

BERNERA COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Minutes of Meeting held Thursday 8 October 2020
via Zoom Video Conference, 6.30pm-8pm

BCC members present via Zoom: Joan Macaulay (Chair, JM), Cllr Ranald Fraser (RF), Norman Macdonald (ND), Neil James Macaulay (NJM), Chrissie Macdonald (CM), Rhiannon Teather (Secretary, RT), Madeleine Macaulay (MM), Calum Richings (Treasurer, CR)

Residents present via Zoom: Natalie Bowling (NB), Zachary Taylor (ZT), Masa Taylor (MT).

Apologies: Cllr Norman Macdonald, Cllr Angus Morrison.

1. Previous Minutes

The minutes for the meeting held on 10 September 2020 were approved by Chrissie Macdonald and seconded by Norman Macdonald.

2. Finance Update

CR provided an update. The balance figures are the same as last month (4819.82); awaiting a new bank statement which will show the Crown Estate monies in. The cleaners have not been paid yet; CR to follow up.

3. Bernera Bridge

RF provided an update. He received an email from Robert Emmott indicating that a UK-based company will design, deliver and install bridge (single tender, in order that the work can be completed as soon as possible). The timeline for the temporary bridge – at the latest – is for next spring, but if it can be fast-tracked, then sooner. JM queried the progress with the Marine Licensing, RF responded that CnES currently proceeding on the basis that the Marine Licensing will be approved; works will begin 15 weeks from whenever they get the go ahead; it is likely this will be the end of January. The weight the temporary bridge will take was queried (e.g. a gas wagon weighs 27 tonnes); RF reported he does not have the exact figure but a working assumption is that it will be sufficient to cover this. There was a query on Facebook about whether the temporary bridge will become the permanent bridge. RF responded that the temporary bridge could last 30 years; the quoted cost for the temporary bridge is 2m, for a bridge with a 100 year life-span, 5m. Cllr NMD has previously stated that the temporary bridge will be a temporary bridge only.

CM queried the findings of the full survey of the existing bridge and whether it is repairable. RF reported that there is serious metal corrosion in the concrete and there is uncertainty about how this will be fixed. In general, time is of the essence and the priority is to install a temporary bridge so utility services, bin collections etc. can resume as normal. The provision of the permanent, 5m bridge, was queried and whether it would not be preferable to skip to providing this instead given the costs involved. The response was that a temporary bridge would be necessary to help build the permanent bridge as well as serve for residents in the interim. The cost of a permanent bridge may prove to be an issue going forward given the 7m short-fall in CnES budget; lobbying for money from the Scottish Government may be required to fund it. RF also reported that the Scalpay Bridge is also in need of repair and this

will cost between 500,000-5m to fix due to corrosion there as well. There was a discussion of alternative solutions. RF cited a previous CnES plan for a road to/from Callanish with a crossing to Kirkibost.

ND queried whether CnES were going to send a letter to Bernera residents as previously promised. RF to follow-up.

NB queried whether the state of the bridge was known previously as this has caused serious disruption to the plans of residents building homes. RF reported that the bridge survey was the first for twenty years and the state of disrepair was a surprise to the engineers. He also stated that CnES have provided information to assist those building housing. NB requested a letter with this details and also information about the practical support that could be offered to home-builders (e.g. for transporting materials, vehicles, manpower etc). Likewise ZT raised the fact that the vehicle needed to help build his home is 35tns empty and the current disruption with the bridge has suspended works. ZT stated he had contacted CnES who had been helpful and been told they are investigating improvised solutions. Regarding the bridge ZT queried whether there are alternative sources of funding available for the bridge. RF responded CnES have used emergency measures, one tender for each aspect to speed up the process. NB queried how frequently the bridge should have been surveyed. RF responded that the structural engineer, Angus Gillies has only been in post 3-5 years; it is indeed likely the survey should have been carried out more frequently. RF to check what the programme of inspection should have been for the bridge. MT queried whether the bridge had insurance to cover repairs. NJM responded that if it has not been serviced according to original stipulations it would not be valid. NB asked whether CnES would be able to compensate those building houses due to the bridge disruption. RF stated he has made notes and will follow-up on these questions.

4. Bernera School

JM and RF provided an update. There is a letter going out about the Bernera School stating that it will be moth-balled at the end of the year. It was queried where the children will be sent. The nearest school is Breascleite; RF stated that the English medium has been moth-balled there and so there will be a consultation; this is ongoing. All expressed sadness about the school being moth-balled and concerns about whether it would be reopened.

5. Petrol Pumps

ND provided an update. The quote for works and materials is 31,250. The pumps, shed, broadband, electrics has been ordered. The pumps will take about 9 weeks to arrive and they will be able to get over the bridge despite the restrictions. Diesel and petrol will be available, with a 24hr card metre. The works should be underway by Christmas.

6. Housing

Further to the discussions at the last BCC meeting regarding housing, RT attended Development Trust meeting on 17 September to discuss the affordable housing issue. The next steps were discussed, in particular whether to make some informal approaches to HHP and other contacts and do some more research, or whether to focus on drafting the letter. The possible sites were discussed and ND suggested approaching each of the Grazings Committees to enquire whether they would provide some land for housing. Once land is identified, RF suggested approaching John MacIver (HHP) and Ian Watson (CnES) in the

first instance, they can then organise a survey of the relevant land and check the ground. RT to contact Grazings Committees; BCA also to be contacted for their views and input once a new Chair is elected.

7. Funding Applications (Crown Estate, Bosta)

JM provided an update. We are waiting on costings from Callum Macaulay on planning (plan ready to go to Planning Department). For the Bosta project, this involves improvements to the toilets, a new viewpoint, new official parking spaces. JM is currently collecting letters of support from Bernera community organisations.

It was queried whether there would be waste disposal installed at Bosta, JM that this facility would be available at the new pontoons development at Kirkibost.

8. Bosta Toilets Complaint and Kirkibost Pier Toilets

ND investigated a complaint relating to the Bosta toilets and spoke to the CnES. It has been checked and it appears to be a false complaint (smell of sea rather than sewage).

NJM raised the issue that a coded keypad has been installed at the Kirkibost toilets without advanced notice being issued; this was a real problem for fishermen and those working at the Pier. NJM has spoken to the relevant authorities given that there was no notification and will follow-up.

9. Little Bernera

ND provided an update. Environmental Scotland will be sending archaeologists over to Little Bernera. Originally there was a proposal for exposed remains to be removed and given to the museum after testing; ND has argued for the remains to stay on-island. Volunteers will accompany visitors from Environmental Scotland. Scottish Salmon are providing assistance to take stone materials to fill the gabion baskets; this should be done by the end of the month.

Regarding the graveyard at Bosta, it was noted that this is nearing capacity as there are no new spaces available.

10. Community Conversations Meeting

It was noted that the Community Conversations meeting (Round 5, for Breasclete, Carloway & Lochganvich Uig & Bernera) is scheduled for Tuesday 13th October 2020 6pm–7.30pm. It will be held online and registration is open up until the meeting. Details available on Facebook.

11. AOCB

Letters of support for Rural Infrastructure Fund (Bosta Project). These are needed ASAP, and especially from BCA. JM to email BCA Secretary Sue Long.

RE Affordable Housing and Rejuvenation of Bernera. ZT made some suggestions regarding the sequencing of the argument on affordable housing, especially linking this to the future viability to the school. He also queried whether there might be possibilities to replicate enterprising models from elsewhere in developing community infrastructure; it was noted that much of this funding for projects elsewhere was from the EU Rural Development Fund;

CR made the point that alternatives will be available but it is a case of making the applications to the correct sources. RF noted the success of the housing scheme in Breasclote, houses have just been finished and two families have received their keys. All agreed it would be ideal to see something similar in Bernera. JM noted that the Community Assets Transfer for part of the land near the Pier and the Care Unit would be going ahead, both of which will provide opportunities in future. This news was warmly received.

BCC Newsletter. MM queried whether any project ideas were forthcoming from the BCC newsletter. It was noted currently no new ideas put forward. Applications for the next round of Crown Estate Fund now live online. MM suggested producing another newsletter specifically on Crown Estate Fund, although it was noted time now of the essence to put forward community project. There was a brief discussion about the possible next project(s) and the criteria. ZT noted that Marine/Aquatic National Parks focusing on biodiversity had been in the news, one possible route; details to be followed-up.

Ditches. It was noted it would be ideal for these to be maintained in advance of the winter. RT to circulate the list started prior to Covid-19 so it can be finished; the list of known locations requiring maintenance will then be emailed to RF.

Gritter. 7.5tn vehicle acquired by CnES to service Bernera.

Concerns about Communication between Bernera residents and CnES. CR raised concerns about the delayed response from CnES, especially regarding admission to care homes, as a result of Covid-19 working restrictions. RF acknowledged these delays as problematic as well as the current challenges in providing efficient services.

Follow up to Resident Questions. RF made a list of the above issues raised in relation to the bridge etc. and will follow up.

Date of Next Meeting: Thursday 12 November 2020, 6.30pm.

Please write to berneracomcouncil@gmail.com to raise any issues or suggest ideas.