**Notes of the Ward Five Joint Community Council meeting**

**held on Thursday 17 May 2018 in Lochcarron Village Hall**

**Community Council members present:** Kenny Maclean, Jennifer Haslam & Bob Moir (Garve & District CC), Helen Murchison BEM, Roger Cundiff & Quentin Banting (Lochcarron CC), Anne Macrae & Andrew Peacock (Torridon & Kinlochewe CC), Claire Munday & Kalie Wilkinson (Shieldaig CC), Ken Thomson (Gairloch CC), Topher Dawson (Lochbroom CC) and James Mackay & Monica Mackay (Marybank, Scatwell & Strathconon CC).

**Also present:** Robbie Bain (Ward Manager), PC Craig Allan, Cllr Derek Macleod, Cllr Kate Stephen & Cllr Isabelle Campbell. Cllr Dr Ian Cockburn also attended and would report back any issues to Ian Blackford MP. Cllr Kirsteen Currie attended and would report back any issues to Gail Ross MSP.

**Apologies:** Ian Blackford MP,Gail Ross MSP, Norma Ross & Pam Courcha (Contin CC), Annie Hingston (Marybank, Scatwell & Strathconon CC), Fay Mackenzie (Dornie & District CC), Amy Macdonald (Wester Lochewe CC), Tim Sowood & Adrienne Sowood (Lochalsh CC) and Ann Macleod (Coigach CC).

Kenny Maclean once again chaired the Joint Community Council meeting hosted by The Highland Council and opened the meeting at 7.00pm. He explained a representative from The Highland Council’s Roads Department and representatives from HIE had been invited but had not sent a representative or apologies.

Has NC500, ferry traffic to Uig and the winter weather highlighted that the road network is no longer fit for purpose? How would road improvements be funded under current budget constraints? This topic was of great concern to those present. The Highland Council has overspent its winter maintenance budget by around £2.6million. Nearly £1million is coming from the Scottish Government to help fix potholes but it appears some at The Highland Council feel that money is needed to pay for the existing overspend. Cllr’s Currie and Cockburn both confirmed that discussions on this point are ongoing between The Highland Council and the Scottish Government. If the “new” money from the Scottish Government has to be spent on potholes, other savings will need to be found to balance the books. Cllr Macleod noted that 51% of Highland Council roads are in Ross & Cromarty but we only get 30% budget allocation. Cllr Stephen confirmed that there are discussions within The Highland Council that mean the formula for budget allocation may change resulting in LESS money for road maintenance in the future. Cllr Macleod wants to see accurate recording of current traffic volumes first before decisions are made. Cllr Campbell noted the roads in Skye & Lochalsh are just as bad. She has spoken to Rhoda Grant MSP who in turn has raised the issue with the Scottish Government. It’s not just the roads that need additional funding in the Ward, Cllr Macleod noted that 10/20 primary schools are “CC” meaning that they are in a bad state of repair. Wasn’t Ross & Cromarty meant to be getting its own area committee so funding decisions could be made at a more local level? Discussions are on the back burner for now. Shouldn’t surplus road funds from previous years not have been put to one side for a “rainy day” - seems they weren’t. PC Allan confirmed that Police Scotland have changed the criteria for attending accidents caused by potholes. The Police will now only attend if there has been an injury or if street furniture has been damaged. The lack of spare tyres in hire cars was noted as was the standard of driving by some on single track roads. Perhaps campervan drivers should be made to sit a test before they hit the road, especially reversing! Ward five is very tourist dependant so facilities should be more readily available such as toilets, litterbins and being able to empty chemical toilets. It is estimated that £180million would be needed to fix all the roads in the Highlands. It was noted there has been work done on the road between Gairloch and Kinlochewe in recent days which was welcomed. Press reports suggest roadmen are facing abuse from road users. A Councillor present was aware of verbal reports that this has happened in this Ward. Everyone agreed such behaviour is not acceptable. There appears to be two roadmen based in Achiltibuie, three in Ullapool, seven in Gairloch, nine in Lochcarron and one in Applecross. An estimated 30% decline in the population over the next 10-20 years will mean less tax paid. Do second homes pay council tax? If simply a second home, people pay 90% of the council tax. If it is a business, they are eligible for small business bonus scheme (rates relief) and this can be up to 100%. Perhaps this needs to change? Cllr Campbell noted that in Dornie, the toilets may close as the cost of running them is too much, even allowing for the Highland Council’s comfort scheme. The mess around some “closed” toilet buildings was noted. Parking also appears to be an issue at times. It was suggested that The Highland Council should publicise the “Highland Comfort Scheme” more so businesses know that funding is available from The Highland Council for businesses to open their toilets to the public. <https://highland.gov.uk/directory/60/highland_comfort_scheme> The Highland Council don’t have to provide public toilets, it’s a non-statutory requirement, perhaps it should be? Perhaps charges for facilities already available need to be considered again? There have been applications to the Rural Infrastructure Fund but this is for capital projects, not day to day running costs. Cllr Campbell noted that local leadership is required to keep facilities going. The Highland Council are again looking at introducing a tourism tax as a source of income. There was general agreement that road improvements are essential and funding will need to be found.

A 10-minute recess was then called so those in attendance could get more refreshments and get to know one another better. Cllr Campbell left the meeting and was thanked for attending.

At 8.10pm the meeting resumed and consideration was then given to faster Broadband. The “Reaching 100% Broadband programme” is a commitment to deliver 100% superfast broadband coverage across Scotland by 2021. Any home or business that won't have superfast broadband delivered commercially – or through programs such as DSSB or CBS – will be eligible for investment through the R100 programme. Following a presentation by HIE to the 2016 Joint Community Council meeting, Kenny asked how things were in the communities represented at this meeting. Highland Community Broadband in Lochbroom works via radio and speeds can be up to 25mbps. BT is not the only option when it comes to Broadband but HIE appear reluctant to look at other options/technologies. Applenet in Applecross is weather dependent but is better than BT though access to the new fibre optic cable would be welcome. Applecross coast road residents are still waiting to hear when they will benefit from the fibre optic cable which has been laid from the Shieldaig – Applecross coast road junction to the MOD establishment at Sands. Green cabinets have appeared in Garve and Kinlochewe but distance from these cabinets is a factor. There appears to be a reasonable service in Gairloch and Lochcarron though Cllr Macleod noted it is chaotic at times having the infrastructure installed! Marybank gets a reasonable service, but Scatwell & Strathconon get a very poor service. It would appear that broadband speeds are, in general, getter faster but 2021 is a few years off yet. We hope the timetable doesn’t slip as has happened before.

AOB – concern was raised at the new gritting routes between Garve and Lochcarron. The gritter doesn’t leave any earlier but has twice the distance to cover. What if the lorry runs out of grit before it reaches Lochcarron? Drivers no longer have a say how much grit goes down or where. Cllr Macleod confirmed that there are discussions to use the quarry at Achnasheen as a “top up” location. This would also benefit the Gairloch – Achnasheen gritter. It was also noted that the gritter from Gairloch was unable to get along the Diabaig road and as such the village was cut off for a week earlier this year. This lead onto community winter resilience and whether The Highland Council would provide funding and training for volunteers. This issue was raised with William Gilfillan when he visited Lochcarron. With training, protective clothing, insurance and risk assessments required, why bother? More support from The Highland Council, who wish “us” to take on these jobs would be appreciated. Cllr Macleod noted there are supposed to be ten mini tractors to clear snow off pavements, he knows where one is, where are the other nine?

The Highland Council has cut Community Council budgets by around 50% yet we are expected to continue fulfilling our statutory roles in planning and licencing matters. We are volunteers and people should not be discouraged from being on the Community Council. What happened to “Localism”? Councillor’s present pointed out that cuts were made in many areas and more cuts may have to come.

The Community Council’s working relationship with the Highland Council - some present felt Community Councils had become “talking shops” and “laughable” in their communities as they appear never to get things done. The lack of responses from Highland Council officials has made being a Community Council member pointless at times. Some present felt the lack of responses had got worse over the last 12months, killing any enthusiasm a volunteer might have had left. Torridon & Kinlochewe CC have been waiting for replies for two years! Issues that need raising with the Highland Council can be raised directly by calling the Highland Council’s Call Centre on 01349 886606, by visiting a Service Point or via [www.highland.gov.uk/report](http://www.highland.gov.uk/report) The Highland Council also appreciate photos showing the actual problem. In all cases, you will be given a reference number. The reference number then gives the Ward Manager and the Councillor’s something to chase if issues aren’t resolved. Community Councils could also email a Ward Councillor for updates. It was noted that Garve & District CC note all issues they have reported at the end of their minutes with dates and reference numbers. Some Community Council’s present might follow suit.

Can Community Council’s co-opt - yes, there are limits (no more than 1/3 total membership can be co-opted) and they could become office bearers if necessary although they can’t vote for other co-opted members to fill vacancies. Vacancies should be minuted and be on the next agenda. Associate members are also possible. It was suggested using noticeboards, websites and newsletters to advertise vacancies should be encouraged where possible.

Do Councillor’s and the Ward Manager have to attend Community Council meetings – no but they are welcome to do so.

Cllr Kate Stephen left the meeting at 8.45pm and was thanked for attending.

The sign at the bottom of the Bealach Na Ba says “Not suitable for caravans” – how can this be enforced? There was general agreement that you don’t want to stop tourists but campervans are getting bigger and longer. There were no Applecross community councillors present to provide an Applecross community opinion on this issue. Councillor’s will discuss this matter, perhaps with the legal department.

A Community Council emailed regarding the proposed new Scottish Government “Community Local Place Plan”. Those present weren’t sure what was being asked of them so the Ward Manager will make enquiries directly with the Community Council concerned.

Can you see what issues have already been reported via The Highland Council website – no, it’s not map based. Data protection of those reporting the faults may also be an issue.

Playpark equipment removed – dangerous or faulty equipment will be removed by The Highland Council without warning. Inspections are carried out each year and if a piece of equipment is considered unsafe it is removed. Playparks have a very small budget and Douglas Miles who manages these only works two days a week. It was noted that several officials at The Highland Council only work two or three days a week so it may take some time for a Community Council to receive a reply to an email.

Kenny asked if sharing Community Council minutes was something that helped Community Councils and whether it was something they all still wished to do? It was agreed that it was helpful and should continue.

Can we get local police reports at all Community Council meetings – ask your local police officer to attend or email you an update. There is also a rural watch website.

Public Toilets – there was general agreement that the way the proposed closure of toilets had been handled by The Highland Council was appalling. Local groups would need to employ a cleaner, supply toilet rolls etc … Community Councils are not advised to hold assets so a separate body would need setting up. Advice from other communities who have set themselves up would be appreciated. Cllr Macleod was determined that Kinlochewe toilets would remain open after 31 August 2018.

Dates for the 2019 Joint Community Council meeting of May and September have been suggested. Kenny will contact Community Councils nearer the time.

Kenny closed the meeting at 9.30pm by thanking everyone for taking the time to attend, especially those who had travelled some distance. Thanks to Robbie Bain, Ward Manager and The Highland Council for hosting the meeting and to Lochcarron Village Hall. A vote of thanks was proposed to the Ward Manager for all his help to Community Councils, especially as he has two other Wards and to Kenny for once again chairing these meetings.