

**The Highland Council
Caithness Committee**

Minutes of Meeting of the Caithness Committee held REMOTELY on Monday 22 August 2022 at 10.00am.

Present:

Mr R Bremner
Mr A Jarvie
Mr W Mackay
Mr S Mackie

Ms J McEwan
Mr M Reiss
Mr K Rosie

Officials in attendance:

Mr M Sutherland, Ward Manager, Communities and Place
Ms J Sutherland, Roads Operations Manager, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr R Bartlett, Technician, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms L MacKellaich, Road Safety Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Mr A Puls, Principal Officer – Building Conservation, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms S James-Gaukroger, Townscape Heritage Assistant Project Officer, Infrastructure, Environment and Economy
Ms S Murdoch, Common Good Fund Officer, Performance and Governance
Ms A Macrae, Committee Administrator, Performance and Governance

Also in attendance:

Station Commander P Farrell, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service

Mr S Mackie in the Chair

1.	<p>Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan</p> <p>An apology for absence was intimated on behalf of Mr R Gunn.</p> <p>The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, extended best wishes to Mr Gunn and his family.</p>
2.	<p>Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt</p> <p>There were no declarations of interest.</p>
3.	<p>Minutes Geàrr-chunntas</p> <p>There was circulated for noting Minutes of the Caithness Committee held on 9 February 2022 which were approved by the Council on 10 March 2022.</p>

4.	<p>Matters Arising – Action Tracker Gnothaichean Ag Èirigh – Tracair Ghnìomhan</p> <p>Following discussion, the Committee AGREED that Members review the format and content of the proposed revised action tracker, a copy of which would be circulated to Members following the meeting.</p>
5.	<p>Scottish Fire and Rescue Local Performance Report Aithisg Dèanadais Ionadail Seirbheis Smàlaidh is Teasairginn na h-Alba</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/08/22 by the Local Senior Officer for Highland.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the reduction in the number of wild fires in the area compared to the previous year was welcomed; • the link between the Service and the NHS Home Telecare Service was extremely important for elderly people in the area; • clarification was sought and provided on the contributory factors which impacted on station availability, concern being expressed at the figures for Thurso for the second appliance and the impact on response times to incidents. It was reported there were a number of new applicants for Thurso and it was hoped staffing levels would improve significantly going forward; and • Members would endeavour to support the Service in any way possible in terms of recruitment in the area. <p>The Committee NOTED, following scrutiny the Area Performance Report.</p>
6.	<p>Roads – Winter Service Plan 2022/23 Rathaidean – Plana Seirbheis Geamhraidh 2022/23</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/09/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the Winter Maintenance Plan be circulated to the Association of Caithness Community Councils to provide for a more coordinated approach in terms of community support. In addition, it would be helpful if the Roads Operations Manager could attend a future meeting of the Association; • confirmation was sought and provided that the Manager would investigate the potential to acquire more secure salt bins; • the need to develop a better understanding with communities in terms of the properties of salt/grit in the freeze/thaw conditions that had been increasingly experienced in the area; • the winter service provided by the Council on Whitechapel Road, Wick should mean there was no reason that Stagecoach could not to return to the Riverside Bus Stance The Manger confirmed she would check the status of this route and report back to Members;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in regard to the above, Member support be provided to the Roads Team for a submission to the Caithness Transport Forum on this matter and to seek a commitment from Stagecoach in this regard; • the potential for staff from other Teams within the Council to assist with roads maintenance over the winter months. It was reported this issue was to be discussed at the Redesign Board and Members were encouraged to attend; and • confirmation was sought and provided that the Roads Operation Manager would report back to local Members in relation to the Pothole Pro being deployed on Trinkie Road, Wick. <p>The Committee:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. APPROVED the Winter Service Plan for 2022/23; ii. AGREED to provide Member support to the Roads Team for a submission to the Caithness Transport Forum; and iii. AGREED that the Ward Manager circulate the Plan to the Association of Caithness Community Councils.
<p>7.</p>	<p>Noss traffic calming and uncontrolled pedestrian crossing points Socrachadh trafaig agus àiteachan-choisichean neo-riaghailte Nòis</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/10/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the proposal be endorsed on the basis of the safety improvements it would deliver in this area of Wick and around Noss Primary School; • a reduction in vehicle speeds was important in terms of removing barriers to active travel choices and it was hoped more projects of this type would come to fruition in Caithness; • It was important to understand that the project was being funded through additional external grant funding from Transport Scotland specifically for ‘Cycling, Walking and Safer Routes’ and not through the Council’s budget for the maintenance of roads and footpaths; and • clarification was sought and provided that it was intended to undertake the works by the end of the financial year. <p>The Committee:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i NOTED following consideration, the objection made in accordance with the regulations and not withdrawn; and ii APPROVED the construction of the traffic calming on Henrietta Street and Willowbank, Wick.

8.

**Castletown traffic calming and uncontrolled pedestrian crossing point
Socrachadh trafaig agus àite-choisichean neo-riaghailte Bhaile a' Chaisteil**

There had been circulated Report No CC/11/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- the scheme addressed an issue in a specific area of the village and could be built on going forward through wider interventions to make Castletown as safe as possible;
- the level of engagement by the public in response to the proposal be recognised and it was considered the objections received had been addressed appropriately;
- the proposal would deliver positive benefits throughout the village including around the Primary School. It was confirmed that in response to speed surveys further remedial measures were being considered around the School;
- road safety was paramount and Castletown should be a priority candidate for a 20mph speed limit given the accident history in this area;
- confirmation was sought and provided that 20mph limit schemes were being rolled out in Highland on a priority basis and the proposal for Castletown would help support the implementation of a 20mph scheme. It would have no implications for the decision-making process on a 20mph limit for the village;
- concern that the proposal for the pinch point at the play park would adversely impact on cyclists. It was confirmed that overrun areas for cyclists had been built into the scheme. A cycling bypass was not feasible due to the physical constraints of the road and the measures to improve pedestrian safety;
- debate as to whether there would be displacement of traffic onto side streets as a result of the scheme and confirmation that it was hoped to undertake works to a small section of an adjacent street without a footpath in future funding years;
- an explanation was sought and provided that the evidence showed a lights controlled crossing with lower pedestrian demand of the level predicted in Castletown encouraged red light running;
- Council officers continue to explore future interventions in Castletown in light of the average speed surveys and lack of suitable pedestrian walkways in some parts of the village with the intention that any interventions support future 20pmh limit ambitions; and
- to state the Committee's support for a 20pmh limit for Castletown and that it would engage in any suitable consultation on this matter as it arose.

The Committee:-

- i **NOTED** following consideration, all objections made in accordance with the regulations and not withdrawn;
- ii **NOTED** following consideration, all representations received during statutory consultation;
- iii **APPROVED** the construction of the traffic calming on Main Street, Castletown;
- iv **AGREED** to request Council officers to continue to explore future interventions in Castletown in light of the average speed surveys and lack of

	<p>suitable pedestrian walkways in some parts of the village with the intention that any interventions support future 20pmh limit ambitions; and</p> <p>v AGREED to state the Committee's support for a 20pmh limit for Castletown and that it would engage in any suitable consultation on this matter as it arises.</p>
9.	<p>Thurso 20 mph Speed Limit Crìoch Astair 20 msu Inbhir Theòrsa</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/12/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • while there was popular support for the principle of a 20pmh speed limit in Thurso, there were concerns around the need to improve compliance and that some level of enforcement by Police Scotland would act as an effective deterrent; • the culture and attitudes of drivers towards compliance with the 20mph limit would change overtime and the need for drivers to take responsibility and recognise that these schemes were designed to improve road safety and encourage active travel; • the opportunity to educate further on the benefits of active travel, for example through a presentation to the Association of Community Councils; and • the potential to make representations to Transport Scotland on the need for a more cohesive 20mph limit through Thurso within the town boundaries. <p>The Committee:-</p> <p>i NOTED the background to the proposed 20mph speed limit order for Thurso;</p> <p>ii NOTED following consideration, the 1 objection made in accordance with the regulations and not withdrawn;</p> <p>iii NOTED following consideration, the 2 representations of support received during statutory consultation;</p> <p>iv NOTED there were 2 resolved objections and one letter of support received during the consultation for the associated traffic calming on Janet Street;</p> <p>v APPROVED the making of the Road Traffic Regulation Order; and</p> <p>vi NOTED the intention the intention to carry out after speed counts to determine effectiveness of the new reduce speed limit; and</p> <p>vii AGREED to make available a Member representation to Transport Scotland in respect of harmonising a 20pmh speed limit in Thurso within the town boundaries.</p>
10.	<p>Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan – Update Measadh agus Plana Stiùiridh Sgìre Glèidhteachais Inbhir Theòrsa – Fios às Ùr</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/13/22 by the Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure, Environment and Economy.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p>

- a detailed explanation was sought and provided on the flexibility allowed in relation to the range and type of replacement windows permitted within conservation areas in view of public concerns regarding affordability and increasing energy costs. It was confirmed that while timber windows were more expensive than uPVC, it was rare in circumstances where timber windows were required in conservation areas for complaints to be received;
- clarification was sought and provided that Old St Peter's Church was a scheduled monument and therefore benefited from the highest level of protection whether or not it was included in the Conservation Area. Its inclusion in the Conservation Area would not give the building any additional protection or access to funding;
- concern at the lack of support the community had received from national organisations in terms of making Old St Peter's Church more of an asset to Thurso. It was confirmed that Council officials, Historic Environment Scotland, a structural engineer and community representatives were due to meet to discuss the opportunity for stabilisation works to be carried out to the building;
- confirmation there was the potential for Old St Peter's Church to be retained as an island within the Conservation Area with the adjacent residential properties being excluded in view of concerns around the affordability of window replacements and given the unprecedented increase in energy prices;
- an explanation was sought and provided as to the rationale for Springbank House being included in the Conservation Area; and
- more frequent reviews of conservation areas were required to protect buildings and retain the local character of settlements in the area;

Thereafter, Mr S Mackie seconded by Mr K Rosie **moved** that Springbank House be retained in the Conservation Area.

Mr M Reiss seconded by Mr W Mackay moved as an **amendment** that Springbank House be removed from the Conservation Area.

On a vote being taken, the motion received 3 votes and the amendment received 2 votes, with 2 abstentions, and the motion was therefore carried, the votes having been cast as follows:-

Motion (3): Mr A Jarvie, Mr S Mackie, Mr K Rosie.

Amendment (2): Mr W Mackay, Mr M Reiss.

Abstentions (2): Mr R Bremner, Ms J McEwan.

Decision

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the public comments and the Council response; and
- AGREED** to recommend that the Economy & Infrastructure Committee formally approve and adopt the Thurso Conservation Area Appraisal and Management Plan, including the amended Conservation Area boundary, on 10 November 2022, subject to the retention of Old St Peter's Church within the Conservation Area.

<p>11.</p>	<p>Wick Common Good Fund – Update Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige - Fios às Ùr</p> <p>There had been circulated Report No CC/14/21 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive and Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance and Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place.</p> <p>The Council Leader advised that he had listed a number of specific detailed questions in regard to this item in an email to the Ward Manager/Common Good Fund Officer. It was suggested that substantive answers be provided to those questions outwith the meeting and included as an addendum to the Minute in due course.</p> <p>In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • this was an initial report on the new Common Good Fund and there would be more substantive reports brought forward in future; • a proper financial report was required which also provided detailed information on income, including forecasted income; • the need to have a structured business plan for increasing and growing the Fund noting that maximising the benefit of Common Good land and assets was the priority of the community; • the need to grow the Fund through investment over a significant period of time before incurring expenditure to ensure the Fund was more sustainable in the longer term and could deliver more significant benefits for Wick; • the potential to improve signage at Council car parks to specify that voluntary payments would be used only for the benefit of Wick on the basis this would encourage the public to pay; and • the potential to use local contractors rather than the Council to undertake the repair and maintenance of Common Good assets to support the local economy and potentially reduce costs. <p>The Committee:-</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> i. NOTED the position of Wick Common Good fund at the end of the first quarter; and ii. NOTED the update on current Wick Common Good issues; and iii. AGREED that the Ward Manager/Common Good Officer provide a detailed response to the points listed in the Council Leader’s email in relation to the Fund and this be circulated to Members and included as an addendum to the Minute in due course.
<p>12.</p>	<p>Wick Common Good Fund – Consultation on proposal to dispose, by lease, of Bignold House to Wick Academy Football Club Maoin Math Coitcheann Inbhir Ùige – Co-chomhairle mu mholadh airson faighinn cuidhteas, le aonta-màil, de Thaigh Bignold gu Club Ball-coise Acadamaidh Inbhir Ùige</p>

There had been circulated Report No CC/15/21 by the Acting Depute Chief Executive/Executive Chief Officer Performance and Governance and Executive Chief Officer – Communities and Place.

In discussion, Members raised the following main points:-

- an explanation was sought and provided as to why the valuation placed on the property had decreased due to the existence of the 50 year lease and the rationale for the proposed rent;
- the proposed rent did not represent a fair and reasonable return for the Fund and the people of Wick. A higher rental income would be more appropriate based on a standard way of assessing return. A full repair, maintenance and insurance lease was standard terms for a commercial lease;
- reference to the history and condition of Bignold House which was substandard, not fit for purpose as a dwelling and likely to become derelict. The proposed lease would deliver holistic benefits for the community in terms of the improvements to be undertaken to the building by the tenants, development of the asset and the amenity of the whole area. The Football Club was aware that the rent would be subject to review every five years.

Thereafter, Mr A Jarvie moved that the consultation be re-issued on the basis of an annual rent of £3,000 but on failing to find a seconder the motion fell.

The Committee:-

- NOTED** the outcome of the consultation process undertaken as detailed in paragraph 4 below and contained in the analysis at **Appendix 1**;
- APPROVED** the responses to the representations raised in connection with the proposal for publication on the Council's website as contained in the table in **Appendix 1**.
- AGREED** the proposal to dispose, by lease, of Bignold House, Bignold Park, South Street, Wick to Wick Academy Football Club; and
- NOTED** that, if agreed, it will be necessary to seek Sheriff Court consent in respect of the disposal because the land is considered inalienable.

* Mr A Jarvie asked that his dissent from this decision be recorded.

**13. Ward budget grants
Tabhartasan Buidseat Uàird**

The Committee **NOTED** that the following Ward Discretionary Budget application had been approved since 1 April 2022:

- Joint award from Wards 2 and 3 - new flagpole for Wick - £1500

The meeting ended at 1.50pm.