

Skerries Community Council (SCC)

Minute of meeting held at 1.30 pm on Friday, 11th April 2025

In Skerries Community Hall

Present:

Paul James (Chair)
Bertha Anderson
Frances Anderson
Janice Hughson
Marina Tait

In attendance:

Anne Anderson – Aquaculture
John William Anderson
Ruth Henderson – Aquaculture
Alastair Inkster
Sylvia Inkster
Isobel Johnson – Aquaculture
Joyce Williamson
Michael Williamson
Matt Wilmot - RSPB
Violet McQuade - Clerk (notes)

1) Apologies

Marina Anderson, Jilly Ash, Michael Duncan, Lynsey Hall, Kia James, Vikki Parry
Robert Thomson intended to join the meeting remotely, but the connection to the Microsoft Teams link didn't work, so was unable to attend.

Paul welcomed everyone to the meeting; after a round of introductions the meeting commenced.

2) Declaration of Interest to any agenda item

Chairperson asked for declaration of interests – there were no declarations of interest to any item on the agenda.

3) Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 28th February 2025, were approved.
Proposed by Janice Hughson, seconded by Bertha Anderson.

4) Matters Arising/Actions from last meeting

4.1 Get in touch with QIO at Education Services re school equipment

This is ongoing.

4.2 Contact Chief Nurse regarding a meeting – Paul sent an email requesting a meeting, still waiting for a reply/date. This is ongoing.

4.3 Contact BT regarding landline switch-off – Paul has written to BT, still awaiting a response. This is ongoing.

4.4 Contact the Team Leader - Leisure Facilities regarding multi-court netting.

A council worker was in Skerries last Saturday taking photos of the netting and other equipment. It was noted that two local men had fixed the net at the multicourt.

4.5 Resilience document - Set out wording to accompany forms for circulation

This is ongoing.

4.6 Check finance, and if possible, order a skip – completed.

4.7 Liaise with Lynsey regarding scrap cars – This is still in progress.

4.8 Change meeting date from 15th to 22nd August – completed.

4.9 Circulate email regarding Director of SCBF – completed

The Community Council thanked the two local men for fixing the hinge on the gate at the old kirkyard.

5) **Aquaculture Issues**

5.1 Salmon Farm debris

Ruth thanked the Community Council for inviting her and Anne to today's meeting.

The reason why Ruth and her colleagues are here today is to try and help find a solution to getting rid of the redundant aquaculture debris that is in Skerries, mostly from the salmon farm. They have experience in this type of clear-up, having recently done a clear-up at the Loch of Strom. The team would like to help Skerries in a similar way, providing that is what the community wants. Ruth provided a brief overview of how they did the Loch of Strom clean up. Ruth has emailed the landowner, but so far has not received a reply.

There are various places in Shetland where aquaculture debris – mostly historical – is located and not, consequently, a reflection of the sectors' operations today. Everyone agreed that the community would like to see all the salmon farm debris cleared up, and taken away.

The problem has been discussed numerous times over a number of years, but no solution has been found - partly because no confirmation of ownership has been established. The debris is an eyesore, health hazard, bad for the tourist industry, and could put off inward investment.

Ruth emphasised that theirs is a genuine offer to help, and they are not here to antagonise anyone.

Anne gave an overview how Scottish Seafarms could help. The industry is interested in clearing up the vast amount of fishing related debris that is in the sea and on the shore. The technology that is available now can target specific areas accurately, whether on the seabed or on the surface. Also, there are various agencies that can help resolve situations like this. She asked how long the problem has existed – after discussion it was agreed that some of the cages are from about the year 2000; the salmon farm closed down about 10 years ago. The time-lapse may be relevant to the outcome/process to get a resolution.

After an in-depth discussion on how to resolve the situation, it was decided that the representatives from Aquaculture would have further discussions on how to go forward. They will keep the SCC updated on any progress.

5.2 Surveys in the seas around Skerries

Scottish Seafarms are proposing to set up several salmon farms around Shetland, and currently carrying out surveys, looking at the potential of putting salmon farms in the seas around Skerries. New infrastructure allows salmon farms to operate in the open seas, where previously they were located in more sheltered areas. Anne asked what it would mean for Skerries as a community if they were to progress with an application to set up a farm near the islands - from the tests so far it looks like the area around Skerries will be suitable for the farms. There are potentially eight jobs that could be created if Scottish Seafarms are successful with their venture. Placing farms in higher energy locations outside the voes, supports farmers in managing any climate changes, such as jellyfish blooms as currents mean any issues move away faster.

John William – this will be a disaster for our business, the buoys that are in the water just now are right in the middle of their fishing grounds; John William's boat fishes for scallops, but white fishing will also be affected. Their industry may not last through the winter if this goes ahead. A local boat recently got caught up in the ropes, adding an extra hazard. He also pointed out that Fishing has been carried out in the seas around Skerries for hundreds of years.

Anne agreed to send over a map of the area that Scottish Seafarms are interested in at this time, Alastair said he had been told that it is illegal to remove indigenous fishermen from their fishing

grounds. He pointed out that the Government has never been interested in supporting the fishing industry; 50 – 60 years ago there were five boats fishing from Skerries, supporting over 20 families, and 130 people were living in Skerries, now there are only 30. All the people in Skerries used to be supported by the fishing industry. Government policies, including the decommissioning scheme, over the years have proved to be detrimental to the local fishing industry, including communities like Skerries. It was felt that more dialogue with local fishermen would be an appropriate way to take this forward.

John William said that he is opposed to the idea of setting up salmon farms in the fishing grounds around Skerries. He asked if there is a policy about the displacement of indigenous fishermen – he was told that there is no policy at this point and that this was a Scottish Government matter. If the local fishermen lose these fishing grounds, they will no longer be viable. For example, if fishermen were to lose maybe 30 or 40 days fishing because of this, they cannot stay ashore on those days, they will have to go elsewhere to fish – putting pressure on other fishing grounds, which will then impact that area.

Anne said that for the planning process you have to cover environmental, social and economic impacts. There are three different levels of impacts that are considered under the assessments. For a salmon farm you need planning permission, an environmental licence, marine licence, fish health production licence; when you have got all four of these, only then do you get the Crown Estate lease. The whole process takes a long time. The 'current meter' is out at the moment. The impact assessments have not been done yet. Notices were sent out about the surveys. Obviously there are still conversations that need to be held and that this was a very early stage discussion on the potential for a farm.

Paul proposed that there should be a separate meeting to discuss this particular issue. Anne will provide a list of the proposed locations.

John William left the meeting

6) VoiceAbility in Shetland

As Vikki couldn't get to Skerries to attend the meeting this item was carried forward.

7) Skerries Crops – Progress Report

Ethan has ploughed some of the land, which hopefully everyone agrees is a good thing to do. This is because the lack of crops across Shetland and including Skerries has had a negative effect on wildlife, and the RSPB is trying to rectify this by planting some wildlife crops. This is a RSBP led project, called Species on the Edge, to encourage crofters to plant some crops, so far around 50 crops have been planted around Shetland this year. Ethan has done up an old Massey Ferguson, so this has been used to plough some land in the West Isle, the soil is good to start with. It is hoped to sow an agreed seed mix in the near future (May/June) so that the crop will be up by the summer – it will be a two-year mix, which includes red and crimson clover, kale, fodder radish, along with buckwheat, phacelia, mustard and linseed. It will be a beautiful crop when it comes through. The crops are beneficial for birds, such as Linties (Twite) as well as beneficial pollinating insects such as Bumblebees. All of the ploughed land will not be used for this mix, there will be some ploughed land left at the side for anyone in the community who wishes to grow some vegetables for their own use.

A ringing project will be established as well, to track the movement of the birds. Matt thanked Ethan for all his efforts in getting this project underway. Matt also said that the crops should be looking good by July, and if the community were to organise an event he would be happy to come over to do a talk about what is happening with this project. Perhaps even a barbecue could be organised. There are a lot of birders that come to Skerries in the summer and autumn, and this project will go down well with them. The crops are likely to be a magnet for common and scarce migrant birds. The only worry with the project is the rabbits.

Marina asked if there were any plans to plant more trees; Matt said that if the community would like to plant more trees then he would be happy to help with that. Paul said he would be happy to take that on again.

Action: Paul to look into getting more trees to plant

8) Community Council Scheme of Establishment

The new Community Council Scheme has commenced. The procedure for applying for Community Council funding has changed. Violet has applied for this year's funding. It is hoped that we will hear within the next week whether the application has been successful, and if so, how much funding Skerries Community Council will be granted.

9) Healthcare Issues – Update

This has been added to the Issues Log (Item 16).

Healthcare issues have been discussed at the Islands With Small Populations (IWSP) group. IWSP are now organising 30-minute one-to-one sessions with the Chief Executive of Shetland Islands Council and the Director of Community Health and Social Care. This is to discuss the issue of healthcare on the island; Paul will be attending the session as a representative for Skerries. A date has not yet been set, but the meeting should be taking place within the next four weeks.

The person from VoiceAbility has agreed to act as an advocate for Skerries, she is looking at what they can do to be able to act on our behalf. If there is no satisfactory resolution, the matter will likely be moved from an Issue to a Risk. The next step would be to approach NHS Scotland. The problem is 30% personnel related, 70% supervision related – the supervision is the area that needs mostly to be addressed. It was pointed out that the community has been harping on about this for months, and nothing has happened. Paul said it will take time to reach a satisfactory agreement.

10) Nomination of Director for SCBF

As agreed at the meeting held on 28th February, Violet circulated an email asking for volunteers to join the Board of SCBF, to represent Skerries in the position of Director. Only one person agreed to take on the post, this was Sheilagh Smith. It was agreed to put forward Sheilagh to SCBF to act as Director on behalf of Skerries. Violet will inform SCBF of the outcome.

11) Shops Consultation

Drafting the survey has now been completed. Just need the necessary supplies to get the documents printed and handed out - paper copies in envelopes. Also, copies will be emailed out to extended families and people who regularly visit Skerries. It is hoped that there will be a good response – the surveys should be ready to be sent out by Wednesday. Once they are gathered in, they will be collated then we will have a meeting about it to decide the best way forward.

12) SCBF Application – Skerries Hall

The application was circulated prior to the meeting. The money applied for is to purchase a scaffolding tower, get some new windows and a door – the cost of labour is included in the application. After discussion it was agreed to approve the application for the full amount that has been applied for. Violet will inform the SCBF of the outcome.

13) Local Place Plans

We have until August 2026 to submit a Local Place Plan, if we choose to do so. It is probably in the best interest of Skerries to submit one, considering the potential commercial development of aquaculture in the seas around Skerries. It is not a veto, but will give Skerries a better voice. Paul is happy to draft one up, but everyone will need to be involved. Once it is agreed on it can be ratified and lodged with Shetland Islands Council. Any planning applications that come in involving Skerries, the council will have to take the Local Place Plan into consideration. Paul asked if everyone was happy for him to continue – Matt offered to help as well. It was agreed for Paul to draft up the document.

Action: Paul to draft up Local Place Plan

14) Scrap Cars (SDG)

A date has been agreed with the company that uplifts the cars in Lerwick, the date that has been suggested is Wednesday the 7th May. Still waiting for Ferry Operations to agree, or suggest an alternative date. There cannot be a community run until after the Filla comes back from her refit – she is due back on the 28th April. Violet will keep the community informed of any progress.

15) Risks

No changes to the log.

16) Issues

No changes to the log .

Paul will take the Issues Log to the SIC Chief Executive when he meets with her.

Paul said it has now been a year since he set up the Issues Log, and asked if everyone was happy for him to continue. Everyone agreed for him to continue with the Log.

At this point Isobel Johnson, Joyce Williamson and Michael Williamson left the meeting.

17) Correspondence Received

All correspondence has been circulated, electronically.

18) AOCB

18.1 Deer

There was a discussion on the rumour that deer were going to be brought in to Skerries. It was felt that it would be detrimental to the community to have deer wandering around the island, they are dangerous and would eat everything in sight. Matt said that from an RSPB perspective, all the good work that has been done – getting trees planted and getting crops in, could be decimated. It is fundamentally a bad idea from a wildlife and conservation perspective; they are an invasive non-native species to Shetland and have never been present on the Islands. If someone were minded to introduce a non-native species such as deer to Skerries, the deer would have to be contained within their own property. They would also need to apply to NaturScot for a licence and the Scottish Rural Payments Agency informed (SGRPID). It is highly unlikely that any licence would be granted, on the basis of the likely negative impacts deer would have on the native wildlife on Skerries. Welfare standards would need to be kept up, which would involve regular veterinary inspections and audits. Deer are escape artists, so they would just jump fences and dykes, and as soon as they escape, this would trigger considerable legal implications. The 'owner' is basically responsible for their movements and welfare, and if anything detrimental as a result of the deer could be a large fine, or jail time. It was agreed by whole the community and nature conservation organisations that it would be detrimental to the isles if deer were to be introduced to Skerries. Matt from RSPB Shetland welcomed any further discussions around the subject of deer introductions to Skerries.

18.2 Graveyard

Rabbits are burrowing in under the gravestones in the new kirkyard. After discussion it was agreed that Paul would raise the issue Burial Services.

Action: Paul contact Burial Services

19) Date of the next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held at 2.00 pm on Friday, 23rd May 2025.

The meeting concluded at 3.15 pm

Actions:

Paul:

- Look into getting more trees or planting
- Draft up Local Place Plan
- Contact Burial Services

Chair Signature

Signed.....