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

**Zoom Meeting 1900 12 October 2021**

**Present:** Cllr Gordon Adam (Chair of meeting, Highland Council and BIP) Jon Palmer (Chair BIP), Julian Paren (BIP and Minute Taker), Ann Jefferson (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council), Anne Phillips (Fortrose and Rosemarkie Community Council), Vanessa Hallhead (BIP), Peter Ratcliife (Cromarty Community Council), Helena Macleod (RANK and Kessock Kindness)

**Apologies:** Nigel Shapcott (Cromarty Development Trust) Helen Robinson (Rosemarkie and Fortrose Trust), Alison Petch (Culbokie Community Trust), Megan Mackenzie (Black Isle Cares), Sarah Macdonald-Taylor (Avoch and Killen Community Council)

**Agenda 1: Minutes of the BIP - Black Isle Communities Meeting on 28 September 2021**

The Minutes of the meeting on 28 September 2021 were approved after corrections.

**Agenda 2: Democracy on the Black Isle – consultation with Community Councils**

Gordon Adam reported that in the last week he had held a Zoom Meeting to which all Community Councils had been invited and all attended bar Killearnan CC. The Zoom meeting had discussed how the CCs would react with the Area Committee and how the Black Isle Partnership (BIP) and the Parent Councils of the Black Isle schools (BIPC) would fit in. Gordon was not minded to change any of the conclusions of that meeting or revise what was said, but to re-emphasise the need to improve democratic structures and allow a bigger say from them.

Gordon remarked that proposed boundary changes would not take place and that Killearnan CC would be in both Ward 8 and Ward 9 as now. Gordon said Anne Macleod and the Killearnan CC were of course welcome to attend Black Isle Discussions and also to deal with the Dingwall Committee. Gordon thought Killearnan had perhaps got the best of both worlds.

**Gordon Adam gave an outline** of the plans for the Area Committee which he hoped Council Officers would look at in real detail before formalising at the next Area Committee.

**Outline:** Agenda for the Area Committee to be shared two months in advance to Community Councils, School Parent Councils and the Black Isle Partnership.

Participants can put forward Agenda items for which Outline Reports would be written by Council Officers and then shared. Feedback would be requested and then incorporated into a final report by officers. It should also be possible for Community Council and others to put forward topics for discussion and possible taking forward by Council officers. How the final selection is to be made needs further discussion.

CCs, BIPC and BIP would be observers of the Area Committee but also be allowed to participate in relevant discussions on the final report. Arrangement for this have yet to be finalised.

Individuals and Community Councils could make a prepared presentation to the Area Committee on a specific topic. Such presentations could then lead to a Report by the Education Authorities, for example, that could be brought to the next Area Committee Meeting. Gordon said the topics brought to the Area Committee would occur on a rolling basis but would need to be issues that had to be taken seriously by Council Officers. The objective was to allow a greater input on issues of local concern to be discussed at an Area Committee, and to provide more power for the CCs, BIPCs and BIP.

**Vanessa Halhead** asked how much Gordon might think this was setting a precedent for the Highlands. **Gordon Adam** said that the Highland Council was keen for community involvement to be strengthened. Area Committees were empowered to find their own way to do this as long as decision-making was made locally.

**Jon Palmer** said BIP was set up twenty years ago to be a representative voice for the Black Isle. He said too many representing Community Councils saw BIP as competition. He was disappointed when he saw Community Councils acting separately. For BIP to work well it should be supported by the Community Councils. **Gordon Adam** repeated that Community Councils were set up fifty years ago with little external funding and they could not bid for money, or own assets. Their weakness was then invested in the development of Community Trusts. Gordon conceded that the Black Isle Partnership was not a statutory organisation, but as the Black Isle Area Committee would focus on issues and projects affecting the whole Black Isle, the Partnership was an important element.

**Vanessa Halhead** said getting the right interactions between Community Councils and other trans-Black Isle organisations at the Black Isle Area Committee would be a slow process that would take time to resolve. She hoped a structure would be agreed and that then all would find they could work constructively with it.

**Helena Macleod** said what was essential was to draw people with vision into the decision making process.

**Ann Jefferson** said the CCs needed more people who had a genuine interest in the local communities. Gordon Adam was the most prominent of the Ward Councillors so it was he who got the agro. Minutes that were circulated were needed from each Area Committee Meeting. Ann argued that every Community Council should have one representative on the Area Committee. She asked whether the longstanding request for 20 mph restrictions in Fortrose/Rosemarkie could be raised at the Area Committee. **Gordon Adam** thought the question of mandatory speed limits in **all** Black Isle villages would be a real topic for the Area Committee and he would request that Di Agnew set the issue in motion for a forthcoming Area Committee.

**Anne Phillips** said that every Community Council needed autonomy for their local area, but issues affecting the whole Black Isle needed wider discussion.

**Gordon Adam** agreed that there had been no discussions yet on the process that might select what issues would be the major focus of the Area Committee Meetings. More would become apparent in due course. The issue would “rumble on”.

**Ann Jefferson** asked whether there were similar bodies to the Black Isle Partnership elsewhere in Scotland. **Vanessa Halhead** believed there to be perhaps five in the Aberdeenshire area with similar constitutions to BIP and for which she believed Community Councils were members. **Gordon Adam** mentioned the Mid Ross Partnership that did not have a direct input to an Area Committee. **Julian Paren** said its website was defunct and **Helena Macleod** said that it was not working well. **Vanessa Halhead** said that Community Planning Partnerships were essentially moribund. **Peter Ratcliffe** asked whether it was possible to coordinate all the disparate groups, to which **Gordon Adam** replied that it was too big a task.

In conclusion, **Gordon Adam** said his desire for the Black Isle Area Committee was to make Community Councils stronger by giving them more voice and added purpose, and in the process to attract more people to join them.

**Agenda 3:** **Rural Communities into Action Fund (Paper distributed prior to the meeting) – Jon Palmer**

**Jon Palmer** said the funding stream was an opportunity at a significant time for the Black Isle. Significant because of the formation of a new Area Committee, the fact that localism was high on Highland Council’s agenda, and local elections to Highland Council would occur in May 2022, after which a different set of people could be speaking for the Black Isle in Highland Council. Residents of the Black Isle would be facing soon whatever government and its agencies might decide on the climate emergency, Afghan refugees, migrants etc and there was a need to be resilient and embrace changes from a position of strength. The objectives are to agree a system of democracy that allows our say to be heard, and not to be in a position to be told what Highland Council thinks we want. Collectively there is the Ward Discretionary Fund and also perhaps £200k from Participatory Budgeting. Then there are the Community Windfalls from Renewables, such as £1 million from SSE for all the Highlands. How do we collectively agree where this funding is allocated, while understanding there will interest groups with loud voices who could drown out other worthy causes. Jon reminded all of the presentation by Leith Chooses where option choice was determined by a democratic vote, but the whole process needed resources for seeing it through.

**Jon** saw the funding as an opportunity to bring in the expertise from outside the Black Isle to facilitate reaching an agreement on how we operate in the future. The deadline for funding was last Friday. The funding is for an external facilitator so that we can come to an agreement on how we wish to operate. A facilitator is not a consultant – the role is to seek a common purpose in how to gain the most for the future democracy of the Black Isle.

**Gordon Adam** welcomed the funding proposal which he said was a strong one and that it was a great initiative that Jon Palmer had put together. Gordon drew attention to the Knockbain Community Action Plan that he thought a facilitator should have knowledge of to gain a broader view. **Helena Macleod** said the Knockbain Community Action Plan was a plan in name only. She was totally frustrated because no actions had yet resulted from it because there was no leadership to take it forward.

**Ann Jefferson** surmised that the funding was to enhance the standing of the Black Isle Partnership, to which **Jon Palmer** replied that the Black Isle Partnership existed only for its members. The partnership could only work, and be fully inclusive if people got involved. If people chose not to, they would need to accept the consequences.

**Ann** reminded the meeting that the Black Isle Partnership had five Directors and just eight members, so appeared more as an intermediary than a substantive organisation. **Gordon Adam** responded that there were certain things CCs cannot do and the Black Isle Partnership was trying to consolidate its position for the long-term benefit of the Black Isle. He remarked (as Vanessa had done earlier) that in Aberdeenshire organisations like BIP worked well with Community Councils. **Ann Jefferson** said that BIP understandably played no role in the argument with Highland Council on Parking and 20 mph limits in her community because there was an established route for the Community Council’s interaction with Highland Council. Why was BIP needed? Gordon Adam said that the role of the Area Committee would get hers and similar voices heard more strongly as they would be raised at Highland Council through the Minutes/Actions of Area Committee Meetings.

**Helena Macleod** said that BIP needed more diversity in its membership and in its Directors. Gordon Adam was the Chair of the Black Isle Area Committee and Chair of the Highland Council Tourism Group. She questioned whether that was a conflict of interest. The perception of BIP across the Black Isle was that it was not perhaps a diverse enough group to represent the area’s interests.

**Jon Palmer** responded that he took full responsibility for the funding submission. No one else had risen to the occasion. The funding opportunity was to promote LOCAL DEMOCRACY as he felt it important that more voices were heard in decision-making. The proposal was bottom up and should provide a reason for people to want to become Community Councillors.

**Anne Phillips** said that if the funding were to be obtained we would learn if this type of democratic working had the backing of the Community. **Jon Palmer** thought that Ward Forums could be re-introduced for the forums provided an opportunity for any one to attend and put a case. He thought the concept of Ward Forums could be discussed by Community Councils to see what their views were.

**Vanessa Halhead** said she was unsure how representative the meeting had been as so few had attended it. She hoped more would be able to attend the next daytime meeting.

Next meeting October 26 at 1000.

The meeting concluded at 2020.