

## NAIRN WEST & SUBURBAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL

**Joint meeting with Nairn River Community Council: 7.00pm, Monday 23 January 2023  
at Nairn Community & Arts Centre**

*[NOTE: the initial obligatory ‘housekeeping and admin’ items of each CC were briefly considered in separate sessions at the start of the meeting, and are recorded in separate minutes]*

### **DRAFT Minutes of Joint Meeting**

#### **1. Process and Procedure: how to collaborate**

1.1 **GS**, speaking as a “new and optimistic” member, highlighted the willingness of everyone to work for the good of the town. CC members were ready to share their extensive knowledge in support of the elected Councillors. He pointed out that CC discussion was open, transparent and public. This should be a two-way process. There should be similar transparency and dialogue in relation to Council meetings. He called for an end to closed Ward Business Meetings (WBM), for the CCs to have the opportunity to offer input to local decision making, and for more meaningful access to WBM records and minutes.

1.2 On the subject of greater openness, **Cllr Jarvie** noted that the decision [to keep WBMs closed and not publish the minutes] had been made by the previous Council and could not be revisited for 6 months. It was pointed out that the 6 months had long since elapsed. **Cllr Oldham** confirmed that he had agreed to propose a change but had deferred action because of the Council’s preoccupation with budget issues. **Cllr Green** said he had no objection to greater transparency and to the publication of WBM minutes: Councillors had nothing to hide.

1.3 This prompted **Bill Spark** (River CC member) to draw to Councillors’ attention his concerns that Council resources were being diverted away from Nairn, and that priority was being given to Inverness. He quoted the example of the Council’s unsatisfactory maintenance of an individual local Council tenant’s house, where repairs had not been carried out despite repeated requests. He felt that local Councillors were not fighting hard enough for Nairn. Eventually it was agreed that the details of the case would be passed to **Cllr Green** who gave assurances that he would look into it.

1.4 On the request for access to WBM minutes and papers, it was pointed out that the key issue was local community engagement *before* decisions were made. This required prior access to reports and documents: it was not enough to circulate minutes after the event simply stating that a discussion had taken place and a decision had been made.

1.5 **AN in the Chair** concluded that there was widespread agreement that we should all work together.

## 2. Local Place Planning (LPP): methodology and timing

2.1 **AN** emphasised that the LPP should be community-led. He welcomed the assurance of funding. NICE was the appropriate ‘community controlled body’ under the legislation to take the lead, with CC support. The delivery deadline was January 2024. The LPP had to reflect the NPF4 guidance. Priorities included jobs, fair shares of resources, and a green sustainable Nairnshire.

2.2 **AN** also drew attention to the relationship between the LPP and the current consideration of the proposed IMFLDP2. He recalled the outcome of the last Area Committee meeting which had agreed to amend the IMFLDP2 proposals to make development at Nairn East conditional on delivery of the A96 bypass. Quoting an official email<sup>1</sup>, he welcomed the subsequent confirmation given to Councillors and the Grigorhill businesses that supplementary material could be submitted for consideration as part of the IMFLDP2 examination process, and that the Council position was to “*support employment uses*” at this site.

2.3 On the preparations for the LPP, **Cllr Green** said that HC officials (Dalgarno) were looking at appointing suitable consultants with relevant experience. This led to detailed exchanges about whether the Council or the community would make the decisions on appointments, funding and resources. **Cllr Green** he could not advise or commit: such questions would have to be put to Dalgarno.

2.4 **AN** urged that an early meeting be organised with Dalgarno and other relevant participants, ideally in March or earlier. He said that work was already in hand on the data around population, housing, etc. **Cllr Green** echoed the call for early action – perhaps in February: “*everyone including HIE, the NNCPP, NICE, the CCs and other groups would be involved*”. **Cllr Jarvie** hoped that the widest possible range of local groups and organisations would be included.

2.5 **BS** suggested that a practical way forward would be to set up an small LPP steering group led by local community representatives with no more than half a dozen members (to include for example participants from NICE, HC planners, the CCs, and local Councillors) to plan and organise the work. **Cllr Green** said this, too, was a matter to put to Dalgarno, and he could not comment further. There was a pattern already followed elsewhere (eg Skye and Fort William).

2.6 **HB** sought explicit confirmation that all four Councillors were committed to supporting the production of an LPP. The Councillors appeared to indicate that this was not in question. **GS** called for NICE to be more visible and to expand its membership. **AN** said this was happening.

**Action: meeting to be arranged in March [who by? who invited? - tbc]**

---

1 “... I note that the Committee decision for NA05/06 offered support for employment uses in this location. This goes some way to align the Council’s position for Examination with that put forward by some of the businesses and community groups. .... As you will be aware, following the Committee’s decision, the Examination will allow the representations made to the plan to be fully and independently tested. In addition, local groups are perfectly entitled to submit their more recent masterplan to the Council requesting that this be treated as supplementary material to the grounds of objection already made through representations to the Proposed Plan. Indeed, this more recent material might inform or prompt a discussion on Nairn East boundaries and land uses through the Examination process.” [Malcolm MacLeod email, 23 Dec 2022]

### 3. Cromarty Firth Freeport: implications for Nairn

3.1 **BS** referred to the recent announcement. This was significant for the region and had prompted a lot of optimistic public comment. For Nairn, it presented great opportunities. But it also presented significant threats and challenges. There was a need to think hard about the implications (good and bad). NW&SCC had prepared, and would circulate and publish, a discussion paper to encourage debate.

3.2 Recalling the recent £300 million City-Region Deal, from which Nairn had derived virtually no benefit, **Cllr Green** agreed that the town could not be allowed to miss out again. He had spoken to senior HC officials (MacLeod). Everyone was on a steep learning curve. He asked for a copy of the NW&SCC paper.

3.3 **JN** asked about the possible inclusion of the Port of Ardersier. **Cllr Oldham** understood that it was not part of the freeport consortium, so might not be a beneficiary of the freeport incentives and concessions. **JN** was surprised that Aberdeen and Glasgow had not been chosen. But the choice had been made.

3.4 **AN as Chair** concluded that Nairn did not want to be left out.

**Action:** (i) **BS** to circulate the discussion paper, and (ii) **GS** to post on the website and social media.

### 4. Common Good Management: the way forward

4.1 **JN** recalled the long campaign – since 2012 – for a local group to be set up to engage in the management of Nairn’s CG. The establishment of a “pilot” was welcome, and other communities with CG around the Highlands would welcome similar arrangements. But so far there had been no dialogue or local input into the formation of this group or its mandate. With the aim of being proactive, she set out a list of suggested parameters:

- the group should engage in decision-making, not simply review decisions after they had already been made;
- the group should be small and effective;
- its members should all be from within the burgh of Nairn;
- the committee should be led by community representatives, with HC officials providing support and advice;
- those who sought to benefit from CG funds or decisions should not be involved in consideration of their bids or interests;
- all meetings of the group should be open to the public and fully minuted.

4.2 In response **Cllr Green** said “*nothing was fixed*”. There would be a consultative workshop in March, which would include CC representatives and others. There was no discussion of who would be included or invited. The next Nairnshire Area Committee was in May. But **Cllr Green** reiterated that decisions on CG matters would remain the responsibility of the trustees, although the local group would have an influence.

4.3 **Cllr Jarvie** again stressed the importance of the widest possible inclusion of local groups in the proposed workshop. She was also firmly of the view that the group title should be “engagement” rather than “management”.

4.4 **BS** noted that the CG was for the benefit of the burgh of Nairn. He expressed concern that the Nairn CG seemed to be regarded as a way to fill holes in Council budgets, supplement or replace Council spending, underwrite the costs of employing Council staff, or pick up the tab for Council neglect. **Cllr Fraser** interrupted to complain that this was “*just rhetoric*”: **BS** undertook to pass on to Cllr Fraser the detailed evidence to substantiate his comments.

4.5 Recalling the request for a local engagement group, **BS** pointed out examples of other Councils (eg Borders, Fife) which had had CG subcommittees in place for many years: it was not difficult or complicated, and should be done quickly. Meanwhile he proposed a moratorium on asset disposals and decisions on expenditure of CG funds until the local group was established and could consider and provide input. This was flatly rejected by **Cllr Green** and his colleagues.

4.6 Public Engagement with the Nairnshire Area Committee. Picking up on the wider point about local engagement, and linked also to Item 2 (collaboration) **Loreine Thomson**, attending as a member of the public, noted that attendance by local residents at the Nairnshire Area Committee was discouraged and the webcast only available days later. She requested that arrangements be made for documents and reports for the Nairnshire Area Committee to be made available in time for public comments to be submitted and considered at the NAC meeting itself.

4.7 This was not welcomed by the Councillors, who saw difficulties both of timing (there was a debate about whether papers could be circulated more than 3 days and up to 10 days in advance) and of procedure (the NAC would not accept additional papers or submissions from the public or local groups). After some discussion Councillors agreed to consider the idea that the public and local community groups might table questions for the NAC to answer, on the model already adopted at full Council meetings. **Cllr Green** said this might make NAC discussions more meaningful. **AN** saw this as a way of working together, and said this would only be possible if people did not get pedantic about procedural rules and regulations.

**Action:** (i) *BS to provide further detailed information to Cllr Fraser on CG spending decisions.*  
(ii) *Workshop to consider the proposals for a local group to be organised [by whom?] in March.*  
(iii) *Cllr Green to look into the possibility of questions being submitted to the NAC.*

## 5. AOCB

5.1 **War Memorial Lights.** The British Legion had formally written asking NW&SCC to intervene with the Council to get a solution to their long-running request (outstanding for more than a year) for the war memorial lights to be repaired. Repeated contact with the Council had brought no progress. The comment was made that it should not take a year to fix a light bulb. **Cllr Fraser** said that there was a long backlog of work and a new fitting was needed. **Cllr Green** intervened to say that as Councillors they would look into and ‘escalate’ this matter.

**Action:** *Cllr Green to follow up with Council maintenance staff and respond to Lt Col Towns.*

5.2 **Riverside Path.** **KR** expressed appreciation to Council staff for responding at short notice at the New Year to a request to clear a fallen tree from the Riverside path to enable the “Turkey Trot” to go ahead.

5.3 **Local grant-funding.** **Cllr Green** drew attention to the decisions earlier in the day to award £28k to the Access Panel and £57k to Team Hamish for local projects.

5.4 **Local Place Planning.** As follow-up to Item 2, **HB** drew attention to a statement by the Nairn East Residents Group that they fully supported the proposals to prepare an LPP.

5.5 **Single Community Council.** Noting that this was a joint CC meeting, **Cllr Green** revived the suggestion that the Nairn CCs should merge into a single CC for the town, to avoid duplication and speak with a single voice. This prompted recollections of the earlier campaign. **HB** was not enthusiastic, on the grounds that the two CCs had differing views and priorities and currently cooperated well on town-wide issues. **JN** was concerned that a single CC would qualify for a smaller funding grant. **AN** wondered if a 13-member single CC would find the capacity to deal with the workload. No consensus was reached and no action proposed.

## **6. Next meeting(s)**

6.1 Nairn River CC would hold their regular monthly meeting on Wed 22 February, and Nairn West & Suburban CC on Mon 27 February.

6.2 There would be another joint CC meeting on 20 March. All meetings start at 7.00 pm.