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

**held on Wednesday 24th April 2019 in Lochcarron Village Hall**

**Community Council members present:** Kenny Maclean, Jennifer Haslam, Sadie-Michaela Harris, Bob Moir (Garve & District CC), Helen Murchison, Aileen Grant, Alec Cormack, Quentin Banting (Lochcarron CC), Anne Macrae, Andrew Peacock (Torridon & Kinlochewe CC), Claire Munday, Kalie Wilkinson (Shieldaig CC), Ken Thomson (Gairloch CC), Topher Dawson, George Farlow (Lochbroom CC), Isabel Grant, Christine Mackintosh (Marybank, Scatwell & Strathconon CC), Audrey Sinclair (Kyle CC), Janice Nixon, Fay Mackenzie (Dornie & District CC).

**Also present:** Robbie Bain (Ward Manager), Cllr Derek Macleod, Cllr Alex MacInnes (was welcomed as new Highland Councillor for Ward 5), Cllr Biz Campbell, Cllr Ian Cockburn (reports back to Ian Blackford MP and Gail Ross MSP), Kristine Mackenzie (Lochcarron Community Development Company), Garry Smith & Carolyn Smith (HC), Rory Dutton (Development Trusts Association Scotland), Jim Holden (HC, housing), Natasha Hutchison (Wester Ross Biosphere) and one member of the public.

**Apologies:** Ian Blackford MP,Gail Ross MSP, PC Craig Allan, Contin CC, Wester Lochewe CC, Coigach CC.

Kenny Maclean once again chaired the Joint Community Council meeting hosted by The Highland Council and opened the meeting at 6.30pm.

**Development Trusts Association Scotland:**

Rory Dutton, Advisor for Community Ownership Support Service. Tel: 07825 250 950 or rory@dtascot.org.uk Rory spoke on

-community asset transfer: when a community requests a public body to transfer an asset. There is a presumption of “right to buy” unless public body gives a good reason not to transfer the asset.

-community right to buy for abandoned or derelict land/ building

-community right to buy to further sustainable development

-compulsory sale purchase.

Any community wanting to know more on any of the above contact Rory. He explained the key to successful community development projects is to accept that it is a lengthy process and to be clear what your objectives are. Demonstrate a community need. Don’t set up formal organisations too quickly. Make sure you have a team with a breadth of skills able to network locally. Consider alternative ways of doing it if funding is not forthcoming. Expenses may be incurred for surveys, valuations before being able to apply for funding. Rory may be able to help with issues like this and other concerns by pointing your group in the right direction e.g. Scottish Land Fund.

**Stromeferry Bypass update:** Garry Smith, from HC Development & Infrastructure, explained remedial work was taking place in 2 sections which will require full night time (10pm-7am) closure of the bypass from 9th September for 8 weeks. There will be ongoing traffic management during the day in the form of a convoy of 1 ½ kilometres. This time the closure will be independent of any rail diversion. There is one full weekend closure proposed on 21/22 September which includes closure to emergency services.

In 2020 further funds have been allocated by HC for the installation of catch fences.

A cross party working group has been set up (9 elected members) to look at longer term preferred solutions. Since A890 is a local road, any upgrade is the responsibility of HC and not Transport Scotland.

**Housing allocation policy:** Jim Holden, HC’s North Housing manager.

How do HC allocate houses?

There is a Highland Housing Register with approximately 8,000 individual applicants currently on it, which is reviewed every year. The Register is shared with all Housing Associations. Within Ward 5 there are 800 “socia-rented” houses available, of which less than 10% become available annually. There is a Highland housing development programme to build 600-650 new homes each year till 2021 with £40m from the Scottish Government. It’s not clear what happens after 2021. This year there are 30-40 new houses in Ward 5.

There is a Highland Housing Register Allocation Policy (2016 and currently being reviewed) which sets out how housing officers allocate houses using a points system. People who apply to be registered for housing are informed how many points they have. If anyone has concerns about their application there is an appeal policy. It was acknowledged that being a housing officer is a very difficult job.

There were many questions from community councillors on this topic.

-Can HC Housing department “downsize” tenants if the number of residents in the house reduces? No, but tenants will be assisted to transfer to more appropriate properties if they ask.

-Some CCs feel recent allocations are not fair to those with local connections and asked about local involvement in the allocation of Housing. Jim explained that the process needs to be fair and officers take care to follow policy procedures. There are some constraints they work within due to Scottish Government directives e.g. priority to homelessness.

-In the Allocation Policy there is reference to special local lettings initiatives. There is concern that there are unmet housing needs for school leavers and single people. If younger people are unable to find housing they are forced to leave communities that want them to stay. Jim highlighted the importance of completing a HHR application form to optimise the chances of being offered housing in a particular area.

Jim explained that HC funds its housing services from rent paid by all is tenants (c14,000). The largest portion of costs is servicing the loan debt accrued from building new houses. Once rents are received, HC salaries need to be paid and repairs carried out to keep the housing stock fit for long term use.

HC Housing work well with the Highland Housing Associations. The Housing Association rents are slightly higher. All Housing providers try to pitch their rents at a sustainable level for tenancy, so people are less likely to go into arrears.

There is a shortage of land available for house building.

If Community Councils want to be involved in the review of the Housing Allocation policy please contact your local Highland Councillor.

**Wester Ross Biosphere update:**

Audrey Sinclair introduced the project. Then their co-ordinator, Natasha Hutchison brought us up to date with their 5-year Strategic Plan 2018-2023 and distributed a brochure. Biospheres are about the interaction between people, nature and development. They referred to their collaboration with Laura Hamlet in SHAPE (Sustainable Heritage Areas: Partnerships for Ecotourism). There is a concern about addressing the needs of youth to ensure they want to stay in the area. CC & Development Trusts have a role in getting involved in WRB business plan.

AGM on 11th May in Plockton from 12.30-2.30 “Business in the Biosphere”.

When asked if WRB had a policy on windfarms or commented on planning issues, it became clear that the Board members may hold different views and they don’t see themselves as a lobby group.

**2019 Community Council elections:**

Robbie Bain explained that all CCs will be holding elections in November 2019 under the new revised scheme. HC will advertise the election on their website. The call for nominations will begin around mid-September and close in October. Robbie asked that nominations be sent in before the closing date in order to give him time to process them. CC need to try and engage young people in CC matters and encourage them to nominate themselves. Anyone over 16 is eligible.

**Community Council Scheme Review 2018-19:**

There is currently a review of the scheme underway by The Highland Council. Community Councils and members of the public have the opportunity to comment and submit representations on the draft proposals. The draft proposals include formalising youth membership, a maximum of four co-opted members (currently one third of total membership), members who move out with the area stay on the Community Council until the next interim/full election (currently they are no longer members as soon as they leave the area) and reviewing core funding arrangements. [https://www.surveymonkey.co.uk/r/CCReview1819](https://emea01.safelinks.protection.outlook.com/?url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.surveymonkey.co.uk%2Fr%2FCCReview1819&data=01%7C01%7CAlison.Clark%40highland.gov.uk%7C768530abcbf84d17b1b408d69e5c79bd%7C89f0b56e6d164fe89dba176fa940f7c9%7C0&sdata=LShsAL%2FImWH9T2vjmjMOxKjKfB9nz%2FNWIEeD5qmLJ1U%3D&reserved=0). The consultation will run until Friday 31 May 2019.

Robbie asked all CCs in Ward 5 to remember to send him copies of CC minutes. To qualify for HC grant Robbie needs to satisfy himself that CCs have met at least 6 times during the year and held an AGM. It was also agreed that CC’s should also send their minutes to Kenny who can then forward onto all other Ward 5 CC’s. This helps keep all CC’s in the loop.

**AOB:**

**Broadband.** There is concern that, although HIE have said that R100 will be 100% by 2021, there are some black spots which will never be connected to fibreoptic cables. There is doubt whether BT will serve the remote parts of our Ward. There was a discussion that a wireless connection is the only way forward using mobile phone coverage.

Kalie spoke about the fragility of Applenet for the Applecross/ Shieldaig coast road residents. The internet coverage is not reliable and there is no mobile phone reception.

Small businesses loose out financially if they are unable to connect their card machines to the internet e.g. Glenelg ferry, as people are increasingly travelling without cash.

**Fish Farms.** Shieldaig CC reported on their struggle to find support from the public regulatory bodies when challenging a potential fish farm expansion by Scottish Salmon Company in Loch Torridon. SSC are applying for a new site beside their existing site at Aird, Ardheslaig. Shieldaig community wish to object to this expansion as they contend SSC has not done enough to mitigate environmental risks to the loch or to demonstrate significantly improved mortality rates.

**Roads.** This subject is one that affects all our communities and is a topic that CCs are lobbied by residents continuously. It was suggested that the road conditions are at a tipping point with any investment by HC being just a drop in the ocean. Cllr’s Biz Campbell & Alex MacInnes spoke strongly on this subject and it was suggested that CCs should write to their local MSP requesting more money for local roads as current funding is not enough.

**Infrastructure Commission of Scotland.** The Infrastructure Commission of Scotland is currently calling for written contributions on Scotland’s future infrastructure priorities.  These contributions will inform the Commission’s initial evidence gathering and analysis, with further opportunities for engagement planned in the coming months. Deadline for submission of evidence is Friday 3 May 2019. More details at <https://infrastructurecommission.scot/page/call-for-evidence>

**Defibrillators.** Could any CC that has a defibrillator make sure that is registered with the Scottish Ambulance Service. <https://pad.scottishambulance.com>

Special thanks were given to Robbie Bain for all the work he does for us, community councillors, and is always there when we have a query. Also to Kenny Maclean for arranging these Joint CC meetings and for his enthusiasm and commitment.

A date for the 2020 Joint Community Council meeting will be discussed nearer the time.

Kenny closed the meeting at 9.15pm by thanking everyone for taking the time to attend, especially those who had travelled some distance and to Claire Munday for taking notes of the meeting.