

FURNACE COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MONTHLY MEETING

THURSDAY 25th May 2023

Attended by Mark Boston, Ann Dodd, Ronnie Dodd, Sharon MacInnes, Andy Henderson, Ruth Tott, Peter Hogbin,

1. Apologies for absence: Cllr Jan Brown, Cllr Garret Corner
2. Agreement of minutes from April meeting:
Prop. Sharon MacInnes. Sec. Anne Dodd
3. Matters arising: Andy Henderson asked who was on the An Suidhe Windfarm panel. No replacements found for 2 representatives from Furnace to sit on the panel since resignations in the in the last 12 months. RT to phone Foundation Scotland to find out who now is the administrator and to give Andy Henderson's email address. It was suggested that we write an advert for replacements.

Mark Boston also suggested that we should advertise for a paid position of note keeper at future Community Council meetings. The sum of £30 was thought a fair payment for attending the meeting, writing up and circulating the notes. MB will speak to another CC where he believes this is already in place.

4. Treasurer's report: The new bank account is now open. Total balance of £3640. £1007 is Microgrant money. Sharon MacInnes said that the SCIO would be submitting an application shortly.
5. Police Report: 43 calls shared between Inveraray and surrounds including 1 road traffic, 2 calls of concern over people and 4 crimes reported.
6. Roads update: No news regarding BEAR. Peter Hogbin has been in contact regarding litter on Furnace bends. This has now been 'elevated to senior management level.' Both Mark Boston and Cllr Jan Brown continue to chase Bear regarding the A83 40mph & settlement signage works which remain unfinished.

The CC has had concerns raised about speeding on Queen Elizabeth. Given the number of parked vehicles causing 'blind spots' and the number of children in the area this is of concern. FCC will put 20mph signs up on posts and ask residents to put stickers on their bins as a reminder that all must drive cautiously, below 20mph. We will also seek advice from the police if this does not improve.

Sharon bought the CC up to date about tarmacking outside the hall from 12th June for a week. Breedon is donating the tar. Ronnie Dodd asked about getting parking lines marked out. This is for the SCIO to discuss.

7. Micro Grant Applications: Peter confirmed that Fyne Friends Parent, Baby and Toddler Group has received their payment. We have had one other request. This was not granted as it did not meet the criteria.

The SCIO will be making an application for new notice boards. Mark Boston requested that the CC had a notice board of their own so notices can be fully displayed. SCIO to submit application to Peter Hogbin.

8. Furnace Surgery Closure: 62 responses to the straw poll pulled together quickly for the closed meeting between the Community Council and Lochgilphead Medical Practice held on 9th May. It clearly showed the local demand to re-open the surgery in Furnace. This should be run alongside other services. See Appendix 1 for written up notes taken from the meeting. The CC has written to NHS Highlands requesting they attend a meeting with the CC and Lochgilphead Medical Practice. Cllr Corner and Cllr Brown have both forwarded emails concerning grants to buy the premises. This was though unrealistic.
- 12 Correspondence: Ruth confirmed that SSEN will be attending the next community council meeting to update residents on plans. RT to contact the SSEN representative to discuss an outline of the contents of the meeting so that we can advertise it.
- 13 Any other competent business: CC has written to the Forestry Commission stressing our concerns over the recent introduction of car parking fees at many national parks. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the letter. John Sutherland from the Forestry Commission is holding a meeting to explain about the charges. Ann and Ronnie Dodd will attend the meeting on our behalf. We will write to John Sutherland requesting that the meeting is opened to other interested groups.

We have had complaints from residents regarding sheep escaping from fields up on Goatfield. The sheep go into gardens as well as walk down the track (Leacainn Walk) onto the A83. One time it was approx.20 sheep on the main road and Queen Elizabeth. FCC say the matter should be reported to the police when this happens.

Date of next meeting – 29th June 2023 - 6.30pm, Furnace Village Hall

Appendix One

Extraordinary Furnace Community Council Meeting (closed) with Lochgilphead Medical Practice

Tuesday 23rd May, 2023

Present: Mark Boston, Peter Hogbin, Ruth Tott, Sharon Macinnes, Dr Strain, Donna Gipson, Dr Laura Cameron, Councillor Jan Brown, Councillor Dougie Philland, Councillor Garrett Corner. The Meeting was chaired by Mark Boston.

After Introductions Dr Strain issued an apology for the delay in holding this meeting. He then went on to apologise for the letter, sent to all residents at the end of last year, concerning the closure of Furnace Surgery. This letter was approved and recommended by Evan Beswick (Head of Primary Care, Argyll and Bute HSCP). However Dr Strain suggested that Evan Beswick has now changed his advice and was “acting beyond his capacity.”

Mark Boston thanked Dr Strain and highlighted the chronological steps leading up to the letter dating back to 2018. The Community Council is not unsympathetic to the problems in providing a service but having no surgery in an area with an elderly demographic, reliant on poor public transport, is creating more problems, short and long term.

A key argument for closing the surgery was the stats provided showing little take up on clinic days. We dispute the stats as we feel they are skewed deliberately to show a negative outcome. Firstly they include 2020 which, due to lockdown restrictions cannot possibly show an accurate picture. Secondly, from 2018 there was a deliberate policy in place to filter as many as possible to Inveraray Surgery. Residents were told that injections had to be at Inveraray, doctors were not available etc.

We’ve asked for figures to be shown going back to 2015. Dr Cameron said she would get these stats for the next meeting.

Mark Boston then went through the ‘straw poll’ responses to a brief, informal, questionnaire. It was noted that this was done quickly, through existing channels (the shop and social events) necessary due to limited time and personnel. However the results were convincing showing, out of the 62 responses 99.5% stated that having a surgery in Furnace was important to them.

The survey also highlighted that many thought the building should house more than a doctor’s surgery. It was, at one point, used for dentistry and podiatry.

A wider discussion followed concerning ownership and responsibility of the building itself.

The building is owned by NHS Highland and Islands Trust. But the receptionist was paid for by Lochgilphead Medical Practice even though this was a shared resource with dentist and podiatry.

The building itself, due to neglect over the last 5 years, is in need to repair and updating, in particular IT. What are plans for the building?

A question was raised about whether FCC could ‘buy’ the building. We should speak to Fiona Davies, Chief Office of Argyll and Bute Health and Social Care, Scotland as well as Evan Beswick.

Dr Strain raised the issue over Community Link which was geared towards Lochgilphead residents giving them easier access to mental health support and other areas of care. Doctors serving rural and remote areas did not vote this in.

Councillor Jan Brown said that all of this is about money. Not about people – major stakeholders.

ACTION

LMP will produce the stats from 2015 regarding use of Furnace Surgery.

FCC will write to Fiona Davies.

LMP will ‘digest and respond’ the survey.

Another meeting will be called where Evan Beswick and Fiona Davies will be invited.

Appendix 2 – letter to Forestry & Land Scotland re. Parking Charges

Simon Hodgson CEO
Forestry and Land Scotland National Office
Great Glen House
Leachkin road
Inverness
IV3 8NW

16th May 2023

Dear Simon Hodgson

I am writing to you on behalf of Furnace Community Council. We represent residents in and around the Furnace area of Argyll and Bute. Several residents have expressed their concerns about the Forestry and Land Scotland's recent implementation of car parking fees at many of the car parks in our area.

Given that Forestry and Land Scotland is the largest provider of outdoor recreation opportunities in Scotland it now seems that residents will have to pay to walk their dog, go for a cycle ride, or take the children out to appreciate nature on land that is actually in public ownership.

At our last Community Council meeting members highlighted that the introduction of parking charges directly contradicts your mission quoted in the *Visitor Strategy for Scotland 2022 – 2023* which states that you want to "have more people participating in – and benefitting from – access and outdoor activities more often on Scotland's national forests and land."

There were a broad number of concerns highlighted including the hazards caused by parking outside of the payment zone, i.e. on the main road. (I remind you a number of these areas will be on the notorious A82 and A83).

Other concerns voiced were around the whole issue over mental and physical health, both having been on an escalated downward trajectory following the Covid pandemic.

Points were also raised that this is yet another example of those on the lowest incomes who will be hit disproportionately by the introduction of these charges.

In the light of the above concerns we ask that Forestry and Land Scotland review its policy and at least offer free annual passes to residents of Argyll to encourage them to enjoy & benefit from access to Scotland's forests & land.

Finally, at a time when the growth & number of Wind Farm developments is ever increasing and Developers are keen to work with and support local community based initiatives in order to enhance the lives and wellbeing of both residents and the wider community, we cannot see why Forestry and Land Scotland cannot collaborate with Foundation Scotland in order to ensure that the provision of free parking is maintained to allow visitors to enjoy a walk, cycle, or a day out with their children.

Yours sincerely

Mark Boston – Secretary
Furnace Community Council

CC

Andrew Hunt, Regional Manager West
Graeme Prest, Director of Land Management and Regions
Jenni Minto MSP
The Editor, Argyll Advertiser