

BERNERA COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Minutes for Meeting held on

Thursday 13 May 2021

6.45pm-8pm (via Zoom)

BCC Members Present (via Zoom)

Joan Macaulay (Chair, JM), Rhiannon Teather (Secretary, RT), Calum Richings (Treasurer, CR), Madeleine Macaulay (MM), Chrissie Macdonald (CM), Alice Murray, Cllr Norman Macdonald (NMD).

Also Present (via Zoom)

Calum Mackenzie (CMK, CnES), Eric Stewart (ES).

Apologies

Cllr Ranald Fraser, Cllr Angus Morrison, Neil James Macaulay, Norman Macdonald.

1. Previous Minutes

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 8 April 2021 were approved by Chrissie Macdonald and seconded by Joan Macaulay.

2. Matters Arising

3. Finance Update

CR provided an update. Balance 10263.07; 3,300 plus a few pennies to go out in total (2,300 for Hydro connection to Petrol Pumps, 1,000 for pay for cleaners). 1,400 paid in for the Kirkibost Pier toilets 2021-22 (also owed 1,400 from Comharlie as the invoice was not paid by last year, 2020-21) and 1,800 for Bosta. MM queried how much we receive for the running of CC. CR responded that we receive 1,000 from Comharlie for the running of the CC, this money is used for the hire of the meeting room at the Community Centre and the wages for the Secretary. MM also raised the issue of a funding a laptop computer for the Secretary once meetings in person resume again. It was noted this had been raised previously but delayed due to Covid-19.

4. Housing in Bernera (Letter, Future Meetings, Reps)

The draft of the housing letter to be circulated to the community was discussed. No issues with the wording of the letter, although multiple members highlighted the importance of the significant obstacles for progress on housing due to Bernera landownership. MM queried whether it was possible for the community to receive legal advice about freeing up land for building plots and suggested a representative from the Crofting Commission be invited to a future meeting alongside reps from HHP, CnES and TiG. It was noted that the Bernera landowner is currently refusing to release croft land for building plots, arguing that there are

sufficient homes in Bernera and that the land should be used for animals. It was agreed this is not a true reflection of the situation in Bernera, and with the school having been mothballed, it is essential homes for young families are built and available to rent/buy. Residents are currently being prevented from freeing up land for homes. Possible solutions to the land issue were discussed including individuals purchasing tenancies and the use of Common Grazings land. Both of these solutions are legal rights of crofters. It was noted housing enhances the assets of common grazing land and is an improvement. The only restriction will be existing services running through the land and its suitability e.g. road access, services. CR queried the technicalities of how Grazings Committees actually free up land for plots, specifically which paperwork is required and who to contact. NMD responded that all that is required is for Grazings Committees to write to the Crofting Commission. There was some discussion about the previous approaches made and increased difficulties in making contact due to Covid-19. It was suggested that the course of action be decided at a future community housing meeting. NMD referred to the situation in Point and elsewhere, where most crofts are subdivided, as a possible option. All were in agreement that a community housing meeting should be held and that a cross-committee meeting would be held by the end of the month to agree a date. CR volunteered to assist in future meetings with housing reps regarding Common Grazings land in Hacklete.

5. Island Ferries / Lewis Association of CCs

RT provided an update. Community Councils from across the islands are planning to join forces to try and find a solution to the ferry crisis. There will be a Lewis Association of Community Councils meeting on Monday 17 May on the ferry issue, and talks between CCs from across the Hebrides are ongoing. AM reported that CalMac have announced the resuming of the MV Loch Seaforth has been delayed until 21st May (reported on: welovestornoway.com).

6. Funding (Crown Estate, HIE, Bosta) and Petrol Pumps

JM has requested an update from Callum Macaulay regarding the Bosta toilets. It was suggested that he be invited to future meetings to simplify communication. CR reported that the latest news he heard was that there were delays receiving the solar panels from Spain due to Brexit (extra paperwork). MM queried why they could not be sourced from Stornoway; CR explained that there was no room in the toilets for a hot water tank and thus Mediterranean style panels are more suitable. These will be located on the roof with a small tank. RT queried latest news on the Petrol Pumps. CM responded that the Hydro still need to connect the meter but also reported that the money has been taken. It is hoped this will be done in the coming weeks.

7. Bernera Graveyards

RT raised the issue of Bernera graveyards (the graveyard at Bosta is close to full) and who is responsible for finding suitable land for a new one. NMD noted that there have been significant issues at the CnES graveyard in Laxay and this has cost a great deal of money to

resolve. The land needs to be of reasonable quality and close to the road. It was noted that Bosta has already been extended and the further up it is expanded the more peat and water will be encountered, which will cause problems. Nevertheless it is worth raising the issue and asking the question. RT queried who to ask. NMD responded it will be an Environmental Services issue. NMD to follow-up with the relevant contact.

8. Bernera Bridge Update w/ CnES rep Calum Mackenzie

CMK provided an update. He reported that works on site are two weeks ahead of schedule at present. The weather has been good and the site/ground conditions have been favourable. CMK noted that there will be further construction elements required once the bridge is across and that these works can only be commenced once the bridge is in place. This construction phase will delay the anticipated timescale for the bridge to be operational, now estimated to be mid-end August. CMK stated that he would contact house builders individually to discuss opportunities to assist them, which may include for a temporary period of opening to facilitate heavy loads. The good news is that the current works are progressing well and the bridge installer is willing to be flexible and react to earlier access to site.

The regularity of updates on the Bernera Bridge was also discussed. It was previously agreed that these would be weekly but we were advised that fortnightly updates with meaningful milestone updates as things progress would be more constructive. All agreed to the revised schedule of milestone updates and fortnightly updates.

ES queried whether mid-August is now the scheduled date for a passage bridge. CMK responded that things are going well at present but it depends how other elements in relation to the bridge come together. All are aiming for this date. The excavator is currently working on the north side. CMK will be in touch after the meeting to discuss individual circumstances and how house builders can be assisted.

NMD queried whether in late July it will be possible, on a supervised basis, for temporary arrangements (without side walls) to be made to allow materials to be moved across for house builders. CMK responded that we are hoping to complete the whole bridge first but all options are being considered. NMD noted that as the season changes to autumn/winter, there will be more obstacles for house builders, so it would be better to get materials over as quickly as possible. CMK replied it is better to build the side walls and complete the works at the same time as temporary works will create further works that have to be removed and this delays completion. CR queried whether it was possible to see more detailed construction plans. CMK replied that he was happy to go through these with CR over the phone.

9. AOCB

Bin at Bernera Road End. CM raised the issue of the bin at the Bernera road end. Once it is full, rubbish is just left around it which is unsightly and unhygienic, as well as attracting sea gulls and further rubbish being deposited in the area. She requested that this would be removed. All agreed. NMD to ask for this bin to be removed on behalf of community.

Email from a family in England looking for Bernera croft/plot. JM relayed the message received in the BCC inbox from a family looking for a croft/plot close to the sea/with sea views. There was a discussion about this in relation to the known problems associated with land ownership in Bernera. One suggestion was that the family keep an eye on the Estate Agents, and consider buying a home locally with a view to buying a plot in future, as this avoids such problems. RT to respond, notifying them about the upcoming housing meeting.

Land Issue/Crofting Commission. MM requested that we invite a rep from the Crofting Commission to help us negotiate our land issues. It was agreed that we need more guidance. It was agreed they should be invited to a future meeting (post community housing meeting) including MP/MSPs and housing reps.

The next meeting is scheduled for Thursday 10 June 2021 at 6.45pm.

Please contact: berneracomcouncil@gmail.com to make suggestions or raise any issues. The minutes from previous meetings, dating back to 2012, can be found at: <https://e-sgire.org/communities/ward4/community-associations/>