

Minutes of 29 May 2024 Caerlaverock Community Association meeting

Present: David Gilbert (DG, Chair), Chris Jackson (Treasurer), Ian Brown (Committee Member), Helen Clark (Committee Member), Ronnie Clark (Committee Member), Rona Carson (Committee Member), Malcolm Johnstone (Nith Councillor), Keith Walters (Nith Councillor), Anna Austin (Estate Manager, Caerlaverock Estate), David Pickett (WWT) and 9 Caerlaverock residents.

Apologies: Sue Greig, Rob Wells, Shirley Little, Billy Little, Suzanne McIntyre (NatureScot), Rosie Thorp (Historic Environment Scotland), Kelly Green, Karen Scriven (Caerlaverock School), Cllr John Campbell, Fred Trigg.

1. Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the last meeting were accepted.

2. Financial Position

Total balance (including allotments) on 23 February 2024 **£23,591.97**

Total balance (including allotments) on 25 May 2024 **£26,001.03**

Non-allotment details

Non-allotment balance 23 February 2024: £21,902.45

Non-allotment income (all from Motorhomes) £4,019.80

Non-allotment expenditure £1,645.74 comprising donation to Hutton Hall to keep them afloat following last year's oil theft £800; sub-base for Quay End to improve surface £333, two Castle Corner septic tank emptyings @ £130 = £260, CCA insurance renewal £123.76, Castle Corner signage £99, hall hire for last CCA meeting £18, replacement lock for vandalised Castle Corner honesty box £11.98. The insurance is for charities and community groups and includes employer's liability, public liability and officers' liability.

Non-allotment balance 25 May 2024 **£24,276.51**

Allotment details

Allotments balance 23 February 2024 £1,689.52

Allotments income (plot 3 rent and cook books) £45

Allotments expenditure £10 (SSAGS membership)

Allotments balance 25 May £1,724.52.

3. General Reports

Community Police

No attendance and no report received, despite reminders being sent. General dissatisfaction with this situation. Police repeatedly promise to attend these meetings and fail to turn up. We were promised that things would change this year but this is the second CCA meeting of 2024 and there's been no police representation at either. Any report they send us is invariably a generic D&G crime report whereas what we want from our local police officer is local information. Following the last CCA meeting, David Gilbert spoke to them about a) cars parking too close to the Kingholm Quay mini roundabout (Police will monitor the situation and speak to drivers where necessary) and b) speeding through the village (when they are able they will keep an eye on things). They ask us to advise them of any community events and they'll try to attend.

D&G Council

Roads: potholes

Cllrs Keith Walters and Malcolm Johnstone have repeatedly asked the Council when steps will be taken to improve the appalling state of the roads. The councillors urge local people to report particular potholes. The amount of gravel (from the potholes or washed down the Quay Hill in recent rainfall) is in itself a danger. DG pointed out that there are no pavements so the road is used by everyone from tractors to people pushing buggies. Cllr Walters reported that Glencaple is to be resurfaced but there is no date for this though the fact that we are on the resurfacing list means we will at least be mentioned at every future Communities Meeting, with an opportunity for councillors to again press for a date. The Councillors were both apologetic; they share our frustration and are doing everything they can and will continue to badger the Council. Frustratingly, no Council officers have yet been seen in Glencaple, so DG and Cllr David Slater have videoed the potholes and sent the video to the Council.

Roads: white lines

David Turnbull commented that many of the white lines at junctions need repainted. Malcolm Johnstone agreed – the problem has existed for years and something as simple as painting the white lines does much to improve the general ambiance of the place for tourists.

Merse and Climate Change

Malcolm Johnstone, as part of his role with Solway Firth Partnership, attended the UK Saltmarsh Conference at Easterbrook Hall. With climate change, saltmarsh (merse) habitat is proving to be an incredibly useful

resource for carbon sequestration and there were many positive comments about our area. Good that Caerlaverock is being recognised in that forum.

Refuse Disposal at Castle Corner

We are trying to improve refuse disposal capacity at Castle Corner car park. The bin is always full, despite it being next to a nature reserve and in a tourist area, but D&G Council say we would have to buy a bin ourselves and pay for regular emptying. As a not-for-profit organisation promoting tourism in the area, CCA should not be expected to pay (see also HES visitor figures and number of CCA website visits, below).

NatureScot

Graffiti on the bins and noticeboard was cleaned off by staff. The holes in Castle Corner car park have been filled. Fencing at the Castle Corner and Phyllis's car parks will be gradually replaced over the summer.

WWT

Events planned for the summer feature moths, dragonflies, the summer solstice, Barn Owls and Badgers. Details on the WWT website. As for wildlife, WWT are targeting some of the rarer farmland birds. Nest boxes are up for Tree Sparrows, also for Barn Owls and Kestrels. Barnacle Geese numbers this winter were almost back at their pre-avian flu levels, having dropped by 30% two years ago. A really exciting discovery was a large colony of nationally rare Holy-grass found growing amongst gorse near the Saltcot hide.

Historic Environment Scotland

23,000 visitors between the castle reopening end July 2023 and the end of March 2024. 5,792 visitors in the year to date (end March to 26 May). Ongoing works: repairs to the visitor centre & cottage and toilet repairs. Completed: bat survey, moat clearance, repairs to two of the castle chimneys. Four new members of staff have been appointed. Jousting returns Sat 27 and Sun 28 July and dates for Robert the Bruce themed tours of the castle will be announced shortly. HES is announcing a new drone policy soon; meanwhile, drones cannot be flown in the castle's area of responsibility for the protection of staff, visitors and wildlife.

Caerlaverock Estate

Conservation Officer Robbie Cowan has left to become an access officer with the Council. Robbie's gamekeeping duties will be taken over by two people from the Castle Douglas area working under contract a few days per month. Robbie's Nature Restoration Fund work will be carried out by Andy Brown (who has already been helping out with forestry/woodland work) 0.5-1 day per week. Andy's role will include planting wildlife corridors, tree safety work and work on the Wardlaw & Mary's Wood (by Lantonside). Anna will take over Robbie's role in issuing haaf-netting permits. Mugshots will be issued of all the new staff. For urgent queries that Robbie used to deal with, eg sheep in the road, contact Anna.

Recruitment

Anna is looking to recruit an estate warden to work 2-2.5 days a week: jobs to include grounds maintenance, basic DIY for holiday lets, strimming, spraying. The team are hoping to move into the new estate office in the next couple of weeks and Anna is looking to recruit an admin officer, working 1-1.5 days a week (flexible). Email Anna if you know of anyone for any of these positions.

Accommodation

Two properties will be available for rent in the next couple of weeks (let Anna know of anyone interested): 2-bed middle house at Greenhead (the castle) and 3-bed Solway Cottage at the end of the drive leading to Lantonside. Another Greenhead property will become available in June.

Community Funding opportunities

Info from Chris Woodness: funding is available for community-based ecology work. If this is something the community wants to apply for, Anna is fully supportive and can help with applications.

Caerlaverock School

Karen Scriven will let David Gilbert have a report.

Barbour Hall

Since the last meeting, the hall has new doors, fire doors, windows and kitchen. Disappointing news on the finances though. We were waiting to hear about money from the Community Ownership Fund but the forthcoming general election has put paid to that. Moreover, the Coastal Benefit Fund money, already awarded, was match funded dependent upon us getting the Community Ownership Fund money. The Coastal Benefit Fund money had to start being spent by 5 July. We have therefore approached the Coastal Benefit Fund again to see if the date can be moved as not getting the money would be a disaster. The two sums of

money would have amounted to nearly £250,000 and would have paid for the rendering, a new roof, skylights in the roof and hall access ramps. Internal improvements will therefore be delayed because of water ingress so there is no point improving the inside of the hall until the outside is done.

Website: the existing website is little used and is therefore being upgraded. All the “What’s on” information is on facebook so the website will become more of an information portal.

Trustees: the Hall has two new trustees: Fred Trigg and Becca Johnstone.

Events: traditional music this Sunday 2 June (the last one till September). Soup Social Wed 19 June 12 noon – 2pm.

Allotments

A very late start to the growing season (about three weeks behind last year). Things are getting going, though, and everyone is welcome to visit this lovely site. Particular thanks to Dick McKune for cutting the grass and keeping the site tidy.

Nith Inshore Rescue

No attendance and no report received. DG is still hoping to run a first aid course for youngsters, perhaps in September.

Caerlaverock Kirk

No report received.

Hutton Hall

Kelly has been ill and the AGM will be rearranged. Very grateful for the £800 from CCA funds. Kelly asked who Hutton Hall’s contact would be in the Council (answer: Chris Woodness). DG asked who owns the old Bankend bowling green and clubhouse next to it (answer: the Council) and is it included in the Hutton Hall lease? He assumes not, but there’s a dearth of community space and this is a building and an open grass area that’s not being used. He asked the Councillors present to make enquiries.

AOB

Caerlaverock Community Website

4,000 visitors to the www.caerlaverock.org.uk website last month, most of them looking at the motorhome page.

Grass-cutting and Community Projects

- Rob Wells reported that the flourishing local kids' football team play at the school but on the hard surface. The head teacher of the school has agreed to the kids playing on the school grass area but the grass is too long (the Council cut it twice a year). Rob wondered if they could use the CCA mower to keep the grass cut. The meeting agreed to this.
- 6 bags of sub-base were spread at the Quay End by Dougie Anderson and Tom Brown to help improve the surface.
- All the Glencaple grass-cutting is done by Dick McKune. Although Dick has never asked for help, it is felt we should find someone to help him. Dougie Anderson noted that the edges need strimmed at the same time. Discussion about how we can attract younger folk to help with some of these tasks. We will post a plea for help on Caerlaverock Neighbours.
- Community events: as discussed at the last meeting, Nith Inshore Rescue would like their 2024 Open Day (summer, date to be decided) to be part of a wider community event but so far no-one has come forward. Anyone willing to organise a community event please contact the Barbour Hall.
- Benches: Douglas Anderson has had the two Quay End benches refurbished. The community payback team will look to refurbishing the old bench at the south end of Glencaple and a memorial bench on the quay. The team will also varnish the two new benches and will refurbish the anchor outside The Boathouse. DG is talking to them about replacing the beacon. It is important to involve them in projects like this as it helps justify their funding next year.
- Speed limits and roads: already discussed above. Our Councillors are on board. There really is no more we can do as a community. Rona Carson mentioned solar speed devices which were used in 2018 to capture drivers' speeds. She would like another reading done. John Carson commented that the road is on a major tourist route, a cycle route and the Burns Heritage Trail, so is used by a great many walkers and cyclists. Fiona Hinchcliffe gave an update

on the campaign for an active travel path from Dumfries to Caerlaverock. The proposal is being submitted to the SWestrans (SW Scotland Transport Partnership) board on 28 June for approval. She will keep us updated. Malcolm Johnstone said there is extra council funding available for active travel so this bodes well for the campaign.

Hutton Trust

Nothing to report. Still no takers among young trade apprentices.

Other

Effluent discharge

On 25 May, road tankers were again seen discharging effluent direct into the estuary at Airds Point where the River Nith meets the Solway. Graeme Dalby has raised a pollution incident with SEPA and made a formal complaint to Scottish Water. Scottish Water blame a burst in the effluent pipe between Cargenbridge treatment works and Airds Point. This will take 7-10 days to fix, meanwhile there is no alternative to discharging from tankers direct into the river. The volume of effluent having to be transported by road is so great that it is not possible to wait for an ebbing tide before discharging it. DG proposed submitting a Freedom of Information request to SEPA and Scottish Water for information on discharges and testing, to make sure it is not causing any environmental damage. The meeting supported this move.

Ecology grants

Anna already touched on the ecology grants now available. DG's concern is that CCA does not own any land and does not have any rights over any land so it's not clear what projects we could take on. Applying for grants would be a phenomenal amount of work for no justifiable reason. David Pickett said WWT apply for similar grants and one of the conditions is often the need for support from the local community. Would the local community feel they could support WWT if this were requested, in broad terms? The meeting agreed unanimously. Alice commented that in the work she has been doing for the Barbour Hall, local letters of support can be very influential.

Fitsteps

Fitness dance classes have started on a Monday night in the Barbour Hall. £7 a session, 7:15 pm - 8 pm.

New Walking Group

First walk was cancelled because of the rain. Will be rearranged.

Glencaple Community Notice Board

Needs attention because the doors no longer open. Chris Jackson and Dougie Anderson to repair it. Bankend also needs a new noticeboard.