

Applecross Community Council

Minutes of Meeting 9th June 2009

Present: Ali Brown, Ewen Gillies, Alison Goldthorpe, Janet MacDonald, Tim Williams, Ali Macleod, Alison Macleod

In attendance: Morven Taylor (Highland Small Communities Housing Trust), Archie MacLellan, Councillor Audrey Sinclair, 9 members of the public

Apologies: Councillor Jean Urquhart, Andy and Heather Walker, Judy Fish and Darren Jones

1. Minutes of Previous Meeting and Matters Arising

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted, proposed by Janet, seconded by Ewen.

Bench for the Green: The Trust agreed that Sam could use their wood for the bench, but there is nothing suitable left. Sam is looking elsewhere for suitable materials.

SNH Grant: Mary Gibson of SNH explained that the match funding for the grant was to have been labour and machinery provided by the Trust, and input from the school. SNH accepts that it is not possible to do as originally planned as there was opposition to fencing the area, and without fencing there is no point in planting anything except trees with cages.

Signs for paths to Coilegillie and Ard Bain: Quotes for the car parking signs have been requested. Wording for the sign advising tourists on appropriate behaviour was discussed. Alison will circulate another draft for comment. The Trust agreed to contribute towards the cost of a more permanent sign which would include interpretation, if the Community Council decides to opt for that. Archie is reluctant to change the contents of the walks leaflet to include advice on appropriate behaviour for walkers at the moment, as there will be more changes required if the ALPS bid is successful and more paths are built.

Industrial Units: Audrey advised that the Highland Council owns very little land at Toscaig Pier, and in any case feels that this would not be a good site for industrial units, as it is at the end of the road. HIE may consider helping with funding for units at a more appropriate site, if there is community involvement. Alison will discuss the potential with Andrew Prendergast of HIE.

ALPS: A further steering group meeting has taken place, as well as meetings on particular project areas which were open to any interested members of the community. Much of the large amount of funding allocated to woodlands projects is to be spent on clear felling the areas of woodland with a large percentage of windblown trees. Some of the timber is to be mulched and will remain on site, some will be transported by lorry to Inverness, despite the fact that it costs more to do this than the timber is worth. However the income from the timber sold counts as match funding which is important for the success of the application. Members of the community suggested that it would make more sense to keep a proportion of the wood in Applecross as a source of fuel for the community. There are also suggestions for projects which will make the woodlands more attractive to the community and visitors, including a 'food forest', children's play area and mountain bike trails. These are most likely to be in the Smiddy wood area, which is most accessible and where the ground is more fertile.

The success of many of the suggested projects would be compromised by the lack of a South deer fence, particularly woodland and grassland projects, while the rebuilt dry stone dykes would be mere ornaments

in some areas as they will not keep deer out. Although the HLF funding cannot be used for the deer fence, there appears to be some hope that the crofters might work with the Trust to find funding for a new deer fence. The crofters would give up rights to claim CCAGs grants for a period of time, if they were claimed to fund 50% of the fence. Care would have to be taken that this was timed in a way that did not adversely affect individual crofters seeking funding to improve their crofts.

It was agreed to write to the Applecross Trust stating that the Community Council is supportive of plans to replace the deer fence.

OOH Group: Gerry does not in fact wish to continue on the OOH group. Liz Pritchard suggests that Applecross should continue to be represented, but points out that the rep does not have to be a member of the Community Council. It was agreed to approach the Health Care Association to ask if one of their committee members would be willing to attend the group's meetings.

2. Affordable Housing

Morven had spent an hour before the meeting looking at some potential sites with Alison and Ali M. Various factors have to be taken into consideration when assessing whether a site is a possibility for development for affordable housing; access, proximity to services, the local plan etc. Some sites will be too expensive to develop for affordable housing. Morven will do a desktop feasibility study on each site before we ask for the permission in principle from the owners of the land to consider further the sites which appear feasible. Morven delivered a presentation to the meeting which is summarised below. Anybody needing any more information can ask a community councilor or get in touch with Morven on 01463 233549, e-mail morven.taylor@hscht.co.uk.

The Highland Small Communities Housing Trust was set up in 1998 to help rural communities secure long term solutions to their local housing needs. It is a charity employing four staff.

A housing needs surgery held in Applecross in January 2008 showed a clear demand for affordable housing, although this report requires to be revisited to update it and add more detail to the requirements. The HSCHT is happy to meet individuals locally to discuss requirements in confidence. Evidence of a strong demand from a community makes an application more likely to succeed in what is essentially a competition for funding.

Once suitable, affordable sites have been identified there is a range of housing options available:

- **Rented housing**, which would be provided by a Housing Association such as Albyn, though the HSCHT can broker the land for it.
- **Low cost home ownership- new supply shared equity scheme:** A housing association builds the properties, and individuals can buy 60-80% of the property, with the government retaining the rest. This means that the housing can't be sold on the open market and thereby removed from the affordable housing stock. A site may provide a mix of rented and new supply housing.
- **Low cost home ownership- open market shared equity scheme:** House prices are too high in Applecross for this to work here as a limit is set for housing that can be included in the scheme.
- **GRO grant.** This is applied for by the HSCHT, which builds the houses and then sells at less than market value.

- **Rural Home Ownership Grants:** These are administered by the HSCHT, and the process tends to be slow, although the HSCHT is trying to find ways of speeding things up. The grants are for £5-£40,000 depending on circumstances and are means tested. They are particularly useful for those who have managed to find a site on decrofted land. HSCHT has sold many discounted plots to individuals and assisted them to apply for this grant. Applicants must have a local connection (i.e. live or work in the community, or have immediate family there).

There are four different options for building offered by HSCHT. The individual can employ contractors to build the house, the HSCHT can project manage the build by the individual for a small fee (which is also eligible for grant funding), the HSCHT can have the structure built and the individual can finish the internals, or the HSCHT can build the whole thing.

The size of the house built must be based on the current family size, although it can be one and a half storeys which allows bedrooms to be built in the attic space from 2 years after the original build.

- **Crofting Grants:** available to registered crofters.

The Rural Housing Burden is used to ensure that houses built on discounted serviced plots sold by the HSCHT remain in the affordable sector when the original owner sells, as the HSCHT retains an equity share in the land the home is built on. The house must always be used as a permanent place of residence. The HSCHT has the first right to buy back the home at 75% of market value, so they can sell it back as affordable housing. The house can be bequeathed to children of the owners.

It is difficult to offer a timescale between a community demonstrating a need for housing and houses being built as all the projects are different. The HSCHT are keen for it to happen quickly if possible.

Planning is often able to be a little more flexible because the housing is affordable.

The availability of good sites which are affordable to develop would be a big help. Archie explained that the Trust was finding the problems with sites offered in the past frustrating. The site at the farm has not been ruled out; it's not clear whether repairs to the bridge would be sufficient or whether a new bridge would be necessary. The Trust has to find a balance between finding sufficient sites for affordable housing and keeping good land green where possible.

Morven suggested asking the community in general if anybody has sites they are willing to offer. Sites sold for affordable housing earn approximately 30% less than for commercial sites, but it is sometimes possible to get planning permission for affordable housing on a site which would never get permission for a commercially built house.

The funding situation for affordable housing is not too bad at the moment, but may well go down next year, which would affect Housing Associations badly. The HSCHT can borrow to finance building as they have land and houses to offer as collateral. The Highland Council Second Homes Fund provides some assistance to the Trust, and it can also apply to the Scottish Government.

3. Financial Report

The balance is £2175.19, with no transactions taking place.

4. Correspondence

- The next Ward Forum is at Dornie Hall on Monday 29th June at 7.00pm; the main topic will be planning issues.
- Liz Pritchard provided information about a meeting at the Ledgowan Hotel on 24th June, to consult on a report on ambulance services in remote and rural areas. Liz is concerned at the very low numbers of people who have expressed an interest in being involved in the consultation and suggested that Applecross should send a representative; unfortunately no Community Councillors would be available as the meeting is during the day.

Post Meeting Note: A member of the public volunteered to go to represent Applecross.

5. Cycle Challenge

It appears that a large proportion of the cyclists on the coast road failed to get out of the way of the ambulance which was trying to get to a cyclist who had had a heart attack. The ambulance driver who was on duty that day did not feel able to comment; we need to get in touch with Calum Campbell, who is in charge of ambulance services for this area, to ascertain what exactly happened, before deciding whether to withdraw support for the events. This had not been possible as he was on annual leave. Local medical personnel are very concerned about the situation.

Post Meeting Note: Calum Campbell reported that the Ambulance Service was dismayed at the attitude of the cyclists, but had not submitted an official complaint on this occasion.

It was noted that a letter writer to the 'An Carranach' had misunderstood the discussion at the April meeting about safety fears. He assumed that the concern had been for the safety of drivers, when in fact the concern had been for the vulnerability of cyclists descending the hill at high speeds and meeting on-coming traffic which is unable to get out of the way on the single track road. Quite a number of Applecross drivers have had near misses of this type.

6. Applecross Post Office

Ali Brown left the room while his application for planning consent to convert his garage to a shop was discussed. It was agreed to write to the planners to state that the Community Council has no objection to this.

The present arrangement at the Post Office, with two afternoons service per week provided, will come to an end on 25th June. As yet there is no news of any alternative. The subpostmaster vacancy is advertised on the PO website, but has not appeared in the press. The Community Council has written to two PO addresses in Leeds and Inverness asking for news on progress and arguing that the PO hours must not be reduced, but there has been no response.

The hours being offered are now reduced to 10 from 17. The Community Council is very concerned that this very limited service is not enough for the community and that it may not be enough to attract any suitable candidates, meaning we may lose the PO altogether. It was agreed to write to the MP and MSPs for the area, asking for support to persuade the PO to offer at least 17 hours.

7. AOB

White lines and Barriers on the Bealach: Audrey agreed to ask Iain Hay to progress these while the weather is suitable.

Wester Ross Brand: Janet met with Douglas Gibson of Celtic Fringe Tourism Association, who are encouraging local businesses to sign up to the Wester Ross Brand. They have a new website which is still being developed and a tourist booklet with a healthy circulation. Businesses can pay to advertise in both. However as Visit Scotland provided half the funding, businesses have to be quality assured by Visit Scotland before they can advertise.

Audrey suggested that local tourism based businesses should get together to discuss if they want to do this, rather than making it a Community Council matter.

Neil Gunn Prize: Congratulations to Jacqui Liuba, who won first prize in the prose section of this competition, and Robbie Fairweather Graham, who won second prize in the primary school section. Daniel Goldthorpe was highly commended in the same section. The winners will be awarded their prizes at a ceremony on 23rd June. It was suggested that the community should get together to celebrate these achievements in some way.

Date of Next Meeting: 14th July at 7.30pm.