

STRATHPEFFER COMMUNITY COUNCIL

CHAIR'S REPORT TO ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (AGM) TO BE HELD ON

WEDNESDAY 6 JULY 2022 AT 7:30PM BY ZOOM VIDEO CALL

Our last AGM was held on the 2 June 2021. This report covers the period from 2 June 2021 to date. While the restrictions imposed during the pandemic have largely now been lifted, the Community Council (CC) has continued to meet on a monthly basis using video conferencing facilities i.e. Zoom. All members of the CC recognise the benefit of meeting in person and it is hoped that we will return to normal "in person" meetings soon. However, given the recent surge in Covid numbers, it is not clear when that might be possible.

Gail Maclean

It was with great sadness that we heard of the passing of Gail Maclean. Gail had been a member of the Community Council and a much-loved member of the Community. She is sadly missed by her friends and family.

Retirement of Councillor Ian Cockburn

After many years of regular attendance at the Community Council meetings, Councillor Ian Cockburn announced his retiral as a Councillor at the recent Council elections in May. Ian has been very supportive of the Community Council over the years and he was thanked for his hard work. Ian was replaced by Chris Birt who was elected as one of our new ward councillors. Chris attended his first meeting with the Community Council on the 1 June 2022.

Fin Graham – Double Silver Medallist at the Tokyo Paralympics

In September, we were delighted to celebrate the homecoming of Fin Graham, a local lad, who had won two silver medals at the Tokyo Paralympics. An event was held in the Gazebo in the Square and around 100 members of the community gathered to congratulate Fin and his family.

Restoration of the Old Phone Box in the Square

Thanks must go to Steve Evans for his hard work in refurbishing the old phone box in the Square. Steve did a marvellous job of restoring the box. It is now being used as a lending library and information hub.

Restoration of the Fountain Garden

During the year, John and Tri Wombell "adopted" the fountain garden in the Square and have been maintaining it for some months now. They have really tidied it up and made it a lovely location to sit and watch the fountain. We are very grateful to them for their hard work.

Strathpeffer.org website and Strath Times

We are very grateful to Bruce Messer who continues to manage and maintain our village website and to Miranda Wharam who has edited and produced a number of editions of the Strath Times which were all well received. Sadly, both Bruce and Miranda have indicated that they would like to step down from this work and we are currently looking for people to take on these important roles.

Litter picking

Earlier in the year, the Community Council was approached by members of the community seeking support for the purchase of equipment to assist with litter picking. This support was given and thanks are due to Karen Abbott and her group of volunteers who have taken on the role of litter picking around the area. They have made a big positive difference.

The new Gazebo in the Square

Over the course of the year, we have seen the new Gazebo in the Square being used by a number of different musical groups. Some of these groups are now becoming regular users which is very welcome. If anyone would like to use the gazebo for an event, they should contact Ron McAulay. It is free to use for members of the community.

Christmas Lights

The Christmas lights in the village once again contributed to a positive festive spirit. The lights we have available for the Christmas tree are now reaching an age and condition that means we will need to buy more. Funding has been found and orders should be placed soon.

Queen's Jubilee celebrations

The Community Council celebrated the Queen's Platinum Jubilee with the planting of a new tree in the Square adjacent to the new Sweetie Shop. Janet Bowen, the former Lord Lieutenant for the area, carried out the planting. Thanks are also due to Henry Cameron and his colleagues in the Fingal Lodge, Dingwall who paid for the tree.

The new Strathpeffer Community Development Trust (SCDT)

The new SCDT was created in 2021 out of the old Strathpeffer Community Association. It continues to manage and oversee the running of the Community Centre. However, the development of the SCDT into a broader organisation with wider responsibilities across the community has yet to really take grip. It is hoped that over the coming year, the SCDT will take on that broader role.

Town Centre Fund – 2021

The works funded by this grant in 2021 included: improved signage; a replacement pump for the fountain and waterfall cascade in the Square along with the installation of lighting in the roof of the new gazebo. This work has all been completed successfully with the exception of replacing a small number of old finger signs on the two old poles in the Square. Most of the work was completed by volunteers allowing the fund to pay for more finger signs than originally planned. The new signs look very good and fit well into our Victorian village.

The Strathpeffer Residents' Association also secured some funding towards the cost of installing essential drainage works for the new play park which has now been completed successfully.

The Town Centre Fund has now been replaced with a new fund called the Place Based Investment Programme (PBIP). An application made to the PBIP this year for works to renovate the façade of the shops in the Square was not approved. We did receive feedback on our application and hope to submit another application this coming year.

Proposed Wind Farms

During the year a number of proposed wind farms have been the subject of much discussion within the Community Council.

At **Strathrory**, the developer applied for planning permission, had it rejected and then appealed. The appeal was upheld and the developer has now submitted a number of revisions to their proposals which has generated a new application. At the time of writing, the matter is still under consideration by the planners.

A new farm at **Aultguish** has also been proposed and is going through the planning process.

Within recent weeks, a further proposal to build a new wind farm at **Abhainn Dubh** on the Heights above Dingwall has come to our attention. This proposal is at the early stages with the developer due to attend our meeting in September.

The Community Council has taken a positive approach to these developments to date providing local concerns are considered and addressed to the satisfaction of the relevant authorities such as Nature Scot and SEPA. We are due to discuss the latest proposal at Abhainn Dubh at our meeting on the 6/7/22.

Strathpeffer Together – Heritage Lottery Fund application

During the year, the Strathpeffer Together group prepared and submitted a comprehensive application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a number of major projects within the Village. Unfortunately, this application was unsuccessful and the group has discussed how a revised application might look. To date, this revised application has not yet been developed in detail but it is hoped that work on this will recommence in the near future.

The groups that make up the Strathpeffer Together initiative are as follows:

- Strathpeffer Community Council
- Strathpeffer Residents' Association
- Strathpeffer Pavilion Community Trust
- Strathpeffer Community Association
- St Anne's Church
- Highland Museum of Childhood
- Strathpeffer Golf Club
- Strathpeffer Shinty Club

Flooding in the Village

While some work was carried out by the Roads team of HC during the year to clear choked gullies and road drains, little else has been done to address the potentially significant concerns about flooding within the village. This issue remains an area of concern to the Community Council.

Improvements completed by the Roads team of HC in the Village

Having raised the issue about flooding, it is only right to thank the HC Roads team for the improvements they did carry out during the year in the village. These works included:

- Resurfacing of a large section of the Golf Course Road,
- Resurfacing of large patches of the main A834
- Removal of a dead tree adjacent to the new Sweetie Shop
- Various tidying up works around the Square opposite the RS McColl's shop

- Clearing of some gullies and road drains known to be blocked

Inner Moray Firth Development Plan 2 (IMFDP2)

Following the initial consultation on the Inner Moray Firth Development Plan 2 earlier in 2021, the HC presented its “settled view” which largely concurred with the views of the Community Council. A second round of consultation on the IMFDP2 has now been held and the Community Council has responded reiterating its views and supporting the “settled view” of the HC. We await the outcome of the second round of consultation.

Speeding through the Village

This issue continues to create angst amongst many members of the community. A survey was carried out during the year which was not considered conclusive. The locations of the monitoring points used for the survey did not match those proposed by the Community Council and some members of the community. In recent days a couple of Vehicle Activated Speed Signs (VASS) have been erected on lamp posts within the village but as before, they are not in the positions where the CC and members of the community have suggested. This issue is likely to continue to be discussed at future meetings.

Overgrown Hedges

This issue raises its head each year. Overgrown hedges alongside the pavements restricts the available space on the pavements for pedestrians forcing them to walk on the road. This becomes a hazardous issue when it relates to the pavements on the busier roads such as the main A834 and Golf Course Road. During 2021, the HC Roads team did a very good piece of work to trim back the hedges alongside the main A834 road on the western side of the village. A number of owners also addressed their hedges which was much appreciated. The areas of concern for this year relate to the eastern end of the village. The lengths involved may be short but remain of concern.

Scottish Water – Work on the main sewer at the junction of the A834 and the bottom of Garden House Brae

In January, Scottish Water returned to complete some major sewer upgrade works. These works closed the A834 through the village to through traffic and created a great deal of inconvenience to many. By way of compensation, Scottish Water agreed to purchase a number of loads of stone and dust that will be used to repair the path known as the Chisholm Trail which runs alongside the football pitch beside the school. This path is used as a Safe Route to school by many children. To date, the first of these loads has already been spread by volunteers along the eastern half of the Chisholm Trail. Further work involving volunteers is planned for the coming months.

Incidents of vandalism

Throughout the year there have been a number of incidents of vandalism in the village. These incidents are very disappointing and while the Police has been involved, the incidents continue sporadically. One of the outcomes of these incidents has been the need to lock the public toilets at night to prevent damage.

Vacancy on the Community Council

We have a vacancy on the Community Council and are keen to find another member of the community who would like to join. If you are interested in being opted on to the Community Council as a member, please get in touch with Ron McAulay – ron.mcaulay@btopenworld.com.

Summary

It has been an interesting year and the Community Council has managed to continue to make good progress on a number of important fronts but very little of that progress would have been possible if it were not for the tremendous help we get from volunteers in the village. Thanks go to all of you!

Ron McAulay

Chair of Strathpeffer Community Council – 4 July 2022