

The Highland Council

Minutes of Meeting of the **Easter Ross Area Committee** held remotely on Thursday, 5 November 2020 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr M Finlayson
Mr D Louden
Ms P Munro

Mr A Rhind
Ms F Robertson (**in the Chair**)
Ms M Smith

Officials in Attendance:

Helen Ross Senior Ward Manager, CSER
Jim Holden, Housing Manager (North)
Tim Stott, Principal Planner
Douglas Chisholm, Planner
Julie-Ann Bain, Planner
Fiona MacBain, Committee Administrator

Also in Attendance:

Alex McKinley, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service
Dave Macrae, Community Liaison Officer, Tain & District Development Trust

**An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council.
All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.**

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies were intimated on behalf of Mrs C Wilson.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

The Committee **NOTED** the following declarations of interest:-

Item 5 – Ms M Smith, Ms P Munro and Mr D Louden (financial)

3. Community Update Cunntas Coimhearsnachd às Ùr

A verbal update was provided by Cllr Pauline Munro and Mr Dave MacRae (Tain & District Development Trust) in relation to community resilience work at the present time and plans going forward.

Key points included the following:

- assurance had been received from local supermarkets that they would continue to provide assistance to foodbanks through to Christmas and possibly beyond;
- funds had been set aside to help with potential debt issues;

- many local groups were providing an excellent service and thanks were extended to all, as well as Council staff, local communities and Highlands and Islands Enterprise;
- the provision by the Council of frozen food parcels to the Cromarty Firth Ward had been useful and would be welcomed in future; and
- issues of concern for community groups included volunteer fatigue, additional running expenses due to Covid-19, communication with people who did not have internet access, with leaflet drops being more challenging during dark winter months, mental health issues, and fuel poverty;

During discussion, the following issues were raised:

- Members thanked Dave MacRae and his team for their much appreciated work;
- attention was drawn to the value of a weekly debrief session for community groups, which facilitated weekly communication on main issues, and avoided key people being overwhelmed with phone calls and messages throughout the week. The importance of open lines of communication was noted so that people knew who to contact and how;
- Home-start East Highland had distributed a number of devices to families in need and might be able to provide more;
- it was occasionally challenging to find out who the families or individuals in need were due to confidentiality;
- social media had been useful for communication during the Covid-19 crisis, although it did not always reach everyone;
- it was possible there could be some welfare funds for tenants of Albyn Housing and relevant community groups would be informed; and
- it was important the Council and other agencies did all they could to support local groups.

The Committee **NOTED** the update and **AGREED**:-

- i. to feed back to the Council that the provision of frozen food parcels in the Cromarty Firth Ward had been useful and would be welcomed in future; and
- ii. to share with relevant community groups information on the possible availability of welfare funds for tenants of Albyn Housing.

4. Fire – Area Performance Summary Report Smàladh – Geàrr Aithisg Coileanadh Sgìreil

There had been circulated Report No ERA/13/20 dated 23 October 2020 by the Group Commander – Service Delivery, Highland North, Scottish Fire & Rescue Service.

During discussion, Members welcomed the positive report and thanked the Fire and Rescue Service for their work and employers for releasing staff who were part-time retained officers.

The Committee **NOTED** the Area Performance Report.

**5. Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan 2 – Main Issues Report
Plana Leasachaidh Ionadail Linne Mhoireibh A-staigh 2 – Aithisg Prìomh
Chùisean**

Ms M Smith declared a financial interest in this item as the Chair of Albyn Housing but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from taking part in the discussion.

Ms P Munro declared a financial interest in this item as land referenced in the Development Plan belonged to family members but, having applied the test outlined in Paragraphs 5.2 and 5.3 of the Councillors' Code of Conduct, concluded that her interest did not preclude her from staying in the meeting although she did not comment during the discussion.

Mr D Loudon declared a financial interest in this item as he had a close relative who owned land zoned in Area TN07 and he left the meeting during discussion.

There had been circulated Report No ERA/14/20 dated 22 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer - Infrastructure and Environment.

A presentation was provided which covered the plan's vision, processes and timelines, a summary of the nine main issues detailed in the report and consultation plans.

During discussion, Members raised several proposed amendments to the Plan, all detailed in the decision below. Other issues raised included the following:

- information was sought and provided on the Council's policy in relation to affordable housing self-builds;
- in relation to landowners offering to sell land for development that was not allocated as such in the Plan, there would be opportunity during consultation for landowners to raise concerns about zoning and further reports would be brought to Area Committees following this process to seek approval of the final Plan;
- it was important not to neglect possible future leisure / tourism use on land zoned for large-scale industrial use at Nigg;
- information was sought on proposed changes to the 25% Affordable Housing policy, with consideration being given to increasing the percentage in areas with the greatest need;
- the dial-a-bus proposal for Seaboard Villages was welcomed;
- the current allocation of housing in Tain was not considered sufficient; and
- with reference to the report on the Freeport Bid that had been considered at the previous day's Economy and Infrastructure Committee, this could have a significant impact on development and growth in the area if successful.

The Committee:

- i. **APPROVED** the Main Issues Report (as applicable to this committee area) to be published for public consultation, subject to the following amendments:

- a. augmented references to be added within the relevant settlement sections to Evanton Rail Halt, potential Freeport status, and an enhanced rail spur to Highland Deephaven;
 - b. addition of a reference in the Placemaking Priorities text for Evanton to the limited capacity at Kiltearn Primary School and along Swordale Road;
 - c. addition of a specific preferred use of a Caravan Park for site SB02 within Seaboard Villages;
 - d. addition of a reference in the Placemaking Priorities text for Inver to allow for greater linear settlement expansion and the important role of the primary school as a hub for the community;
 - e. that the sites south west of Tain bypass have their preference changed to Alternative rather than Non-Preferred and that the related text be changed to explain that the Easter Ross Area Committee and in particular local Ward Members believe that these sites (TN10, TN12, TN13 and TN14) are more viable than alternatives within the bypass in particular in terms of accommodating self build housing plot development;
- ii. **AGREED** the approach to consultation outlined in Paragraph 6.1 of the report; and
 - iii. **NOTED** the important role that the plan would play in addressing the Climate & Ecological Emergency, economic recovery and in taking forward the Council's agreed Indicative Regional Spatial Strategy recently submitted to Scottish Government;
 - iv. **AGREED** to investigate the potential for improvements to Portmahomack Harbour with the Council's Harbour Team; and
 - v. **AGREED** to discuss with the relevant case officer why the Grove site in Tain had not come forward for development.

6. Housing Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais a thaobh Taigheadais

There had been circulated Report No ERA/15/20 dated 19 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer Housing and Property.

During discussion, the following main issues were considered:

- tribute was paid to the tremendous work undertaken by the Housing team during the challenges of the Covid-19 crisis;
- the trend on repairs and voids performance was of concern, and was mainly the result of access difficulties during the covid-19 crisis;
- a breakdown of the information contained in Appendix 1 for Wards 6&7 would be helpful in future reports;
- although arrears had risen significantly at the start of the financial year, they had reduced in the second quarter; and
- it was hoped that business opportunities on housing estates could be encouraged and, in relation to the possible use of Council-owned garages for small businesses, an options appraisal was being undertaken on the Council's garage estate and would be reported on in due course.

The Committee **NOTED** the information provided on housing performance in the period 1 April to 30 September 2020 and **AGREED** to investigate the possibility

of desegregating the information contained in Appendix 1 of future reports to provide a breakdown for Wards 6&7.

7. Invergordon Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ghòrdain

There had been circulated Report No ERA/16/20 dated 13 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance and Executive Chief Officer, Community and Place.

During discussion, attention was drawn to the need to find options for a resolution to the Town Hall situation.

The Committee:

- i. **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Invergordon Common Good Fund;
- ii. **NOTED** the current position in relation to the Invergordon Town Hall; and
- iii. **AGREED** the report to the next meeting should contain options for the future of Invergordon Town Hall.

8. Tain Common Good Fund Maoin Math Coitcheann Bhaile Dhubhthaich

There had been circulated Report No ERA/17/20 dated 23 October 2020 by the Executive Chief Officer, Resources and Finance, and Executive Chief Officer, Communities and Place.

The Committee **NOTED** the Quarter 2 monitoring statement for the Tain Common Good Fund.

9. Minutes Geàrr-chunntas

There had been circulated and **NOTED** Minutes of Meeting of the Easter Ross Area Committee held on 20 August 2020.

The meeting ended at 12.15pm