

CHAIR'S REPORT – LAGGAN COMMUNITY COUNCIL AGM – JUNE 2024

MEETINGS – The community council has met 4 times since the last AGM in June 2023, with thanks to all members of the CC for their efforts in progressing community matters. Over the past year there have been significant changes to the CC, with Colin Morgan stepping down as Chair as he and his wife Ailsa made the move to beautiful Orkney. Colin successfully chaired the CC for many years and will be sorely missed both professionally and personally. The CC are very grateful for the onward help Colin has provided to the new council members who have taken up the baton. We also saw the departure of other long standing community council members, Jill Warner as Treasurer, Lauren Hendry and Valerie McPherson. With these departures it has been necessary to vote in new CC members to fulfil the positions of Chair, Secretary and Treasurer along with new council members to make up a full quota of 8 community councillors and one associate member in order to continue to routinely review a number of statutory items at each meeting as noted below. We continue to be supported by the community, our area Highland Councillors and Ward Managers.

PLANNING / LICENCING - The CC exercises its statutory right to review, and where appropriate, respond to all planning & licensing applications. Training in Planning policies and procedures for Community Councils and their officials is still to be carried out. There have been number of residential planning applications – most of which were supportable and have subsequently gained approval. The planning application for a wind farm development by SSE at Cloiche was granted. An application by SSE Networks to erect Pylons connecting the Melgarve Substation to the Stronelairg plateau has been made

Planning for the construction of a new distillery has been passed. This may present future employment for our community.

The Government continues to present planning applications for various additional telecoms masts in remote areas where there is no current coverage. We, as a CC, have questioned whether coverage of this type is actually required in such remote areas, particularly in areas of noted outstanding beauty. As such a proposed mast atop Creag Dhu did not gain planning approval and will not be erected. Conversely, there has been permission to erect a mast on Jahama Estates as this directly benefits estate workers who work in this remote area on a daily basis. There is currently another proposal for a further mast in yet another very remote location.

By far the most significant planning application under review is that of Loch an Earba Hydro Scheme which will have far reaching consequences for our community. Briefly, the plan is to build a dam which will flood the glen and change the landscape irreversibly. Additionally, there will have to be a further substation constructed, the location of which is still being discussed. Planning permission has been sought in this regard and will be reviewed accordingly. We are tasked as a CC to give our thoughts on the matter and as such we have disseminated information to the community to ensure that residents are aware and kept abreast of the situation as it unfolds.

ROADS/TRANSPORT LINKS – There have been several areas of improvements made to the A86 between Laggan and Newtonmore, although this will be an ongoing process simply due to the wear and tear brought about by use. The new bus service which was introduced at the beginning of June continues to run successfully Monday to Friday. Weekends do remain a problem but we are happy for this small win. It is likely that the bus routes will fall back under the remit of Highland Council over the next couple of years when Stagecoach contract comes to an end. We are hopeful that at the very least there will be no deterioration in the service we now have and that there may be potential for a weekend service to be added. Speed past the village of Laggan continues to be a concern for

residents as does the lack of a safe haven/crossing for our schoolchildren who now all have no other option than the school bus service to transport them to and from schools in Newtonmore and Kingussie. The CC is making enquiries with Highland Council about the installation of a bus shelter and enhanced safety features. We also await response from HC/BEAR in respect of better roadside barriers in the area of the lochans.

COMMUNITY ASSETS – School – Gergask Primary is now officially closed. **Church** - The church will officially close at the end of the year and is actually already up for sale by the Diocese of Scotland. **The Public Toilet** - remains open, but we are advised that funds to maintain this facility will be discontinued after 31/12/24 in line with the church closure. **Picnic Site and Play Park** – the work done by local volunteers in the community to tidy the play park area, repair the steps down into the area, pick up litter and attend to the various planters is always much appreciated and thanks go to everyone who has helped out.

COMMUNITY CONSULTATION & COMMUNICATION - We continue to use a Local Community Action Plan, which can be viewed on the www.laggan.com website, to prioritise and inform you of our progress and decisions.

The Community Resilience Plan remains a work in progress.

The “Connecting Laggan” paths project proposing possible routes to connect all the hamlets of Laggan safely, by taking walkers and cyclists off the main trunk roads through our area is unfortunately not being taken forward. We are extremely disappointed in this decision but financially it is not viable at this time. Further information can be obtained from C Pizaro. The publication of Laggan Matters continued during the year and we remain grateful to our Jill Warner for producing and to Ardverikie Estate for printing copies of the newsletter for distributing. This newsletter is for the community and articles, large and small, are always welcomed by the editors and each edition is welcomed. All the editions can be seen on the www.laggan.com website.

SSE COMMUNITY INVESTMENT FUND – The Laggan Community continues to be a beneficiary of funds from the SSE Stronelairg Community Investment fund. The fund started in 2017 but only operational to Laggan in early 2019 – and specifically after the Community Council was formed in late 2018. The commitment of funds from SSE is for a total period of 25 years – the first 3 years of which operated via a local volunteer advisory panel under SSEs guidance (to April 2023). New panel arrangements have been agreed with new guidelines for managing the fund for the next 18 years. This CC is currently looking into the potential to employ either a Community Benefit Officer or a Development Trust Officer under a SCIO arrangement and meetings are being scheduled to that end.

In closing I would like to thank our community and the members of the Community Council, past and present, for their support at our scheduled meetings and their continued efforts in the many matters brought before the CC. Special thanks to Amanda Gallagher and Cath Hamill without whose help I would not have had the courage to take on the position of your Community Council Chair. As required by statute I will demit as Chair of the Community Council at the AGM.

Karen Thew. Chair, Laggan Community Council.