

CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

INTRO

This report only covers the period between April and October 2009. This is due to the resignation of the previous Chair in December and the subsequent decision of the other members to all stand down and hold a full Council election in March 2009.

ALPS

Throughout the period there have been monthly meetings at the Estate office progressing the ALPs application involving the CC and members of the steering and focus groups. The application has to be in place by 2nd Nov. It is difficult to make an accurate list of the contents of the programme, as even at this late stage is fairly fluid. If this final bid is successful, the scheme is to take place over a three-year period and includes such items as

- 1) Burial ground mapping
- 2) Interpretation and signage: creating the story of Applecross
- 3) Bealach na Ba interpretation
- 4) Events and festivals
- 5) Beechwood to Sand link
- 6) Community Archaeology training project
- 7) Digitisation Apx Hist Soc archives.
- 8) Apx place names (including school project)
- 9) Holy well
- 10) Heritage manager/archivist
- 11) Guided walks
- 12) Limekiln
- 13) Development of ALPs website
- 14) The Bardic school

There are several other projects involving the Smiddy Wood, the Hazel Wood, the logging of the plantations and more. The deer fence is still on the agenda as any of the grasslands/environmental schemes will not be able to go ahead without it. The most controversial aspect of the programme is the fear that there will be a large number of interpretation boards put up in the community. Again as before it was put to the officers that this is not welcome. Funding partners are still being sought and so far include SNH, ERDF, HC, SRDP and Leader. There is to be another meeting on the 19th of October.

CYCLE CHALLENGE

This topic has taken up a lot of my time and I have come to the conclusion that the organisers either cannot or will not engage with the Applecross community to address their concerns regarding the Bealach Mor and Beag events. The CC decided they could no longer support the organisers as they repeatedly refused to comply with safety concerns put to them by the CC.

Following this withdrawal of support I still attended a safety meeting in Lochcarron and two CC meetings at Shieldaig and Kinlochewe with little or no progress. It was agreed I give the organisers GPS reading of hotspots on the coast road so motorists would be warned by signage that cyclists would be meeting them on certain blind corners.

The coast road is the area that raises the main problems and I have tried to address them by requesting better ID for cyclists, better and more signage and better trained and more marshals. All these requests have been argued against and not carried out. One of my emails has been taken out of context and sent to all competitors implying I was in favour of direct action. During the last event the marshal on the coast road end was trying to prevent people coming down the coast road till one o'clock, effectively cutting off Applecross for most of the morning. This along with many other reasons is why I do not think the organisers are competent to run such an event on our public roads.

Throughout the summer the CC carried out a survey of what people thought of the events and they have told us that of the 75% asked a majority of 3/1 were against them and of the 30 people who supported only 9 were happy with the way they were being run. It is interesting to note a previous minute of Nov 2006 when it was proposed that two events should be held as 'a number of participants exceeding 500 would be considered excessive for any event' 582 were entered for the Bealach Mor in Sept 2009

AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Housing, in particular affordable housing, remains a major problem in the Applecross area. As recently pointed out at the ward forum at Poolewe, Wester Ross has the least affordable housing i.e. the greatest gap between wage levels and house prices. With this as a background we invited Morven Taylor from the HSCHT to guide us in the procurement of additional housing. The last housing surgery was completed in Jan 2008 and a need was clearly shown. This needs to be updated.

Morven also told us all the various options re affordable house building which were all laid out in the CC minutes. At present Morven has a list of

potential house sites, which will be discussed at planning level and regarding viability. If OK then we will approach the Estate and/or relevant crofters regarding sale of sites. At present the 'right to buy' does not exist. We will continue to try to alleviate the current problem although since the 'credit crunch' funding has tightened up.

POST OFFICE

February saw the suspension of PO counters' operations in Applecross. We have to thank Roger Cundiff for coming over from Strathcarron two days a week giving a service to the community till the end of June. While the Post Office at no time said they were going to terminate the counter the CC were very concerned that the hours would be dramatically reduced and encouraged everyone to respond to the consultation with this in mind. We would like to thank Charles Kennedy, JF Munro, Rhoda Grant, and Alison Clark at HC and Audrey Sinclair for their efforts on our behalf. The Post Office has now reopened albeit only for twelve hours a week, up from the original ten offered, but with a promise to increase the hours if it well used. That is something that we would encourage everyone to do.

WARD FORUMS

There were three Ward Forums held during the period. They dealt with Waste Management, Planning and Housing. The secretary and/or the chair attended all three. I believe these to be important meetings to attend as they are very informative and they also give an understanding of the problems officials have to deal with. i.e. financial constraints, housing lists, planning designs etc.

We are very disappointed that the very successful plastic collection has been discontinued through circumstances beyond our control. West Coast Recycling has evolved from this group of volunteers and is still working to improve the current situation. We would like to thank all volunteers involved for their hard work especially Ali Brown. Reports of the Ward Meeting appear in our minutes.

THE FILLING STATION AND GP SERVICES

As there has not been a Chairman's report for eighteen months I think it is worth noting the Filling Station was reopened on the 29th of Nov 2008 under the auspices of the newly formed Applecross Community Company. I know a lot of work has gone into the setting up and running of the Company which up till now has involved the day to day running of

the Filling Station and the applying for grants to fund refurbishment of the pumps.

There was a successful campaign to keep our GP services and to prevent NHS from downgrading to a nurse led service for two days a week. This was a very positive community led campaign that attracted a lot of positive publicity nationally. Kinlochranoch CC representatives have met with the Secretary and other members of the community to see if they could learn anything to help their own situation. Their petition to the Scottish Parliament has been successful; it is to be followed up in committee. Thanks to the many local people who took the trouble to sign it.

OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

Wild camping and other tourist disruptions to residents have cropped up and are being dealt with using signage and Internet. We are still represented on the Out of Hours Group, which intends to keep an eye on a wide range of issues affecting the delivery of health services in SW Ross. We were also represented at a meeting to discuss an ambulance consultation.

A campaign was run to save our post bus service, the result of which was Dial a Bus. We would like to thank HC for the replacement system, which by all accounts is being well used. Thanks to the HC for the painting of white lines and the erection of barriers on the Bealach.

CONCLUSION

I would like to thank the community councillors for making chairing the meetings so easy, the HC members who attended every meeting, Robbie Bain ward manager and all officials who have helped us on the way. I feel the last two years have been challenging ones for this community and it has felt like crisis management at times. I hope that in the future emphasis will be more on growing community assets and services rather than mounting campaigns to save existing services. Finally I would like to thank John Mckeon for his voluntary work keeping the web site up to date. I know in the past the site was not considered important but the CC believes it is a very useful tool in communicating what is happening in Applecross to the many people who visit.