

# **Ardross Community Council**

## **Minutes of Management Meeting**

**14<sup>th</sup> August 2023**

**8.00pm**

## **Ardross Community Hall**

Present: Peter Allen (Chair), John Edmondson (Secretary), Alison Gordon (Treasurer), Willie Beattie, George Mackay and Emma Chisholm

Sandra Cunliffe

James McDougall and Elliott Blaauw

Meeting started at 8.00 pm.

1. There were apologies from James McTaggart as well as Clair Bale.
2. The July Minutes were approved.
3. The Secretary was still trying to sort out a way of collaborating on documents rather than just sharing. There was a possibility of setting up an iCloud or DropBox account for the Community Council. It was work in progress. There were two main consultations

We had still not had any response from the Highland Council about the Dalnavie cross-roads. Cllr Tamala Collier has been dealing with this but has still not been able to get any response. The Secretary had written to Ward Manager Helen Ross and we should wait to see whether this got any results. There now had been a serious accident and although it was not established that the new fence and hedge had been a contributory factor, the speed limit was also very important and having slower traffic was a priority. The Highland Council had done a traffic survey several years ago and had had concluded that there was not a speeding problem; this of course was not the question it was whether the speed was appropriate for the road and the junction. George Mackay also thought that some of the signage by the junction obstructed the vision up and down the road. There was also still an outstanding issue with the crash barriers at Stittenham. And the Lealty bridge that had not been repaired yet.

John Edmondson reported that the internet problems had been sorted. Trees and adjustment to the antenna were the main issues.

4. The Chair explained that the Ardross Community Council had had two requests for grants from the Ardross Community Hall, details of which had been circulated earlier. One application from the ring fenced funds and the other from the wider community benefit funds. The application for ~£9,000 for new chairs, (examples were on hand); a new entrance mat and tables from the ring fenced funds.

John Edmondson made a personal declaration of interest, explaining that he was a Director of the Hall, but he did not have any financial interest in the hall.

The proposed chairs were tested out for “completeness”, the old chairs were good quality, had lasted well and they were very comfortable, but had proved difficult to stack. The ~£9,000 from the ring fenced fund was accepted. The **Treasurer** agreed to get in touch with the Ardross Community Hall Chair to arrange payment on invoice.

There was a second application was to kit out the new playpark for ~£50,000+VAT. The Ardross Community Hall was contributing a fair proportion, £11,000 for the whole of the project. They had obtained several quotations for the installation, and the successful bid allowed for renewing of certain sections, rather than all the equipment when the time came. The cost of these items of equipment never ceased to amaze. It was envisaged that all hall users would benefit from the installation. Training would be offered and a maintenance contract entered into. There were some concerns over liability and insurance, but this was the Ardross Community Hall’s ultimate responsibility and regular checking and a maintenance contract seemed to be a responsible way of dealing with this. There was general approval of the memorial garden, raised beds and whole scheme. Peter Allen proposed and Alison Gordon seconded the proposal and the grant of £60,000 inc VAT was approved. It was agreed the funds should be applied for from the Beinn Tharsuinn Windfarm Community Benefit.

The Treasurer had received a letter from Jane Smith resigning from the Christmas Treat after 10 years and Anne Mardon was to take her place.

The Secretary explained that he had had a meeting with Maree Todd MSP the week before covering the topics of the pylons, broadband and water supplies. She had been interested in the private water supplies [PWS] as the west coast had had severe warnings about water shortages. There was an urgency to get legislation in place to ensure Private Water Supplies were connected to the water mains.

Maree Todd MSP had also stated we should think that we should be more like Ardgay who want to build wind farms on Wildland and open country. I had pointed out to her that I was only the messenger and that to favour one community council over another was disturbing, that the view of the Ardross Community Council was just as valid as Ardgay Community Council and that she should respect that. However when it came to the pylons Ardgay Community Council were however not supporting the route through Wildland, but as someone pointed out at an Ardgay Community Council meeting this was more than likely because this particular route went directly past the Ardgay Community Council Chair’s house.

Elliott Blaauw asked how there was a connection between wind farms and water supplies. It was explained that we weren’t talking about this in particular, but as it happens there was a link. At Whitelees wind farm there were 5 PWS’ which had been polluted and householders were having to use bottled water as a direct result of wind farm construction. Both Peter Allen and John Edmondson had seen a deterioration in their PWS since the cabling for the Coire Na Cloiche Wind Farm had been put in.

The Secretary had got in touch with the windfarm being proposed near Evanton asking for community benefit. It was agreed to think about a top slice rather than a % and then ring fence for certain projects. The **Secretary** to circulate the total amount theoretically available to the fund on the standard rate per MW so that we pitch at the right level.

The Secretary also explained that he had written to the Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Ardross Church aka ARK over a year ago in 2022 and had no response, so a further letter was sent, and this too had not been replied to. The main issues for the Ardross Community Council were that the ownership was not clear; there was no guarantee that the building would be retained by the community; that an equal opportunity policy would be practiced amongst other things. Until the building was secured within the community and there was no possibility of the Church of Scotland or Free Church or indeed the Board forcing a private sale; and an inclusive equal opportunities policy was practiced then the Ardross Community Council could not possibly spend large amounts of the community's money on the Ardross Church building.

There was a deep frustration with the Church Board that points raised in a letter from over a year ago still remained unanswered. Peter Allen thought that it was extremely difficult dealing with an organisation where there was a lack of transparency and they didn't want to talk to you for a year. And at the moment there is nothing to stop the Church Board from selling or disposing of the building to whomever they wished and the Ardross community would have no say in the matter.

A Business Plan was requested which had not been forthcoming, and no assurances as to how the ARK was to complement the Ardross Community Hall rather than compete had been received.

The Ardross Community Council were being blamed in a whispering campaign that they were not heating the Ardross Church building, but it was never the Community Council's responsibility to do this. The ARK was not in community ownership nor was it non-denominational and it was the responsibility of the Church Board to fund raise to heat the building. ARK was there to promote Christian worship and it was not still clear whether it was available to people of other faiths. This was contrary to the perceived status of the Church.

It was regrettable that the Church Board had not engaged in a dialogue to try and resolve all these matters a year ago. If they had done then matters would probably had been finalised.

Ardross Church's account summary was available at OSCR for anyone who wanted to see the Church had received income of £4,178 in the last published accounts [since the meeting further accounts have been submitted showing an income of £10,596 and expenditure of £9,468]

There had been a suggestion which the ARK was a long arm's length of the Ardross Community Hall. This would solve a lot of problems as far as being open to everyone. And despite being urged to explore this avenue by both the Ardross Community Council and Cllr Maxine Smith nothing has been heard back.

Any correspondence received had been forwarded to community councillors for information.

5. The Treasurer presented and distributed the accounts for the last month. A total of £5,700 had been distributed for electricity payments in the last month. And also the money for groundworks for the Playpark had been sent out. A report to RWE had been submitted, but the main grants had been distributed through our other accounts during last year. In total £15, 246.58 had been paid out since April 1<sup>st</sup> for various projects. There had been many thank-you letters received for the electricity payment.
6. Alison Gordon raised the issue of the gate by Loch Dubh. A new gate which was padlocked had been installed and put in to replace the "A" gate. The wider side to the gate had been blocked off. This was on a Core Path and prevented access for buggies and horses for example. It was regrettable that the Ardrross Distillery had taken this approach to prevent people from using this core path. Signs were going up in many places; this was a well known tactic used by developers, bit by bit, inch by inch more restrictions go in place, fences go up, gates go up and before you know it areas are being denied the public. The Secretary agreed to get in touch with the Access Officer and pursue this as it was unacceptable that access was being denied by the Ardrross Distillery.

John Edmondson reminded people that it was a community council election this year nominations started on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 2023.

7. The Strath Rory Wind Farm with the higher turbines had been approved. It was felt that this was a bad day for Ardrross. The Reporter had overturned the Highland Council's Refusal and Ardrross' wish not to have the wind farm built. There was a definite feeling that the Scottish Government were trying to say "resistance is futile". The Planning Conditions were poor, the request for fire suppression equipment had been ignored. The tone of the Reporter was extremely dismissive and condescending which says a lot about the attitude of the Scottish Government towards communities.

Another wind farm had been approved controversially at Croich as well.

Another Energy Storage Plant was being planned by the Corkscrew Road and there was a Public Exhibition at the Hall on the 17<sup>th</sup> August 2023 during the afternoon.

There being no other business the Chair closed the meeting.

Next Management Meeting **11<sup>th</sup> September 2023** at the Ardrross Community Hall

