

Skerries Community Council (SCC)
Minute of meeting held at 2.00 pm on Friday, 4th October 2024
In Skerries Community Hall

Present:

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

In attendance:

Robert Thomson – SIC Councillor – joined through Teams link
Lynsey Hall – Community Support Worker for Skerries
Brenda Leask - Executive Manager-Schools Service
Tanya Riley - PG Marine Scientist, UHI
Dana Jamieson – Police Scotland – joined through Teams link
Alan Hay Senior
Alan Hay Junior
Alister Inkster
Sylvia Inkster
Violet McQuade - Clerk (notes)

1) Apologies

Paul James, Kia James, Jilly Ash, Duncan Anderson and Michael Duncan.

Bertha welcomed everyone to the meeting.

2) Declaration of Interest to any agenda item

Chairperson asked for declaration of interests – there were no declarations of interest. For any planning issues that may be discussed, Councillor Thomson said he would have to declare an interest for that item/s. There were no planning items for discussion.

3) Minutes of last Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on the 23rd August 2024, were approved. Proposed by Janice Hughson, seconded by Frances Anderson.

4) Matters Arising/Actions from last meeting

4.1 Contact NHS/raise issue at IWSP, re nursing availability

This is ongoing. The MSP has been in touch with NHS. Also, a meeting is scheduled for 18th October, this is specifically to discuss healthcare/nursing support for Skerries.

4.2 Organise a get-together to discuss LPP

Still to be completed – ongoing.

4.3 Contact Ferry Operations re online booking

Ongoing.

4.4 Circulate information to members, re hogweed

Completed

4.5 Inform applicants of the outcome of applications for Distribution Fund money

Completed

4.6 Request school grass to be cut

Received a favourable email from the department, saying this would be looked into and done if possible. Completed

4.7 Write to Burial Services re propped up gravestones.

Received information from Burial Services, which was circulated. Completed

4.8 Order a skip.

Completed

4.9 Raise HSW availability with NHS.

Received an email from MSP, she had been in touch with NHS and was told about the meeting which is planned for the 18th October – to discuss healthcare/nursing support for Skerries.

4.10 Raise generator/IT issues with NHS.

MSP following this up with NHS – ongoing.

5) School Building

The school is currently mothballed. Building Services still come in to Skerries to keep a check whether any maintenance needs to be done, and to ensure it is kept in a suitable condition in case it ever needs to be reopened.

Brenda Leask, Executive Manager-Schools Service, has been for a look at the school building today, and is attending the meeting to find out at first-hand what the community want, and to hear if anyone has any questions regarding the school. Although the whole school cannot be handed over to the community, there may be a possibility that part of the building could possibly be temporarily handed over – Brenda would like to have a discussion with the community, then she can go away and find out more about the possibilities, bearing in mind that the school has to be kept in a state that if a family were to move to Skerries the school will be in a condition that it could be reopened. The building at the moment is in good order, with no sign of dampness.

There was a discussion on what a section of the building could be used for. It was suggested that it could be used in the summertime like a camping böd – mattresses and/or air beds could be used if there was an event on that a large amount of people wanted to attend. The kitchen and toilets are there, and a shower could be installed. This option would be easy to set up, and if things changed, would be easy to change back to a school.

It was recognised that if the community were to use part of the school building then someone would need to be appointed in a caretaker type role. The building would need to be looked after, the premises checked, and kept up to standard. It was not clear whether a caretaker person would need to be a council employee – Brenda will check this out. If part of the building can be handed over, funding will need to be sourced by the community to purchase any items needed.

Brenda will get back to the Community Council with any information that needs to be passed on, and if anything else comes up anyone from the community can email her and she will get back to them with an answer, if possible.

6) Marine Restoration and Enhancement Action Plan for Shetland – UHI

This project is looking at ways to look after the marine environment around Shetland, and get views and ideas on how things could affect Skerries. Also looking out for fishermen and those who could be affected by the impact of floating windfarms – including looking at training local people to be able to monitor marine mammals near wind farms/cables.

Marine enhancement and restoration refers to actions to improve the health of the marine environment could involve protecting habitats/species, planting trees, and cleaning up

underwater litter. The project aims to produce a 10-year prioritised action plan for marine restoration efforts in Shetland, serving as a tool for communities, public bodies, and marine industries and developers to guide marine restoration initiatives.

Summary of key discussion points

Active Research or Enhancement

- Gillnets and longlines.
- It was noted that not all gillnets and longlines are correctly tagged (every mile). There are about 100 miles of gillnets off Shetland. If they are lost or dumped, then someone trawls them up they can should be able to identify who owns the nets. But for some reason the authorities are not insisting that the nets are tagged.
- Concerns were raised regarding the discarding of gillnets.
- Solutions proposed included the use of larger hooks to minimise the impact on birds that may swallow smaller hooks. This is killing thousands of seabirds. If you want seabirds to survive this should be addressed by the relevant authorities, but the authorities are doing nothing about it.
- The potential development of biodegradable gillnets was also raised as a potential solution.
- Rats - It was noted that the rat population on Skerries has reduced since the salmon sites has been inactive
- An Action Plan is needed to address the discarded aquaculture in the voe.

Access

- The possibility of 2 bird hides was mentioned – that may not come under this plan, it would be more coastal.

Research

- A decline in eider duck populations on the Skerries over the past five years was reported, while an increase in otter populations was observed.
- There is an increased need for research into the sustainability of the fishing industry.
- Research on the impacts of underwater electric cabling were raised, especially impacts on fish and crabs.
- It was noted that there will be 19 square miles of scallop bottom expected to be affected by the cabling from the floating wind farm. It has been found that there are no fish/crabs now living on the seabed around where cables lie.

Additional Points

- Offshore Windmills - It was pointed out that under international law it is illegal to displace indigenous fishermen from their fishing grounds. But now they are going ahead and clearing indigenous fishermen from the fishing grounds anyway.
- Marine litter - logging of rubbish that has been landed is needed – currently harbour authorities are not dealing with this.
- Chartering a local vessel every spring to remove known areas of issues with discarded underwater litter (mentioned that this has been done in Norway). Chartering a local vessel to do this would go a long way to clearing up the marine litter. It was noted that there exists a large amount of photographic evidence.
- More monitoring of the fishing activity on the east of Shetland to replicate that which is done on the west side by Marine Scotland.
- One idea is to make gillnets out of material that only lasts a certain time, then it would rot away on the seabed. Could fish with gillnets providing the use biodegradable nets. Foreign fishermen are the ones using gillnets – none used by Shetland fishermen.

Concerns were expressed that local boats are heavily monitored, while foreign boats are not being properly monitored at all. The foreign boats should be subject to the same laws as local boats. Local

fishermen have evidence, and have been raising their concerns for some time, but are being ignored by the authorities. If they want to protect the marine environment it would be easy to take a big step in doing so by monitoring the foreign boats – the evidence is there if they would only use it. The officers are only doing 'photoshoot monitoring' - counting the boxes that are landed. It was also felt that figures should be verified by an independent witness.

Further points raised

- Discarded fish farm equipment – this will be relevant to these discussions.
- Impact of scallop dredging is no more damaging to the environment/sea bed than a storm.
- It was noted that there were 400 trees planted in Skerries earlier this year.

Robert asked Alister to get in touch to arrange a meeting to for further discussion.

Action: Alister to contact Robert for further discussion

Tanya said that by mid-November the project will have been around all areas of Shetland, and that if there was anything that anyone wished to add, there is an online survey to complete, where comments can be added. Early in 2025 there will be a prioritising workshop, finding out what the main priorities are in the different areas. After that an action plan will be drawn up.

Action: Tanya send survey link

3.10 – Dawn Jamieson left the meeting

7) Funding – Application/s received for money from the Distribution Fund

11.1 Application from the hall

A request has come in from the hall for money to buy a cooker, as well as part funding to buy indoor scaffolding. The old cooker is useless. After discussion it was agreed to award the hall £2,000 to buy a cooker – the cooker is expected to cost about £1,800 + VAT.

It is hoped that other sources of funding will be found to help pay for the scaffolding.

8) Risks

No risks were noted.

9) Issues

No issues were noted.

10) Correspondence Received

All correspondence has been circulated electronically.

11) AOCB

15.1 Council houses

In Skerries there are still two council houses standing empty.

Some time ago a Skerries resident had asked to buy one of the council houses, but were told it was not in the council policy to sell council houses, so they would not sell it to them. That house is still standing empty.

Another resident applied for a council house, this was initially approved, and then the offer was rescinded – the council said it was not in a liveable state, so they couldn't let it out.

One person stated that they are currently paying two lots of council tax for properties in Skerries, even though they can only living in one property, while at the same time the council is not looking after the houses that they own.

Councillor Thomson asked for an update to be sent to him, so that he could do a follow up.

Action: Clerk send Councillor Thomson update

15.2 Transport meeting

A Transport Meeting was held this morning – Robert asked if anyone from Skerries had been invited. As far as everyone was aware no one had been invited. Violet will check the emails that has come in, and let Robert know if an invite had come through.

Action: Violet to check if an invite had come through

15.3 Salmon Farm debris

A meeting is to be set up regarding the debris left by the salmon farm. It was noted that no information regarding a meeting date has come through to the Community Council.

12) Date of the next meeting

The next meeting is scheduled to be held at 2.00 pm on Friday, 15th November 2024.

It was noted that a meeting with the Chief Nurse (Community & Mental Health) and a representative from Scottish Ambulance Services is scheduled to take place in Skerries Community Hall at 1.30, on Friday, 18th October.

Bertha thanked everyone for attending the meeting.

The meeting concluded at 3.40 pm

Actions:

Clerk: Check if an invite had come through for Transport Meeting
Send Councillor Thomson an update on the situation with the council houses

AI: Contact Robert for further discussion

TR: Send survey link for Violet to circulate

Chair Signature

Signed.....