**Black Isle Partnership (BIP) – Black Isle Communities Meeting**

**Zoom Meeting 1000 17 August 2021**

**Present:** Cllr**.** Gordon Adam (Highland Council and BIP),Jon Palmer (BIP), Julian Paren (Minute taker and BIP), Sinclair Browne (BIP), Helena Macleod (Kessock Kindness and Residents Association of North Kessock), Ann Jefferson (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council), Anne Mackay (Killearnan Community Council), Nigel Shapcott (Cromarty Development Trust and Cromarty Care Project), Anne Phillips (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council), Vanessa Halhead (BIP), Cllr. Jennifer Barclay (Highland Council), Megan Mackenzie (Black Isle Cares), Cllr. Craig Fraser (Highland Council), Bruce Morrison (Ferintosh Community Council), Neil Cameron (Resolis Community Council), Sheila Currie (Transition Black Isle), Angie Morris (Culbokie Community Trust).

**Agenda 1: Minutes of the BIP - Black Isle Communities Meeting on 27 July 2021**

The circulated revised Minutes of the meeting on 27 July 2021 were adopted.

**Agenda 2: Strengthening local democracy on the Black Isle: The Black Isle Area Committee and how local communities interact with it**

Gordon Adam apologised that the first Black Isle Area Committee was not live-streamed and would only be available on YouTube at a later date. Whereas in pre-CoVid times Area Committees welcomed the attendance of the general public, they were not legally allowed to participate as the meetings were mainly to question officers and “rubberstamp” decisions agreed beforehand. Gordon apologised for raising expectations about the first Area Committee Meeting.

Gordon said a broader engagement was necessary in future meetings, and how that could be made possible was open to discussion. At the Black Isle Communities Meeting on 24 August he would invite Nicola Sinclair (past Chair of the Caithness Area Committee) where progress had been made to give more attention to groups in Caithness and the area Committee was “going its own way”.

Gordon emphasised that the Committee had great potential to take forward issues affecting the whole of the Black Isle that was a readily identifiable area in the Highlands.

Gordon opened two potential areas for discussion

(1) The advisability of seeking funding for a Community Development Officer for the Black Isle.

(2) The advisability of seeking views at the Area Committee from three strands

(a) The community Councils of the Black Isle (The Black Isle Area Committee had a statutory duty to consult them),

(b) The Black Isle Partnership membership,

(c) The Parent Council Groupings across the Black Isle (who were well funded independently of Ward funding)

Gordon said all such interactions would not preclude the Black Isle Community Councils speaking directly to Highland Council – a continuation of current practice. He thought three pan-Black Isle organisations should have their voices heard at the Black Isle Area Committee. He hoped in the months ahead agreement could be reached on how this could happen.

Jon Palmer agreed that having been a guest at the first Black Isle Area Committee, he had sat through the “rubber-stamping” of items on the agenda. But this made him question who had made the original decisions, how were they arrived at, and how much real consultation with residents had occurred beforehand? For Jon the vital question was how to create the right structure for a Black Isle Area Committee where all voices were heard.

Jon thought a face-to-face “conference” with all the relevant stakeholders might be a way to get input and to provide a basis for working together. Jon used words like “Mapping Exercise, Seeing where the gaps are, Who actually works together, Bridge building exercises, Diversity.”

He wondered if The Highland Third Sector Interface could facilitate such an event. Gordon Adam countered by suggesting Cai MacIver Support Coordinator for Dingwall/Seaforth might be useful.

Anne Macleod (Killearnan Community Council) expressed dismay that residents of Killearnan Community Council area would be disenfranchised through the formation of the Black Isle Area Council as many residents stayed in Ward 8 (and not The Black Isle Ward 9). She conceded that this would be temporary until the Highland Council elections with new Ward Boundaries until May 2022. Anne had sought clarification from Highland Council, but had not been satisfied with the response so far.

Nigel Shapcott supported Jon Palmer’s approach saying that it seemed that the near future could be potentially the only sure time organisations could meet up, as the future outcome of the pandemic might preclude genuine meetings. He urged that there should be a meeting as soon as September with the appropriate facilitators to ensure the many organisations that needed to be consulted were heard impartially.

Craig Fraser mentioned the formats of Ward Forums where those attending had the opportunity to question Highland Council Officers. He wondered how it would be possible to harness the potential of so many organisations and talented strong personalities living on the Black Isle to a common purpose. Jennifer Barclay said that she agreed with that.

Jon Palmer commented that there might be funding for a paid officer, but what the officer was asked to do would depend on a Job Description. That should be one topic for a conference.

Sheila Currie commented that she felt Community Councils were toothless, and their remit needed to be strengthened. At the same time pan-Black Isle organisations needed to be involved. Her perception was that Community Councils main role was to be reactive to planning issues, while it would be wonderful if their role was to be proactive, and to promote and develop what is good for the Black Isle to thrive and look forward.

Anne Phillips (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council) via Chat expressed a number of views that she was not able to speak to in this section of the meeting:

*The Scot.gov website says: Community Councils are the most local tier of STATUTORY representation in Scotland They bridge the gap between local authorities and communities, and help to make public bodies aware of the opinions and needs of the communities they represent.*

*Highland Council has a similar description. THC is required by statute to consult CC's over planning and licensing. The Community Empowerment Act sets out further consultation guidelines.*

*F&RCC recently delivered leaflets telling residents how to express their concerns and included a slip which could be hand written to reach those not online, so far we have a higher percentage return than the BIP survey.*

*We are very much in favour of collaborative working but feel that BIP needs to do more to become representative of the Black Isle and that CC's should have a place, they have a significant part to play.*

*In 2016 we met with the then Ward10 highland councillors to discuss how to improve communication sadly this is still a problem.*

*Our CC has taken an active part in the wellbeing partnership, resilience work, the conference group and will continue to work to achieve positive outcomes for our community.*

Gordon Adam agreed that Community Councils should be allowed to take the initiative.

Ann Jefferson agreed Community Councils were toothless – but not for want of trying to be proactive. She thought Community Councils could take the initiative to meet with all the voluntary groups in their own area and encourage the groups to work together effectively.

Bruce Morrison argued that it might be thought better for local networks to become stronger, but in his personal view, having worked for a long time with voluntary groups, there is no better way than admitting that chaos actually works. It was simply just not worth the time and effort to organise folk.

Ann Jefferson asked what difference a Black Isle Area Committee would make in the day-to-day dealings of the Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council with the Highland Council. She posed the question of where the Community Council had failed, as Highland Council just did not help whenever they were asked.

Gordon Adam commented that lacking close co-operation between groups in one community or living in a divided community would delay the progress of issues with Highland Council.

Vanessa Halhead said the Scottish Government set up Community Councils in 1976 to fail. \*\*\*\* They were designed to be toothless and their role had never been strengthened and only the Scottish Government could give them greater empowerment. The Black Isle Partnership’s role in the Covid pandemic had led to the Black Isle Communities coming together via Zoom. A Partnership on the Black Isle had to include more than Community Councils and understanding the different roles they all played would be beneficial for future development.

**\*\*\* Sarah M-T has added the following which suggests Vanessa was ill-informed. Community councils were a result of the The Local Government (Scotland) Act of 1973 which was a UK parliamentary act and was updated in 1994 - also pre establishment of a Scottish government.**

Julian Paren said he found a great disconnect between the Climate Policy of the UK aiming for a target of Net Zero and the steps taken by both the Scottish Government and Highland Council to make declarations for yet smaller areas of the UK. Taken to its limit, the Black Isle must take its place in achieving this goal. But as yet, he could see no plan/discussion/consultation to put this into effect at a local level. He thought it time that Highland Council entered a dialogue with communities on how the targets could be attained.

Vanessa Halhead agreed that the threat to low-lying areas of the Black Isle could not be ignored as sea levels rose. Craig Fraser said that the government’s Renewable Heat Incentive would end in March 2022 and there was nothing to replace it.

Returning to how a discussion might be organised to take forward the effective use of the new Black Isle Area Committee, Ann Jefferson asked how Ward Forums were organised.

Di Agnew explained that the events were held in public up to twice a year often at Culbokie Primary School. Councillors, two representatives from each Community Council, officers of Highland Council and School organisations usually participated. There would be one main topic for the meeting. 50-100 folk might become involved. There was a 20 minute Q&A at the end followed by refreshments when there was ample time to meet those attending . Di thought reinstating Ward Forums would make sense and funding would be available to cover costs.

Gordon Adam hoped that a meeting could be convened within the next six weeks to produce a preferred structure for the new Black Isle Area Committee. The question of whether this was best done at a Ward Forum or by other means was left unanswered. Craig Fraser said the event had to be well marketed with use of social media. Nigel Shapcott asked that necessary further steps could be explored by e-mail with a target of an event in September.

**Agenda 3: Update from the Communities**

Deferred until next meeting August 24 at 1000

The meeting closed at 11:17.