

August Minutes of the BCC

Present: Dave Conroy (Chair), David Milner (Vice Chair), Lynn MacNabb (Treasurer), Viv McKie (Secretary), Harry MacNabb, Maggie Dornan, Linda MacPhee, Chris Luby, Christopher Milligan, Andrew Marshall, Cllr Rosemary Bruce, Cllr Eileen Durno, John Wills, Mary Lennox

Apologies: Cllr Ann Ross, Tony Tulett, Annya Law

Councillors' Report

The Council met at the end of July to discuss the widespread and long lasting effect of the Coronavirus crisis. Due to restrictions in place, some services had to be scaled back or stopped entirely while others were far more in demand. New priorities are being discussed, alongside new strategies and a new financial plan. The goal is to carry on supporting the community and to target the services to those with the most need. It is important to also be mindful of the possibility of a second wave in Autumn. To this end a community impact survey will be available for completion by groups and individuals.

Schools return on Wednesday following two in service days. Each school has its own plan for returning pupils.

Households can now book more trips to the waste disposal site at the Crow's Nest, and the 20 mile speed limit at the entrance on Raemoir Road has been removed.

During a time of increased visits to our surrounding countryside, it is worth noting that the Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service posts updates on its Facebook page when car parks in certain areas become full. This allows visitors to respond by planning a visit to another site. When arriving in an area, if you notice the car park is full, please do not block roads by parking, instead move on a visit another place. A new poster campaign has been launched encouraging visitors not to litter. This has been a big issue during lock down with abandoned items including tents and human waste.

The Space for People initiative and changes have received a lot of negative feedback from the public. These changes were made with the best of intentions to allow safe social distancing during this Global Pandemic. This virus has not gone away and there are still residents who do not feel safe being out and about. Aberdeen City having to return to lock down goes to prove that we cannot afford to be complacent. Social distancing and related guidelines will be in effect until it is safe to lift them. The councillors have received many negative and in some cases abusive emails from individuals who did not have the full information behind the reason these decisions were taken. BCC and the Banchory Business Association were statutory consultees, although it later became apparent that the representative for the BBA was not representing the BBA. This was not known until much further along the process.

There have been reports of a footpath traffic monitor near Hill of Banchory School being badly vandalised. It is lying on its side by the path with exposed cables and wires. Cllr Durno has raised with Aberdeenshire Council, but as this path is not adopted by the council the traffic counter is not theirs. The Roads Department have been contacted and they are tracing who this belongs to. It is in a dangerous condition at the moment but the council are aware and are chasing it up.

Further information was requested about the time frame for changes to council priorities and services, Cllr Bruce advised that it would be approximately the end of October when the council would usually have a review to see how they stood budget wise. Part of the process is waiting for updates from the Scottish Government. Some costs, for example the running of the Childcare hubs, may be reimbursed by the Scottish Government. There will be a knock on effect to this from decisions made by the UK Government as well. The financial implications of Covid-19 are serious and widespread. Aberdeenshire council employs roughly 16,000 staff, none of whom were

furloughed. All worked from home or were redeployed to assist other services and were paid for their excellent work despite all facilities being closed and not earning any revenue.

John Wills notified both his local councillors and the Community Council that he will be applying for the Marr Area Partnership's Grant Scheme.

APPROPRIATE USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA

Cllr Eileen Durno has brought to our attention many negative comments made by community councillors on social media, particularly regarding the Space for People changes and libellous comments regarding the councillors themselves. Cllr Durno was keen to emphasise that all councillors have an excellent working relationship. Members of the BCC posting slanderous comments on social media for all to see is completely inappropriate. Also given that the BCC were a consultee and had been broadly supportive of the Space for People changes it was unprofessional for the individual members to identify themselves publicly with a conflicting viewpoint. Cllr Durno does not wish to take any further measures at this time, but felt it important to have these events minuted along with her disappointment.

The conduct of members on social media has been discussed and minuted both over the lock down period and earlier this year and councillors were reminded of their responsibilities and the Aberdeenshire council guidelines we are expected to adhere to. Twice this year the Chair has had to approach moderators of Facebook groups to have inflammatory remarks removed. Both times the injured party has not wanted to take any further action. However as a community council we cannot afford for this to continue. After notes from the Chair and verbal warning being issued twice within an eight month period, any further offences will result in members being removed from the council. Individual members expressed their regret that the Councillors had suffered personal attacks from community council members and agreed that it would be appropriate to invoke disciplinary proceedings from this point onwards. The actions of our members cannot be allowed to bring the community council as a body into disrepute. On social media if you pertain to represent the community council then we speak as one voice or we do not speak at all.

APPROVAL OF JULY MINUTES AND MATTERS ARISING

No matters arose from the July minutes, they were proposed by David Milner, seconded by Maggie Dornan and adopted.

COMMUNITY COUNCIL ELECTIONS AND VENUE

Following feedback from all community councils in the area, the decision was made to cancel this year's elections entirely. The next election will be held in June 2021. We will still be required to hold an AGM in October in order to approve the accounts which we need to receive our council funding. All members reaching the end of their term have agreed to carry on in their roles until June. However David Conroy has raised that his professional life has become much busier and he will only be able to continue in the role of Chair with increased support from the other officers. Guidance has also been issued regarding booking of rooms in council buildings. From the timetable it looks like we will be able to book a venue from the 12th September onwards, although we have had no specific information as yet.

Christopher Milligan continues to look into the Town Hall as a possible venue.

Given the time restraints, it was decided to plan for another Zoom meeting in September with a view to a physical meeting in October.

The possibility of holding hybrid meeting in the future to aid social distancing and to support those who do not yet feel comfortable gathering in groups was discussed. As we have the Zoom capability now and access to Aberdeenshire Council Wi-Fi in the venues it should be possible to have

meetings with a mix of physical attendees and members dialling in from home.

SPACE FOR PEOPLE

Councillor Ann Ross joined the Zoom during this discussion.

David Milner recently attended a zoom meeting regarding these changes, along with representatives from the Banchory Business Association and Martin Hall from the shire council. This remains a very contentious subject in our community, with some calling for the immediate and total removal of all restrictions while the council remain adamant that these measures are necessary in the interest of public health and safety. A compromise of sorts has been reached with the cones being removed from some of the wider areas of pavement on the high street. Martin Hall reiterated that the current law of the land requires us to leave two meters distance from other households, although this is under constant review.

Banchory was selected for these measures as a result of it's inclusion on the Town Centre First funding list issued a few years ago. The measures were brought in as a Temporary Traffic Restriction Order which the council is able to do with no consultation required. These can last up to 18 months and was chosen as an effective way to get something done quickly. Other avenues can take six to eight months to come to fruition which would not have been suitable as immediate action was required.

The Vice Chair and Secretary have reached out to other community councils affected by these changes, and Stonehaven and Inverurie have responded that the mood in their communities is one of resigned acceptance.

There are Banchory residents who do not yet feel safe to come out and resume shopping and socialising on the High Street. There are also concerns that the vitriol and negativity on social media has made the environment so hostile that people do not feel able to disagree and post in support of the distancing measures.

As a snapshot in time, Covid cases are at a two month high in Grampian. The virus has not gone away, cases are increasing, and if they continue to increase Aberdeenshire may join the city in lock down. Following the guidelines to reduce spread of Covid 19 is as important as it ever was.

Banchory Community Council takes no political stance on the Space for People changes. We acknowledge the two 'camps' developing, on one side those concerned about the effect on local business and on the other the need for keeping our community safe. We sympathise with both viewpoints.

Cllr Bruce is keen to point out that in Inverurie the shops and businesses have adopted a very positive approach. The message from there is yes, we are open and you are welcome to come and shop. Although this is now the case with Banchory, in the early days she found it frustrating that much of the negativity was coming from the shopkeepers themselves- "the cones look dreadful, don't come, there is nowhere to park". In talks the head of the Banchory Business Association Ian MacIntosh has now been very constructive in taking a common sense approach and pushing the message "Come to Banchory, it is safe to shop". The council and police are monitoring the usage of car parks.

Concerns were raised regarding the attractiveness of the cones. Cllr Durno let us know that she met with the Banchory Business Association on the 2nd July and proposed further talks with the council with the end goal of having planters or something more decorative instead of cones. Local groups such as Men's Shed and Bonnie Banchory could have been involved in the design, construction and installation of these. These could then have been distributed around the community once they were no longer needed. That offer was declined by Banchory Business Association. As this situation is likely to be with us for some time, any investment in improving the aesthetic of the social distancing measures may be well worth it. Aberdeenshire Council Officers are very will to engage with both the community council and the business association with this. Cllr Ann Ross has urged us to work with the Business Association on this. A unified and jointed up approach can only be of

benefit to Banchory as a whole. Maggie Dornan has offered to liaise with both Bonnie Banchory and the Banchory Gardening club to assist with any projects.

It was acknowledged that communication was a problem, especially at the beginning of the project. The councillors have received many, on occasion abusive, emails about the new measures. However often once the reasoning and process behind the measures have been properly explained, people have become a lot more understanding. This is perhaps an opportunity for 'lessons learned' for the council. The community council are horrified that our councillors should have received any abuse for carrying out their jobs and condemn this entirely.

The 20mph limit has been generally well received.

David and Viv will put together a rough draft of a non political statement in support of the safety of returning to shop in Banchory.

SOCIAL MEDIA FORUM

Linda MacPhee suggested that there could be a place for a social media forum for Banchory residents to raise concerns and questions for the community council more easily. There are a wide variety of local groups at the moment, but they are a mix of all sorts and some more serious enquiries can get swamped and lost. It was agreed that this could be done as part of the existing Community Council Facebook Page. Linda has volunteered to look into and to moderate this on our behalf. We will add this to the agenda for our September meeting.

THE BOX SPACE IN BELLFIELD PARK

This is the small building adjacent to the Rose Garden. Jean Henraitty has contacted us to let us know that Number One have taken over the lease for this space and asking if the community Council would have an interest in using it. It was agreed that we do not need that space or the costs associated with it.

BANCHORY COMMUNITY RESILIENCE TEAM

Since the beginning of lock down, between 280 and 300 requests have been fulfilled by the BCRT. These have mostly been deliveries for prescriptions. Since the Government advice for shielding ended at the beginning of August, we have contacted our service users, the doctors surgeries and the pharmacies themselves to let them know we will no longer be operational. As the restrictions have now been loosened so much, we feel it is no longer an acquirement there is a second wave or further lock downs we are in a position to start up again very easily. The Resilience Team phone is currently with the secretary and will continue to be renewed for use as a general community council phone at the cost of £10 per month.

PLANNING

The statement on the LDP has been submitted on our behalf.

Again, this month has been mostly homeowner applications but there are three worth keeping an eye on.

Morrisons Supermarket has submitted a plan for a Garden Centre Style Kiosk in the centre of their car park. It was noted that this has been done successfully in their Dundee Store.

There is an application for a caravan storage area on Brathens Road.

Finally an application for five houses on a piece of land west of Raemoir Road.

CORRESPONDENCE

Norma Makin has let us know that the bill for our calendar advert will be due after the sample

calendar returns from the printers.

Quora fund have contacted us with an online survey asking how we have spent the grant money from them. This is the fund we combined with a donation from Scott Birse for a total of £2500 which we used to make donations to both Primary Schools. Each school has had a cheque for £625 with a view to giving them each a second cheque of the same amount for the ongoing additional support needed. Lynn McNabb will fill this on on our behalf.

TREASURER'S REPORT

The balance on the Youth 2000 checking account is £231.51

The balance on the Youth 2000 main account is £3010.30

As of the 29th July, the balance on our main account is £5100.76

Accounts will need to be prepared for our AGM next month. These will cover June 2019 to October 2020. Norma Makin stated last year that she would be happy to audit us again this year, Lynn will contact her regarding this.

COMMUNITY REPRESENTATIVES

POLICE AND SAFETY

We are not able currently to meet with the Police, but will circulate Police reports as we receive them.

A discussion was held regarding the use of masks on public transport. It was raised that bus drivers and shop assistants have no power to challenge or refuse service to anyone not wearing a mask, even though it is a legal requirement. This power rests solely with the police. However it was pointed out that there are many hidden disabilities that mean someone cannot safely wear a mask, and anti discrimination laws mean that all people have the right to carry on their daily business in public without being challenged and asked to explain or disclose personal, medical information. Sunflower lanyards and exemption cards are available but are not required.

WIND FARMS

The Feteresso extension has been resubmitted to planning after having made the necessary changes. Andrew Marshall, David Conroy and David Milner attended a meeting with Fughdee West regarding this and will keep us updated. That group are looking into community investment if the extension makes it through planning, but no timescale is available at the moment.

The current round of KGV funding is hugely under subscribed. Just under £10,000 is available for community projects, and currently only four applications have been received. Applications are open until the 28th August.

AoB

The Office Bearers met via Zoom with Paul Wilson regarding improvements and renovations to the recreation area by the lawn tennis club. Lynn MacNabb will report on this at the next meeting.

Chris Luby reminded us that the Banchory Fly was an available resource.

The next meeting will be held via Zoom on Monday the 14th September, 7:15pm for 7:30pm.