**Minutes Dornie & District Community Council 24.02.25**

1.Present: Karen Baker (until 8.15pm), Matt Baron, Campbell Dreghorn, Shona MacLennan (Chair), Fiona Matheson (Treasurer), Janice Nixon (Vice Chair),

Apologies: Linda Brooks, Alison Jack (Secretary)

In attendance : Cllr Biz Campbell

2.Declaration of interests: Shona MacLennan and Matt Baron notified an interest in Item 6 Visitor Levy Consultation

3.Previous Minutes approved FM proposed, JN seconded

4.Matters pertaining to the last minutes:

* + 1. Update from Dornie & District Community Trust - Dornie Shop is making good progress. Insulation has been installed. Next work is electrical fix and installation of the treatment plant. Connection from Scottish Water to mains water supply is organised. Open Day planned, possibly for mid-March. Funding of £60k is still required to complete works. Specification and pricing is underway for kitchen equipment which will comprise new appliances and second-hand steel tables etc.
    2. Dornie Moorings Association Ltd: AGM was held on 3rd February and public meeting on 6th February in Dornie Hall. A range of feedback, positive and constructive was received. Information from the meeting has now been uploaded to the website. A Q&A document will be provided with aim to publish on website by end March.
    3. Graham House – no update
    4. Energy Group : LB had circulated a link to the Energy event by email.
    5. Tidy up project : to be restarted in the spring/summer

1. Police Update : Apologies were received from the police for this meeting. The CC has kept them informed on problems relating to human waste at the slipway and castle viewpoint.
2. Roads Update : AJ had replied to Roads Officer that CC aims to gather information about status of Brookside ‘pavement’ through our traffic survey. Potholes and steps on Francis Street require urgent treatment; road east of repair at Bundalloch looks as though it is damaged; stones have fallen from the wall which hold up the road at Lagg (between the two laybys) – SML to inform Roads Officer.
3. AJ has emailed Chair of Hall committee with a letter of support and the application form for car parking monies.

5. Financial Report:

**Balance**

Brought forward                                                                   £2,301.81

**Income:**

                                                £0.00

**Outgoings:**

Spanglefish (website) £70.00

A Jack (traffic survey printing) £35.00

£105.00

**Balance:**

Carried forward                                                                   £2,188.81

Less £508.07 held for Energy Group                      £1,680.74

One outstanding invoice for the CC insurance via Zurich. AP: Cllr Campbell would clarify with HC whether this insurance including public liability for any premises owned by the CC.

6. Visitor Levy – Highland Council Consultation

This item was to discuss the controversial proposal from Highland Council to introduce a visitor levy at 5% of accommodation charges across the Highland Council area. David Bevan had previously offered to provide information on this and while unfortunately, he was unable to attend, his wife Lisa did so.

FM had tried to register for the HC online session run for community councils but the registration had not worked.

Principal points of information from Ms Bevan were:

- not against a visitor levy in principle

- concerns about the way in which this levy is proposed, particularly as it is not a flat rate and the impact will be felt by residents of the area, who will be considered visitors if they stay in accommodation elsewhere in the Highland Council area.

- it will affect those staying away from home for eg medical appointments, training, work or other essential activities which will increase costs for public sector, commercial and 3rd sector organisations and individuals.

- while disabled people will be able to reclaim the tax; this is not straightforward for either the individual or the business and effectively penalises disabled people. It is not clear that an Equalities Impact Assessment has been carried out

- the levy as proposed is chargeable on the accommodation only. For those who provide accommodation and meals or other facilities, such as parking, there will be significant impact on them in having to explain what the tax is, why it is different to another region where the visitor stayed, or even within the region if a B&B provider has calculated the cost of accommodation differently to elsewhere. As well as the administrative burden, it could also create hostile and aggressive behaviour from visitors who feel unfairly penalised by this tax; children and young people taking part in sports and cultural events which require an overnight stay elsewhere in the region;

- the levy will also be considered as part of a business turnover which may move the business above the VAT registration threshold. This could have two impacts – one that the small business decides to close; or that it reduces its offering so as to remain below the VAT threshold. The Skye & Lochalsh Levy impact survey shows that 48% of local businesses will consider closing as a result of financial administrative challenges arising from the levy.

- if VAT registered, the business will have to charge VAT on the levy. This will make tourist accommodation in the Highlands amongst the most expensively taxed in Europe at 26%. Most other European countries have a lower level of VAT on accommodation.

- the levy will not be applicable to motorhomes unless they stay in a campsite. This will encourage more motorhomes to park up on the roadside, something already a problem in this area. Thus the levy will encourage more irresponsible tourism.

- % charge rather than flat rate. The legislation for the levy states that if applied, the levy must be on a % basis. It would be far simpler to administer and much easier to understand if it was a flat rate such as is being proposed in Wales.

- lack of confidence in the systems for compliance. It is the accommodation provider’s responsibility to ensure that the levy is correctly applied and collected. However, the experience of delays in processing in the Short Term Let implementation and the national Horizon Post Office scandal has reduced public confidence in such systems.

Further discussion included the shortcomings of the survey, such as it’s statement that there is no island impact assessment from the proposal. However for island and rural communities in the region, the additional travel requirement is very real, whether it’s children and young people participating in sporting and cultural events where they have to stay overnight due to distances involved in getting to Inverness; or accessing services which are centralised in the city.

It seems that 3rd party booking agents, such as AirBnB and Booking.com, have stated that they will not collect the levy and it will then be for the accommodation provider to tell the guest that they are due to pay an additional amount and to extract that from the guest when the guest has already paid via the 3rd party booking agent.

Another impact is that if there are fewer accommodation providers; and they are charging higher prices due to the levy, there will be fewer visitors which will impact on all the other businesses that provide services to visitors and residents, such as pubs, shops, galleries, tour operators etc.

At strategic level it was suggested that the councils should respond to Scottish Government and ask them to amend the legislation which was introduced prior to COVID, Brexit and the war in Ukraine, all of which have negatively affected the economy.

AP: Cllr Campbell said that she would ask the CEO of Highland Council whether the CC could submit a letter as a response, rather than completing the survey which had limited options for expressing contrary views. [Information was received post-meeting that this would be acceptable and that any such response would be included in the responses to the survey.]

AP: SML to draft a response and circulate to the CC. Responses have to be submitted to HC by 31 March 2025.

7. Traffic Management Survey

The survey which had been carried out online and by circulation of paper copies for 3 weeks ending 12 February had received 86 responses. There was a further drop-in session held in Dornie Hall on 19th February, attended by about 25 people.

It was agreed that all the responses would be available on the CC website.

As a means of taking the results forward, it was agreed to prioritise work on certain actions

* + In conjunction with Eilean Donan Castle, aim for Transport Scotland to introduce a 40mph speed limit on the A87 – 80% of respondents agreed this should happen
  + the introduction of a speed limit on the Lagg/Bundalloch road (Highland Council responsibility) – 90% of respondents agreed this should happen.
  + further analysis of the detailed comments to identify further actions, likely to be double yellow lines on entrance to Dornie and entrance to east side of Francis St. (Highland Council responsibility).

Other actions identified would be identified through further analysis of the detailed responses. It was noted that many of these would be taken forward in partnership with other groups in the area. SML to send all response files to MB for summarising using AI by his colleague.

8. “Press Pause” community-led tourism workshop

This had been held in Dornie Hall on 19th February, facilitated by Scottish Community Tourism (SCOTO) organisation and 17 people had attended, including members of the CC, the Dornie & District Community Trust, Dornie & District Village Hall, Eilean Donan Castle, Dornie Hotel and various local businesses. A report would be produced by SCOTO which would be shared with the CC when received.

One immediate output from the workshop was the possibility of a grant of up to £2k from North Highland Initiative and Wester Ross Biosphere and the group had agreed to take forward an information map for visitors. The CC agreed that it would be the applicant for the grant on behalf of the group.

9. Any other competent business

* 1. AJ had contacted the farm manager (Ardintoul/Duich) from MOWI to advise that a CC member would try to attend a community engagement event on the 26th February. However, no information was forthcoming about the event.
  2. SML action outstanding on information for residents about public bodies and statutory and advisory functions.
  3. MB ordered signage to try to reduce instances of human and dog waste and had put signs up in various locations. AJ continued to follow up with Environmental Health
  4. Office of Kate Forbes MSP had responded with SEPA’s response on sewage pollution. It was agreed to look at the response in more detail to see what further action could be taken.
  5. Community council review 2024/25. SML said the closing date for this was 9th April and that it would be on the agenda for a future meeting. Also that Dornie & District CC was not affected by boundary changes.
  6. AJ had written to HC Burial Ground services to request new graveside covers.

7. Questions or contributions from the public present: None present

8. Date of next meeting: 31 March 2025

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