2 proposed cattle grids in the glen

were far better than the alternative of deer fencing closer to the road. However, the proposal for a car park at Loch Dughail raised more difficult issues. A car park for use by the Woodland Trust or by the wider public during the day for access to walking trails on Ben Shieldaig would probably be fine. But a car park which could be used at night for roadside “wild camping” or by motor homes was not. Over the years, and particularly with the growth of traffic on the NC 500, Shieldaig had experienced too many problems with unregulated roadside camping – wild toileting, littering, campfires and portable BBQs (which could so easily have caused devastating wild fires). There were also significant risks to the environment and endangered wildlife species on Loch Dughail which while not on Woodland Trust ground was only a few metres away. The Woodland Trust were encouraged to rethink their proposals for this development. Best endeavors to discourage overnight camping would not be good enough.

Any Other Business - a. because of the growing problem with road potholes, Ian offered to prepare a monthly log of those potholes which in his view presented a serious safety risk and forward this to Daniel for onward transmission to the Roads Dept.

b. Laura offered to carry out a weekly check on the Highland Council website for any planning applications in the Community Council area. She would forward the results and her comments to Ian who would consider which applications needed to be seen by all community councillors. Both offers were accepted with thanks.

c. Roger Hodgson raised the issue of sheep worrying by dogs in the village and mentioned a particularly upsetting incident which he had seen. The Community Council agreed that this was an issue to be taken seriously but felt that it was one better taken forward by the crofters themselves in conjunction with the Police.

Date of next meeting – The AGM : Thursday 6 June at 7.00 pm in the Shieldaig Hall.