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

**Zoom Meeting 1000 18 May 2021**

**Present:** Cllr. Gordon Adam (GA) (host, Highland Councillor and BIP), Julian Paren (Minute taker and BIP), Becky Richmond (Black Isle Tourism Team), Neil Cameron (Resolis CC), Anne Phillips (Rosemarkie and Fortrose CC and Rosemarkie Amenities Association), Jon Palmer (Chair BIP), Nigel Shapcott (Cromarty Development Trust), Cllr. Jennifer Barclay (Highland Councillor), Cllr. Craig Fraser (Highland Councillor), Peter Ratcliffe (Cromarty CC), Helena Macleod (Kessock Kindness and Residents Association of North Kessock), Vanessa Halhead (BIP), Anne Mackay (Killearnan CC), Angela Morris (Culbokie Community Trust), Megan Mackenzie (Black Isle Cares).

**Minutes of the last meeting held 4 May 2021:** The minutes were accepted as a true record of the meeting.

**Agenda 1. Update on Munlochy Junction consultations**

Gordon Adam mentioned up-coming meetings with Transport Scotland following the publication of the North Kessock to Tore Case for Change Report by WSP published in March 2021. Transport Scotland was meeting with its stakeholders on May 18 and May 25 and proposing a wider consultation meeting on June 2 that would include Police Scotland, and representatives from the Black Isle Community Councils, the Black Isle Partnership, and Black Isle Councillors. Gordon Adam said he hoped Richard Gerring from Highland Council could attend the June 2 Meeting..

It was hoped the meetings might consider a longer-term solution to the junction to go beyond the proposal expressed through Gordon Adam and the Black Isle Partnership, after discussions at Tuesday meetings, that a 50mph limit be imposed along the A9 from the Kessock Bridge to beyond the Munlochy B9161 turning

Anne Mackay (Killearnan CC) said she had been invited to the May 25 Meeting because of the status of Killearnan CC's as a stakeholder with WSP, because the major part of the stretch of the A9 under review is in the Killearnan CC area  (including the Munlochy Junction and the Tore roundabout.) Killearnan CC had been expressing concerns to MSPs and Transport Scotland for some time. As well warning about the constant danger of accidents at the Munlochy Junction, the impact of increasing traffic on the five roads radiating off the roundabout is another of the issues Killearnan CC has raised as is the dangerous pedestrian crossing. Killearnan CC has taken part in the previous 3 WSP Teams meetings and other consultations.

Craig Fraser said he had been voicing concern since 2008 for the Tore community, and he was pessimistic that long-term solutions would appear without a robust approach at the forthcoming meetings. He argued that a deadline was needed for progress, as he did not want the saga to drag on further.

Jon Palmer said that the letter BIP had sent to Transport Scotland in the autumn asked for action before winter 20/21. In view of the lack of progress he urged that the meeting should demand a real outcome before the start of winter 21/22.

The meeting accepted that the problems of the A9 between the Kessock Bridge and Munlochy should be considered at the same time as the problems with the five main roads at Tore including the right turn access from the east to Tore Village and its primary school.

**Agenda 2. News on Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee split**

Gordon Adam explained that following a request from the Dingwall and Seaforth elements of the Black Isle, Dingwall and Seaforth Area Committee to go it alone, the full Highland Council had moved swiftly and agreed that there would be a single area committee for the Black Isle. An extra Committee for Highland Council would involve extra expenditure, but there were real benefits for the Black Isle.

On a practical level this new arrangement would mean that the three Black Isle Councillors would have to face the public in some open meetings. Gordon Adam surmised that it had been the very success of the Black Isle Communities Tuesday Meetings over 14 months that had contributed to the identification of the Black Isle as a unit, despite its small size with three Councillors.

Craig Fraser concurred that the Third Sector on the Black Isle was separately identifiable and there was a common purpose to support all the residents of the Black Isle. These were the foundations to build on for the future.

Jennifer Barclay added her support to her fellow councillors.

Nigel Shapcott argued that the communities attending the Tuesday Zooms had, despite all its faults, done well to think of the Black Isle as a whole, and if the new Area Committee were to be a way to express the co-operation more formally that would be a positive step.

Jon Palmer said it was ironic that Dingwall and Seaforth had precipitated the break, when this was an objective of the Black Isle Partnership all along. Jon said no one could argue against the movement over the last year when the Black Isle Community Councils forum and Black Isle Communities Zoom forum strengthened their consultations across the Black Isle.

Gordon Adam also noted that there were forthcoming changes to the Ward boundary that would preserve better the integrity of the Black Isle. Redcastle was mentioned as coming back into the Black Isle.

Vanessa Halhead agreed that it was sensible to have administrative boundaries based on a local sense of identity, and she wondered if it would be possible to absorb Muir of Ord, Conon Bridge and Beauly more closely into the Black Isle.

Gordon Adam saw no hope in further extension to the Black Isle. He noted that power and money is delegated to Area Committees, so there is a lot of responsibility. Gordon Adam wondered if a Highland Council Officer could inform this group of all the possibilities and implications the new arrangement would bring. A suggestion that a member of the Wick Area Committee could attend a future Zoom Meeting was welcomed.

**Agenda 3. Update on the Black Isle Wellbeing Project**

Jon Palmer explained that, as many knew, Highland and Islands Enterprise had rejected the re-allocation of funding to BIP for wellbeing to be used to create a Wellbeing Week at the end of May. Around £8000 had been allocated to wellbeing, but a wellbeing week was seen as too radical a change to the plan originally submitted.

Jon admitted there was a sense of relief as Fortrose Academy could not have been involved because of exams in a May week, and a postponement to an October Wellbeing Week seemed far better for many reasons. What was important was that the concept of a Wellbeing Week had been well received by HIE and there was no reason to change the concept for the autumn. Indeed HIE believed that it was possible to fund such a week with new money.

Jon thanked all who had subsequently risen to the challenge of seeing how to use the current funding in a way that HIE might accept.

Helena Macleod explained that with Megan Mackenzie (Black Isle Cares) they had made a realistic proposal for ensuring that Black Isle Cares in conjunction with Helping Hands at the Highland Hospice could initiate a Befriending Service on the Black Isle. Megan Mackenzie explained that Black Isle Cares was also seeking funding from a Social Fund and the project could get underway on 7 June. Jon Palmer agreed to talk to HIE about the Befriending Project, its costs and timeline to see if this was an acceptable use of the funding.

Helena Macleod mentioned that there was an initiative from Think Health Think Nature (an initiative backed by NatureScot, NHS Highland, Highland Third Sector Interface, Highlife Highland, universities etc) on Health and Nature. <https://www.thinkhealththinknature.scot/tender/>.

She agreed to read its scope and take it forward if applicable. Jon Palmer also agreed to study the initiative. The submission deadline is June 7 for a Green Health event to be completed by 10 September.

**Agenda 4. Volunteering and the pandemic**

Jon Palmer drew attention to one item featured in Alison Clark’s weekly digest from Highland Council. This was a survey on volunteering. Jon noted that the Black Isle Partnership had responded to it, and he thought it would demonstrate good engagement if as many local groups could do the same. Local groups have more direct experience of the Covid volunteer response than BIP. He commented that Black Isle Cares and Cromarty Care would be very relevant organisations to complete the survey.

**Agenda 5. Tourism Update**

Becky Richmond (Black Isle Tourism Team) explained that the NatureScot application for emergency funding for the expected increase in visitors stay-cationing in Scotland, had been submitted in collaboration with Nigel Shapcott and Anne Phillips. Becky still had to get formal permission for locating signage, and she would update the application when appropriate.

Becky said that she was ordering Hi-Viz vests with a Black Isle Tourism Team logo and wording Black Isle Ambassador. They could be used in many situations and would be a visual kick-start to a Black Isle Ambassador initiative.

Becky had talked with Colin Simpson (Principal Tourism and Film Officer at Highland Council) to discuss future funding for the Black Isle Tourism Team. She learned that an Ambassador scheme in Gairloch involving local school children and local businesses had been beneficial for both the future employment potential of those involved, and for progress in the Saltire Scheme. She would explore this further for the Black Isle noting that a 14 year old was doing the role of an Ambassador at the North Kessock Market.

Becky asked for all present to suggest the number of Black Isle Ambassador bibs they would like. The costs would come from the BITT budget.

Gordon Adam mentioned that Phil Waite (Highland Council Outdoor Access and Long Distance Route Manager) was now training 17 Highland Rangers and that these folk would be hoping to get local volunteers to provide back up and local colour. He suggested Becky should talk to Phil to see what his requirements might be and how volunteers could assist.

Gordon Adam mentioned the traffic management scheme proposed for Rosemarkie. A tender was out for bollards to delineate parking space and room for pedestrians. There would be a one-way road traffic scheme and an overflow car park, but not all the details were decided. Officers at Highland Council were overstretched.

Becky Richmond said that if Highland Council were slow to act, others must take the initiative. Once the NatureScot projects had been funded she would ensure the Chanonry Point Advisory Group met. Gordon Adam agreed that the current problem of Highland Council was the staff required to get things moving; money was not the issue.

**Agenda 6. News from the Communities**

Angela Morris (Culbokie Community Trust) said the Sharing Shed in the village was meeting a real need. There had been one episode of minor vandalism. The Community Market was going well. Angela expressed a hope that visitors would come to the north of the Black Isle.

Anne Phillips (Rosemarkie Community Council) mentioned the ongoing battle with potholes in roads and dog poo. Recently gulls had become a significant issue with residents being dive-bombed. Vanessa Halhead said that in Cromarty netting had been secured to chimney pots and this had deterred gulls from nesting.

Nigel Shapcott (Cromarty Care and Cromarty Development Trust) said Cromarty Care was continuing with its larder and was relaunching the Cromarty Trikes for getting older folk out of their homes. The Development Trust had been successful in obtaining funds for upgrading the Reeds Loop circuit. The Community Council application to NatureScot for improvements to the 100 Steps South Sutor Path had been backed by Highland Council.

Anne Mackay (Killearnan CC) presented a strong case that traffic was of most concern. The previous survey of traffic at Tore was in 2014, and with a subsequent increase in traffic the situation was no longer tolerable. She reiterated that children have to cross four-lane highways with nominal 70 mph speed limits to get to school. The impact on life at Tore was overwhelming and she was putting all her focus on that issue.

Helena Macleod (Residents Association of North Kessock) thanked Becky for all the work on the NatureScot application and hoped that it would lead to better signage. She said that the larder was well stocked and a new seedling swap section was being used. RANK’s website was now attracting donations for the larder.

Helena mentioned the plight of a homeless man who was monopolising a bus shelter on the A9. Jennifer Barclay had also tried to be helpful. Police Scotland were not interested and it was suggested that either Helen Robinson or Jill Stoner might provide some input or the North Kessock Surgery.

The Meeting ended at 1106. It was proposed to hold a further meeting on May 25.