

NETHY BRIDGE & VICINITY COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 5 SEPTEMBER 2019

Present: S McCook (Chairman), D Carrott (Treasurer), J Grant (Secretary), E Ibbertson, D Black, A Young

In Attendance: Cllr B Lobban, John Kirk CNPA, Chris Donald SNH, Uwe Stoneman RSPB, Representatives from Morgan Sindall and SSE, several members of the public

Apologies: None

Welcome: S McCook welcomed everyone to the meeting.

Minutes of Previous Meeting: Approved: E Ibbertson, Seconded: A Young

MATTERS ARISING

Hospital New Build: Still no further communication from NHS Highland

Christmas Lights: Nothing further from previous meeting.

Members of The Public

Castle Roy Trust: Stuart Black circulated a letter from the Trust asking the CC for a letter of support to help towards their applications for further funding.

There is to be an open day on 21/22 September for people to see progress made thus far and will include a morning of traditional music, teas and coffees.

Visitors can walk around the castle, there is a picnic area, a signposted viewpoint area and wild flowers have been sown.

Historic Environment Scotland have offered the Trust £97000 towards the sum needed to finish the castle, leaving them with a final £50000 to find. Secretary to email letter of support to the chairman of the Trust.

Abernethy Old Kirk Association: Stuart Black also took the opportunity to update us on plans for the new toilet facility at the Old Kirk. Directors had taken on board our comments and suggestions from his last visit and plan to extend the interior wall of the new room to ceiling height.

It has been decided to have a soakaway and septic tank on Castle Roy land with pipe work running under council land, hidden by what will be a future pathway.

Chris Donald Operations Manager SNH

At a previous CC meeting a member of the public had expressed concern re what he felt was mis-management of deer culling on land in the local area and asked the CC to investigate. The Chairman and Secretary met with Chris Donald and asked that he conduct an investigation. Mr Donald has since met with RSPB and was asked to address the meeting with his findings.

Mr Donald stated that a specific part of the role of RSPB is deer management. The Scottish Government's Deer (Scotland) Act 1996 is the policy that RSPB must adhere to and states what RSPB *must* do, what is *best practice* and what *could* be done to support deer management in Scotland.

Mr Donald looked at what RSPB were doing, their policies and their approach to deer management and also at how RSPB could be more transparent. He met with the Area Manager of RSPB and Bob Moncrief, investigating each specific allegation. He found that RSPB are working well within the law, indeed at the upper end of best practice. He has no qualms about how they are conducting themselves.

RSPB are improving habitat quality and restoring and expanding forestry. RSPB land is not being managed as a sporting estate where deer are the objective, but is being managed so that habitat is restored with deer in situ.

He discussed the need for greater transparency from RSPB and widening the knowledge of the community to the work of RSPB.

The Chairman thanked Mr Donald for his report and stated that it was good to know that RSPB has a clean bill of health having been investigated by professional people and the matter is now closed.

With regards to the above matter, an employee of RSPB said that he appreciated that anyone can make an allegation and it is quite fair to do so, but it would have been preferable if the CC had approached RSPB direct. A member of this employee's family had been accosted by a member of the public regarding the matter and was left distressed by the incident. The Chairman explained that the fairest way all round was to get professional people to investigate. It was a compromising situation for the CC and the RSPB: The CC had received allegations from a member of the public – not our allegations – put to us in a public forum and we were obliged to act. The CC are not knowledgeable on the subject, therefore the fairest, most honest way forward was to ask a neutral professional body to investigate. The Chairman expressed his anger and disappointment that the RSPB family member had been verbally abused by someone in our community and the CC would hope that the person involved has the decency to apologise.

Uwe Stoneman Senior Site Manager Abernethy RSPB

Mr Stoneman thanked the Chairman for introducing him. He agreed with the Chairman that a line needs to be drawn under the matter discussed previously but wanted to stress that the whole affair and particularly the abuse suffered by an RSPB family member had a severe impact on everyone involved. He was very glad to hear that SNH had given them a clean bill of health. He expressed that the team of stalkers employed by RSPB work very hard and he had expected that everything would be in good order.

Mr Stoneman then explained his background in that he moved to northwest Scotland in 1988 and worked as an artist. He became a countryside ranger in Durness where he met his wife who was a conservationist. They then moved around various locations in Scotland, latterly in a reserve in Fife . He always loved the Highlands and is very happy to be here on the RSPB's most amazing Reserve. He realises there are challenges ahead but has met quite a few people now in the community and would like people to find out more about what RSPB do in their community just as Chris Donald suggested. They are about to renew their management plan which includes a lot of forest expansion. The new plan has the power to look at how people who live here would like the next 60 years to be. He invited CC members to come up and see Forest Lodge and have a look round.

One problem separating RSPB and the community is it's location of Forest Lodge and is something to work on. They would like people to drop in and get some input from local people.

The Chairman thanked Mr Stoneman and expressed his sincere hopes that we can all make this relationship work.

Safer Routes To School

Mrs Law, Abernethy Primary School Principle Teacher and Aurelie Walker-Dean from the Parent Council presented developments in their project, "Park and Stride". This came about from multiple

concerns re safety of the local children en route to school. The national speed limit applies on most of School Road (60) so parents would like the existing footpath re-fenced. The school/parent Council would like parents to park in the wooded parking area by the bus stop on School Road then allow children to walk or cycle to school. The school has a reward system to encourage those who walk/cycle and 2 pupils were junior safety officers.

D Black expressed concern that some children were walking and cycling on the road. The CC is supportive of the plans but would like parents and teachers to work together to enforce use of the path.

Morgan Sindall/SSE

Present were: Louise Anderson, Community Liaison Manager SSEN; Alan Adamson, Morgan Sindall Project Engineer; Alan Ross SSEN

The "Vista" project involves removal of pylons from our area and had been discussed at a previous meeting. Project offices are now in situ near The Mains of Garten.

There was an issue earlier in the summer re the timeline of proposed road closures that clashed with Abernethy Highland Games week. The Chairman had consulted with Louise and this was quickly cancelled. The Chairman and Secretary then had a very useful meeting with 10 people from SSE and Morgan Sindall and the group got back to the CC with new dates. These dates were chosen to have minimum impact on community activities and the environment.

PROPOSED CLOSURES

Week commencing 21 October 2019:

Closure of B970 Nethy Bridge to Boat of Garten near the site office

Week commencing 28 October 2019:

Closure of B970 Nethy Bridge to Boat of Garten near the site office
AND

Closure of Station Road, Nethy Bridge

Week commencing 4 November 2019:

Closure of B970 at Pine Cottage (Culreach)

The CC noted that the week of 28 October, there would only be one access route to Nethy. John Kirk asked if they would explore the possibility of using preformed concrete to lessen the timescale and impact on the community and it was agreed to look at this, though costs may be prohibitive. Various ideas had been explored regarding a school bus solution: 2 buses to meet to pick up pupils/a roundabout route to school. Emails have been sent to schools asking for their input but no replies as yet.

An open evening is planned for the end of September/start of October.

The estimate finish time for the entire project is November 2020 when the site office will be removed and land there returned to its previous state as agreed.

Treasurer's Report: The accounts have been circulated via email. Balance: £5769 with no invoices outstanding. The necessary paperwork has been sent for out grant to Highland Council.

Councillor's Report: The new Community Council format will be approved at the next full Highland Council meeting. S McCook asked Cllr Lobban to thank HC for their fast work in repairing Broomhill Bridge following a vehicle collision. Cllr Lobban was also asked if HC could repair a fence that had been damaged in said collision and a sign replaced commemorating work done on the bridge on a previous occasion.

CNPA: Mr Kirk reported that 7 houses at Lynstock (5 earmarked as Affordable Housing) are in the process of going through planning.

Planning: The Chairman has received a letter from Laing's Builders regarding the application for Section 50 to be removed from land north of An Teallach, Nethy Bridge. The CC remains of the opinion that there no grounds for removal of Section 50 have been produced. The Chairman will contact HC planning dept and the forestry officer regarding this.

AOCB

CALENDARS: A Young awaiting answer re calendars.

NETHY SIGNS/ROADS: Signs need cleaning. Approach Explore Abernethy and Highland Council D Black also asked Cllr Lobban if signs at the bridge/golf course could be lowered as the impede visibility.

The road below the school has become undermined as has Broomhill Road where overgrown trees continue to be a hazard to motorists/pedestrians/school children.

Cllr Lobban, S McCook and a road engineer to visit sites.

RIVERTRACK: <https://map.rivertrack.org/location/river-nethy-black-bridge>

The new flood water monitor is up and running. We will invite Paul Copestake to our review meeting for the Emergency Plan.

There being no further business, the meeting was closed.

NEXT MEETING: THURSDAY 3 OCTOBER 2019 at 7.30pm in the Community Centre