

Minutes of the Banchory Community Council January Meeting

January 11th 2021 7:30pm via Zoom

Present: David Conroy (Chair), David Milner (Vice Chair), Lynn MacNab (Treasurer), Viv McKie (Secretary), Maggie Dornan, Harry McNab, Mary Lennox, Chris Luby, Christopher Milligan, Linda MacPhee, John Wills, Cllr Eileen Durno, Cllr Rosemary Bruce, Cllr Ann Ross

Andrew Sharples, observing

Apologies, Alistair Murison, Tony Tulett, Andrew Marshall (due to technical difficulties on the night)

Councillor's Reports

Council meetings have resumed online and services are continuing as normally as possible within the current guidelines. The current estimate is that these online only meetings will continue until at least April.

There have been issues with missed bin deliveries, this is caused by a variety of factors including adverse weather conditions. Missed collections can be reported by the myAberdeenshire app or the council website. The teams are active on social media to advise service users that they are aware of these missed collections, and if they are unable to return for them then they will be collecting any extra bags of refuse needed at the next scheduled visit. Unlike during last year's lock down the waste and recycling centre at the Crow's Nest has remained open with an appointment booking system in place.

We are once again under lock down restrictions, albeit slightly different to the initial 2020 period. With this comes tremendous personal and social responsibility to comply with these and help halt the spread of covid 19. The new variation of the virus is thought to be 50% more infectious. While people are feeling low and ground down it is important to keep everyone's spirits up and help each other through these times. The Council Officers have been working from home or on the front lines with tight resources and Cllr Ross called for patience and understanding to reflect this.

A discretionary fund is being made available from the Scottish government 30 million, 1.7 million for Aberdeenshire. Distributed to small and self employed businesses that may have fallen through the net and missed previous funding. There are estimated to be in the region of 800 businesses in this position in our area and the current plan is to issue them a grant of £2000 each. These plans are still under discussion.

The environmental planner has been in touch with the police and received an incident report number in relation to the destruction of the James Hunter Memorial. She then reached out to the insurance of the driver who hit the memorial. The insurance agency has requested the council supply two quotes for repairing this monument. Once these quotes have been obtained, a decision will be made about what next step to take.

Cllr Durno entered the following statement into the minutes, regarding comments made in her absence at the December Meeting.

“I would like to point out for clarity that Cllr Ross has misinterpreted what I said about car parking charges. I was referring to the council's proposal to remove the 45minute free period back in 2018/2019 and not the recent Spaces for People which was an ironic statement in relation to a past

event. I at no time made any reference to the 'Recovery Resilience Group' nor did I have discussions on this topic with anyone from this group.”

A member of the public has reached out to us to ask if council funding cuts are responsible for the lack of pavement clearing during the recent cold snap. The conditions have been particularly bad for ice at the moment, changed very quickly and in some places even where grit was laid it was not effective due to the melting and refreezing of standing water. Covid restrictions also mean the council are limited in how many crew members can fit in one vehicle, meaning additional vehicles are required. There will also be staff members off self isolating. In some cases 'hand gritters' rather than vehicles have been used.

The Snow Warden scheme is still active but hasn't been as heavily promoted during these covid restricted times. Anyone can sign up to be a snow warden and request a ton bag of grit to be delivered to their area, as the council have become more restrictive about where they are able to install public access grit boxes. There are fears from the community that if you clear areas of pavement, you would be liable for damages of anyone then slips. These are however unfounded as long as reasonable and sensible measures only are taken to clear ice and snow. Cllr Ross added that snow wardens are not expected to grit the pathways, only to clear the snow. We have also had reports of one grit box in Banchory being emptied in the early hours of the morning by someone with a van. Empty grit boxes are filled approximately 48 hours after being reported. This grit is provided for use on public paths and roads, not private driveways. The myAberdeenshire app will provide details of which roads have been cleared and the locations of public access grit boxes. Priority, heavy use routes will be attended to first.

As a community council, we could promote the idea of being a good neighbour during these times, clearing your own path, checking to see if your neighbours are able to clear theirs and providing assistance when able.

Approval of December's minutes and matters arising

December's minutes were proposed by Maggie Dornan and seconded by Lyn McNab.

Damage to the Bellfield Y2K Shelters

Reports were emailed in suggesting the shelters in Bellfield park had been vandalised as there was a large amount of refuse scattered around and one of the support posts had been removed and placed into a bin. However upon closer inspection the base of this post was found to be quite rotten so it may have simply fallen in the course of normal and reasonable use. John Wills has asked George Anderson to inspect and quote for repair. The cost he has returned to us for replacing this post is approximately £185 including VAT, however other support posts are showing signs of rot. It is important that this is repaired quickly as the shelters are designed to have four supports, and especially in windy conditions the lack of one support could quickly cause further damage. We will also ask the joiner to quote for potential work to improve and repair the rest of the shelters.

The Y2K checking account currently stands at £231 so we can cover any repairs up to that amount quickly. This will be discussed further under the Treasurer's report.

We have also had complaints from the people responsible for cleaning the Bellfield public toilets that these are being left in an increasingly unpleasant state, bins strewn around, food waste smeared on walls and blocking toilets and so on. This is particularly disappointing as until relative recently a key was required to access these toilets, and if this continues it may reach a point where the toilets are closed. The councillors request that all such incidents are reported to the police to build up a

picture of what is happening in Bellfield park. We may also like to involve our area manager in this. It is also important to note that in many cases it is young working adults, rather than younger teenagers that are causing these problems. David Milner will bring this up with the police.

Community Resilience Team update

The resilience team has once again been enacted. Our predominant focus is the delivery of prescriptions to those vulnerable, shielding or self isolating. We do not have the capacity to offer a shopping service, but can work in conjunction with Number One Cafe who may be able to help, and recommend click and collect services.

Viv McKie is currently holding the phone and watching the emails, but there is support and additional volunteers ready to handle these in shifts should it become much busier.

At this point Andrew Sharples volunteered the services of COTAG 4 x 4 response, a volunteer group of 4 x 4 drivers who may be able to help. There are approximately 20 drivers available to cover the Grampian area, all of who are fully on and off road advanced driver trained, first aid trained and police checked. We are grateful for this offer and will definitely take it up if required.

At the request of Cllr Ross, COTAG will reach out to other rural community councils in the area.

Planning

Another quiet month of predominately householder applications.

However there are two applications of note, both relating to the land by Banchory Lodge Hotel.

Firstly, an application to change the use of an area of land to a paddock and shelter for horses. This area would be one meter east of the land set aside for the football pitch. The area around the pitch has already been reduced by the last accepted plans for five houses to the west, and this would seem to be so close as to make the football pitch unusable. There is also no public path available to access the pitch. There is a real danger the pitch could become untenable and the area could instead be used for further development. The original planning application for the houses has a 2008 date and the pitch 2014.

Secondly a plan submitted by the Hotel itself to create an extended outdoor terrace to accommodate 'dining pods'. While we welcome this kind of investment in the local economy, this plan overlaps with the wooded area associated with the above five house plan. Trees in this area have already been felled in preparation for this project. We are concerned about the loss of public access land. The loss of these trees will be flagged to the planning department by us as it was a condition to the five house development that these trees be retained and it is incredibly disappointing these have been deliberately felled.

The site set aside for five houses is currently up for sale. This, alongside the loss of public access land concerns us, especially as future developers could decide to make a financial contribution to the community rather than follow through with the commitment to build the playing field as their section 75 agreement payment.

Harry McNab will reach out to the local football clubs for their feedback. Any response to this plan should be submitted within the next few weeks, Harry will draft and circulate a letter on our behalf detailing our apprehension at these changes.

At our last meeting, a complaint was read from a member of the public concerning the new flats built beside the East Church. There was concern that the working conditions were unsafe, and that the building was higher than it was approved to be. HSE have visited the site and safety measures seem to have improved. The council enforcement officer is due to visit the site to investigate the allegations regarding the height of the building, but this may be delayed due to the current tightening of covid restrictions. Harry will be informed of the results of this visit when it takes place.

Correspondence

A quiet festive period for correspondence. We have made contact with our new neighbouring community council in Inchmarlo, Glassel and Brathens and hope to arrange a virtual meeting shortly to discuss working together to support our larger community.

Treasurers Report

The current account totals are as below:

Community Council main bank account, £3473.94

Y2K checking account, £231.51

Y2K business account £3011.54

One outstanding payment to ICO for Data Protection Status is due, this will be a Direct Debit for £33.

We had considered diverting funds from the Y2K Business account to other community projects, but upon researching past minutes Lynn McNab has discovered that this fund was intended to be held for the maintenance of these shelters in perpetuity. The shelters were built in 2001, and we have now spent more on repairing them than the original cost of construction. Lyn recommends that we combine the two accounts for ease of access. The upcoming change of bank due to closure of our high street branch would be a good opportunity to do this. It is important to remember that this fund is not bottomless and will eventually run out. A discussion was held over possible funding options, including asking for organisations to adopt a shelter. While small local businesses have had a challenging year, larger places such as the national banks and supermarkets etc often have a community fund available. Chris Luby will speak to Morrisons on our behalf. In 2001 the original Y2K committee decided not to pursue sponsorship in this way as the then newly formed BDI would take on youth provision in the community. There also needs to be a push to raise both funding and a sense of responsibility among the younger people who use the shelters.

The youth members of the community council assured us that they were heavily used by high school students, but that the colour was a bit dark and uninviting. Members visiting the park with younger children also attest to their usefulness, as they are a popular meeting and gathering spot. However in heavy rain they are not 100% waterproof.

We also floated the idea of replacing parts gradually over time with new materials such as plastic recycled wood which is eco friendly and longer lasting. John Wills will speak to the joiner about the possibility and expense of this.

The final outcome of the discussions was that we would continue to repair and maintain the shelters until the account was exhausted, while also looking for alternative solutions with new materials and/or alternative funding.

Lyn also recommends that although we open a new account and transfer any funds across, we do not close the TSB account until after we receive our annual grant from Aberdeenshire council in March as this caused great problems when we last had to switch banks. A decision will be made at the February meeting as to which branch we switch to. The two banks available on the High Street are the Bank of Scotland or the Clydesdale.

At this point in the meeting, David Milner, Chris Luby and Linda MacPhee were digitally removed from the meeting via the Zoom waiting room facility after declaring conflicts of interest. They were not party to and played no part in the Mid Hill Wind Farm discussion.

The current balance of the Mid Hill Wind Farm Fund is £15,612.12 and the only guaranteed payment into that will be approximately £5000 in September. A payment of between £1100-£1300 of our own funding from Aberdeenshire council will be paid into the Community Council Bank account, due in March. During 2020 we received an additional grant of £200 from the Scottish Government to cover costs relating to covid and the changes we were required to make to comply with restrictions. This was used to fund the resilience team phone and the zoom account. However there is no guarantee of a further grant for this, while the expenses will continue, so it may be necessary for us to cover those ourselves out of the BCC account.

After last weeks meeting it had been decided to offer the Skate Park £5-6 000. Our contact came back to us very grateful with that offer, but asked if it would be possible for us to raise that to £7500 as that would help them generate more matched funding. We are concerned about the feasibility of this project achieving the funding, however we are very supportive of the initiative and feel it will hugely benefit the community.

The application for £12000 from the football club is still pending, however they are still in negotiations with the owners of the land this funding is required for (Aberdeenshire Council).

Banchory Green Power, a club working on electric racing cars with senior academy pupils, have requested £2,500 but are unable to begin their work until the school situation is clarified.

The Taiko Drum Project have requested via BDI £1000 for the purchase of drums. We would require to see invoices for these drums, and as per Wind Farm Fund rules the BDI as a whole would be unable to apply for funds for any further projects for 12 months.

Especially during this turbulent time, we are reluctant to drain the fund entirely as we cannot predict what other applications may arise during the next 12 months. A precedent was set with the Men's Shed funding application, where we awarded the funds but with a promissory letter holding the actual cash in the wind farm account until the money required to secure the match funding was raised.

Our final and unanimous decision was to award

£7500 to the Skate Park
£4000 to the Football
£1000 to the Taiko Drummers

and defer decision on the Green Power club until the situation with schools becomes clearer. The funds for all three applicants above will be ring fenced and kept in the Wind farm account for them until they raise the rest of the money they require.

The above will leave us with approximately £3000 in community funding to last until September, bearing in mind that the community council do not meet over the summer months and so could defer any requests from May onwards until after this recess.

At this point the other community councillors rejoined the meeting.

Social Media, Community Engagement and Future Planning for the Community Council.

This month we have been pushing harder to get our agenda and meeting details out to the community. As a result of the Facebook post we had three enquiries for the zoom details and one guest was able to join us. This was a good first result and for the February meeting we will do the same again, and try and advertise wider.

We do need to look to recruiting new members and looking to fill the officer bearers roles. Assuming the AGM happens as usual this year in June, there are only four meetings between now and then and it is important for us to plan for a handover period. The election and AGM process may still be delayed by the ongoing covid restrictions. Until an election is held, we are able to Co Opt any interested parties. As soon as Viv receives any guidance from Marr Office regarding this she will circulate it to the community council. It is the intent of the current office bearers to hold elections as soon as possible, and to step down from their roles as they are now well into the second year of a one year term.

Mary Lennox, as former chair, reiterated the importance of building a strong community council with new members and a well functioning team of Officers. Serving on the community council can be tremendously rewarding. With the wealth of knowledge from our members to fall back on, there is no need for any potential office bearer to feel they do not have enough experience and nominations are open to all. Unless a plan for the future of the community council now, we may find ourselves in unnecessary difficulty when election time arrives. A private meeting to discuss and come up with ideas may be required, as this is a large and important matter and deserves careful consideration.

A regular piece about recruitment could be placed in the Banchory Fly but we may need to pay for this space.

An enquiry has come in from the public looking for past minutes. There has been a delay in us getting these uploaded to the Visit Banchory website, but we are working on this.

There is also a suggestion that the community council should have a dedicated website. At the moment we do rely heavily on Facebook, as that is within the skill set of the current secretary, however this does miss out on the section of the town who do not use this site. Having said that, the data has shown that historically it is the Facebook page that has given us our highest level of community engagement. The Visit Banchory site is not the easiest to use for visitors or administrators, however a contact of Maggie Dornan's has offered her expertise to help us establish one of our own. We would be delighted to accept this. There would also need to be funds raised or set aside for this.

Community Representatives

Covid restrictions continue to prevent most of our representatives from attending meetings.

David Milner will contact the police regarding the vandalism of the toilet in Bellfield park. He will also bring to their attention a poster taped to our noticeboard which made a serious allegation regarding unsafe driving of a taxi complete with details of the car including registration plate.

Regardless of the truth of this allegation, the notice board is not appropriate for this and the police can investigate if necessary.

AoB

Cllr Durno let us know that there was an incident of flooding coming from Silverbank park and encroaching on a private property. With sandbags and help from the police and a council worker she was able to divert this from damaging the house, but the issue is ongoing with each new rainfall. The drains have been inspected by camera and found to be blocked with tree roots or branches. This is why a channel has been dug in the back of Silverbank alongside the fence and sectioned off with barriers as a temporary measure until this can be properly fixed.

John Wills brought to our attention Mel Shand being recognised with a BEM in the New Year's Honors list for services to the arts and the local community during the coronavirus crisis. We offer our sincere admiration and congratulations to her.

Next Month's will be held via Zoom on February the 8th at 7:30pm