

3.2 There were brief comments/updates on three subjects:

- Common Good - Cllr Green said that the four Nairn Councillors were aiming to adopt a more collegiate and inclusive approach. Ward Business meetings would now take up a full day: the next meeting would be on Wed 6 July. He was committed to setting up a local CG advisory group.
- Local Place Planning. Cllr Green was a supporter of LPP, and he noted that Malcolm Macleod (HC Development and Infrastructure Director) had expressed willingness to work together to make progress with this. He noted that Fort William already had its FW2040 plan, which had been supported by Highland Council with funding from the Council and the Crown Estate. Cllr Jarvie spoke enthusiastically about including all the diverse community groups in Nairn, such as the BID and the Access Panel, in the preparation of a Local Place Plan.
- Delnies site-sale. The Councillors would seek an explanation from officials of the basis on which a part of the site was being offered for sale with planning consent for 300 houses, with no apparent linkage to the original application and the consent which linked the housing to the delivery of a range of other amenities and recreational facilities on the site.
- Vaccination arrangements – JN felt that the latest correspondence from NHS Highland this week (not circulated) gave some reason to hope that a review and change of policy might be considered.

3.3 In the more general discussion which followed, PS noted the low public attendance at CC meetings and suggested that the CCs should “proactively invite all local groups” to the monthly meetings. It was pointed out that local residents had always been willing to turn out to express their concerns, objections, or opposition to specific proposals (parking, housing development plans, etc). Their reluctance to attend regular CC meetings was perhaps a reflection of the recognition that CCs had no executive or decision-making powers and no control of resources, so any input into CC meetings would make little difference. The framework which brought together Councillors, HC officials, CCs and other local groups for regular formal meetings – the Ward Forum – had been unilaterally abandoned by Highland Council some years ago. Cllr Green felt that a collective effort to put together a Local Place Plan was the key.

4. Financial report

4.1 In the absence of the Treasurer, and following the report given at the AGM, the Chair reported that there had been no transactions on the account in the past month. The current balance remained at £2219.16. Now that a new Treasurer had been elected and once the procedures for change of account signatories had been completed, the recent invoices and outstanding payments would be dealt with.

5. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan

5.1 JN outlined the main points in the comments submitted on behalf of NW&SCC during the IMFLDP consultation process. A copy had been posted on the NW&SCC website. She highlighted in particular the need to deliver infrastructure, the importance of protecting local industry and

business, and the need to resist unrealistic proposals for large-scale housing. Because of difficulties with the online portal the comments had been sent to an HC official (Chisholm) but would not be visible on the HC IMFLDP website for some time.

5.2 ML noted that many of the visionary policies mentioned in the proposed IMFLDP (eg on green objectives) had not actually been prepared yet. HB added the observation – from recent contacts with Moray Council – that there was already serious concern in Moray about the extent to which the infrastructure deficiencies in Nairn were having a detrimental effect on the businesses and economy of Moray. The impact of traffic congestion and problems of the A96 were a particular concern. More development in Nairn without considerable improvements in the main routes and access networks would make the problem worse.

5.3 GS pointed out the apparent contradiction between the desire for a community-driven Local Place Plan and the Council's determination to push ahead with the IMFLDP. How could the two different approaches be reconciled? In discussion the change of government planning policy and guidance to a locally-driven model, based on the approach set out in national Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) was explained. That change would happen in the next few months and the IMFLDP could then become redundant or irrelevant. If however the IMFLDP in its present format was adopted and approved by the Council, it would acquire the force of law and would determine development over the next 5-10 years. This would make the drafting of an LPP almost pointless. Cllr Jarvie again urged the participation of local groups in the process: the community should lead.

5.4 The Chair in summing up said that this was not an either/or choice. There was general support for a change to locally-driven planning reflecting local priorities, rather than the existing IMFLDP approach which was largely a zoning exercise for developers and landowners. But meanwhile some of the specific and detailed proposals in the current draft IMFLDP posed a real and immediate threat to established local industries. There was a real need for all who represented Nairn's interests to register strong opposition to plans which would adversely affect local enterprise. Speaking personally, he highlighted the Nairn East site as an example where he had recommended that the comments submitted by NW&SCC should have been much more robust. JN disagreed, arguing that other members of NW&SCC had all endorsed the existing text. ***No decision was made on further action.***

6. Planning for new Academy (and possible Library relocation)

6.1 AH said that the exhibition event at the Academy on 15 June had been woefully short on detail and profoundly unsatisfactory: while the home-baking had been impressive, the information-display had been very disappointing.

6.2 This evidently reflected the general view also expressed at the River CC meeting. The lack of useful and detailed information and the simplistic and largely irrelevant displays (including Lego-type bricks) were disappointing. Everyone was convinced of the need for a new school and had sympathy for the staff and pupils: it had been known for decades that the existing building was not fit for purpose. But this highlighted the lack of sensible long-term strategic planning. There was no evidence of an appraisal process, little information on the design-specification or capacity forecasts, and no sign of any exploration of alternative options. There appeared to be no acknowledgement of the lessons to be learned from elsewhere (capacity issues in Croy/Tornagrain and Culloden, design and structural problems in Wick). There was considerable anxiety among nearby residents – who felt that they had not been informed or consulted at the stage when proposals were being drawn up.

6.3 Cllr Jarvie believed that the Council was aware of the issues around the new school in Wick. She was concerned that the delays over the new Tain Academy (build due to begin Easter 2022) would have a knock-on effect on the plans for Nairn and elsewhere. She also felt that the exhibition at the Academy should have included a 3D model and hoped that the next such public presentation would include this.

6.4 In summing up the Chair observed that the present proposal was very obviously being driven by short-term factors: the understandable desire to get out of the present defective building, and a desperate rush to secure government funding against a very tight deadline. The new plan was being presented as a “take it or leave it option”. While it was desirable to do it quick, it was also important to do it right.

6.5 In a separate but related comment later, ML drew attention to the petition against the removal of the library from the town centre, which had attracted 1547 signatures. While relocation of the library into the new Academy had been mentioned publicly as an element in the new school planning the HC official at the event (Campbell) had taken the view that this was not a matter for him, although the Council would take note of any public views submitted. The petition organiser had then attempted to deliver the petition to the Ward Manager who had declined to accept it. Subsequent advice was that there was an official procedure for submission of petitions, which was outlined on the Council website. It was also noted that HLH had not yet published the outcome of the brief consultation which they had conducted.

Action: It was agreed that the CC should – in the minutes – commend the petition organiser [Pam Bochel] for her initiative on the future of the Library, and express support for the campaign.

7. Parking Scheme

7.1 JN noted that there had been a series of exchanges of correspondence over many months with HC officials about this scheme. She listed the numerous concerns which had not been adequately addressed: the lack of a legal basis for the HC management arrangements for Cumming Street and the Maggot, the misleading signage, the safety issues with overnight motorhome parking at the harbour, the appropriation (“top-slicing”) of revenue from CG assets into HC general budgets, the recent extension of the scheme with a requirement for permits at the harbour, and the Council decision to cease maintenance in lieu of rent and to charge those costs to the CG Fund.

Action: It was agreed after discussion that while the further draft letter [to Alison Clark] prepared by JN should be sent, this was a matter on which local Councillors, could, and would, engage with the aim of reviewing and revising the present arrangements. JN would copy the letter and previous correspondence and supporting information to local Councillors for consideration at a Ward Business Meeting.

8. Public Toilets

8.1 Now that the summer visitor season was well under way there had been significant criticism of the inadequacy of public toilet facilities. It gave a poor impression to be extracting money for parking while failing to provide good, basic, essential facilities. Elsewhere in the region the Council had successfully sourced funding for improving and maintaining public conveniences.

8.2 Cllr Fraser noted that a survey was due to be carried out to assess the scope for restitution of the Harbour Street toilets (which were on Common Good land). Once that had been done various options could be looked at – including possibilities such as a single unisex loo. JN wondered whether that was enough: it was not good if people had to queue. PS asked if there was a timetable for decisions and action. Cllr Green felt the priority was to get the Harbour Street toilet reopened soon, and then to examine the longer term strategy in the wider context of a harbour improvement plan.

Action: it was recognised that further action was for the Council and the Area Committee.

9. BID public art initiative

9.1 The Chair drew attention to the email (sent to the CCs and others and copied to all members) from the BID seeking comments on their project to install a painted mural on a Leopold Street building wall. A more recent message from the BID had explained that the project would be delayed as the building concerned was in the process of changing ownership.

9.2 Members had discussed the subject informally prior to the meeting. Some had responded already on a personal basis. Others felt was inappropriate for the CC to express views on the project-planning, the aesthetics of the mural, or the location. Cllr Green supported the suggestion (made in separate comments to the BID) that it might be good to base the mural on some theme which had local cultural or historical relevance.

Action: It was agreed that NW&SCC should simply express support for all efforts to brighten up the town.

10. A96 Bypass

10.1 Since the previous monthly meeting, the Transport Minister had visited Nairn. She had repeated Government assurances of commitment, but offered no firm progress on funding or delivery. She had deflected local pressure by referring to the Scottish Government's imminent budget review. That review had however said nothing about bypass funding or delivery and had in fact emphasised that there was insufficient funding for the projects currently proposed. The message was therefore very discouraging.

10.2 Cllr Green, who had chaired the meeting with the Minister, concurred. There was an absence of specifics. When it came to infrastructure there were aspirations, but no delivery.

10.3 PS commented that the A96 bypass had been under discussion in Nairn for more than 30 years. It needed to be at the top of every local agenda. But if it was unlikely to be delivered, there had to be a 'Plan B': what would Nairn do if there was no bypass?

10.4 This prompted considerable discussion. It was noted that with inflation and supply-chain issues, construction costs were now spiralling rapidly upwards as projects were delayed. JN recalled the STAG appraisal which had identified the Nairn (and Elgin and Keith) bypasses as priorities, with a deadline of 2019. Perhaps local residents should start demonstrating and lie down in the road? BS in the Chair noted that a specific proposal for a 'Plan B' had been put directly to the Minister, at her request, by River CC colleagues with advice from local businesses. It outlined a simpler, scaled-down non-dualled carriageway on the same bypass route but at considerably lower

cost in recognition of the government's budgetary constraints. Regrettably however the official response had been an absolute rejection of any such alternative proposal. Cllr Green commented that this fitted the pattern: the Government's approach was to "extend and pretend".

10.5 In conclusion the Chair also highlighted the linkage between the bypass planning and the proposals in the IMFLDP. Much of the development plan was predicated on the delivery of the bypass as a crucial element in the infrastructure which would support the expansion of the town. If the bypass was not delivered, this called into question the credibility and feasibility of the development plan. In simple terms, no bypass, no development. This would be a difficult message for Councillors to deliver. But in the absence of a 'Plan B', and without a bypass, that would have to be the approach.

Action: It was agreed that the CCs (and others) should maintain the public pressure for early bypass delivery; but that as this seemed increasingly unlikely, serious thought should be given to a 'Plan B' strategy on what the town should do if there was to be no bypass.

11. Dialogue with other Highland CCs

11.1 JN outlined again the reaction from other CCs – reported at the 30 May meeting – to her email about the Council's policy on allocation of Developer Contributions (DCs) to HighLife Highland projects and activities, often to communities and locations away from the developments concerned, and without any local consultation. The overall reaction from other CCs had been deep disquiet and in some cases "outrage". She had subsequently written to the HC Development and Infrastructure Director (Malcolm MacLeod), and had received a reply (not circulated) agreeing that the issue "needed to be looked into".

11.2 Separately HB confirmed that River CC had held two joint meetings by Zoom with other Highland CCs. The main discussion topics had been Common Good management and (especially with Wick) the parking scheme proposals. These meetings had revealed that some other communities were relatively unaware of the issues around Common Good and appreciated the expertise offered by Nairn colleagues. It was clear that (with the possible exception of Dornoch, whose local decision-making arrangements were unusual) the communities around Highland and also in Inverness who had Common Good assets shared the same concerns about CG management.

11.3 Cllr Green thought it would be useful to have a Highland-wide meeting of CCs to discuss subjects of mutual interest and agree joint positions. HB added that the contacts with Caithness had revealed that local communities there had successfully set up an Association of Caithness Community Councils, which met regularly to consider joint action. The Council CEO (Donna Manson) had commended this arrangement. The contrast with the situation in Nairn was remarkable: similar efforts in past years to coordinate, hold joint meetings, and set up a Nairnshire CC area group had been actively opposed by the then Ward Manager on the grounds that there was no provision for such arrangements in the Scheme of Establishment.

Action: there was general consensus that it was desirable to look again at how a local CC network (perhaps of the southern Inner Moray Firth area) might be established.

12. Questions from the public/Comments from Councillors

12.1 There were none.

13. AOCB

13.1 HighLife Highland fees and charges. JN had requested further discussion of this item. She reminded the meeting of the issues outlined in previous meetings: the fact that HLH was being paid twice for management of the Links splashpad, both by the Council under the 2011 service contract and also by separate direct invoicing of charges to the Common Good Fund. HLH management of the seven other recreational facilities on CG land elsewhere in Highland was all paid for under the service contract. The Nairn Links recreational facilities were the only CG facilities in the region where charges were also debited to the CG Fund.

13.2 The issue had been raised in a series of letters since December 2021. JN felt that the explanations in the most recent response – from the Deputy CEO Kate Lackie dated 23 May – to had been inconsistent and evasive: it was variously argued that the splashpad was “*not a statutory leisure facility*”, that “*under long-established past practice Nairn CG had always been charged directly..*”, and that the inclusion of the Nairn amenities in the service contract had been “*an anomaly and a mistake*” which would be corrected.

13.4 In answer to a question from Cllr Jarvie it was explained that the contract with HLH also included management of the leisure park/crazy golf. There was little further discussion and no decision on a response to Ms Lackie’s letter.

Action: The Nairn Area Committee will in due course be asked to authorise payments from the CG Fund to HighLife Highland. For review and consideration by the new Councillors, and discussion at a future meeting?

14. Next meeting

14.1 Traditionally NW&SCC had not met during the summer months of July and August. Prior to the meeting, Alastair Noble as Chair had raised the possibility of holding a meeting in the last week of July. In a brief discussion, several members argued for a meeting in late August rather than late July. The availability and holiday absences of CC members were a factor to consider. It was left that the date of the next regular meeting would be discussed further by email.