

Minutes of 27 November 2024 Caerlaverock Community Association meeting

Present: David Gilbert (Chair), Fred Trigg (Committee Member), Ian Brown (Committee Member), Rona Carson (Committee Member), Helen Clark (Committee Member), Ronnie Clark (Committee Member), Anna Austin (Caerlaverock Estate Manager), Cllr John Campbell, Cllr Malcolm Johnstone, Cllr David Slater, Alice Wilson (Barbour Hall), Karen Scriven (Head Teacher, Caerlaverock Primary School), Rosie Thorp (Historic Environment Scotland) and 16 Caerlaverock residents.

Apologies: Chris Jackson (Treasurer), David Pickett (WWT), Suzanne McIntyre (NatureScot), Cllr Keith Walters, Cllr Chris Woodness, Rob Wells, Sue Greig, Douglas Anderson.

Minutes of last meeting

The minutes of the 28 August 2024 meeting were accepted.

Financial position

CCA finances remain very healthy. Motorhome income for the past period £4,345.59, expenditure £1,865.21 (entire 23 Nov financial statement is on the website). Our healthy financial position shows just how important motorhomes are to the community.

General reports

Community Police

No attendance, not even a report. DG asked if the Councillors have any idea how we can get a meeting with the police and let them know this is just not acceptable.

D&G Council

Cllr Slater has been in touch with the builder regarding the continued lack of a footpath from the new houses south of Glencaple into the village centre. He reminded them that the work needs done and if a footpath is not put in place, building may have to stop. Potholes: Cllr Slater mentioned further potholes reported near Castle Corner but DGC came back saying they were not sure where exactly the potholes were. DG said Lantonside. Cllr Slater explained that upon receiving a pothole complaint, DGC officials go out with iPads but if they can't find the pothole they can't do anything. Fred chipped in with a reminder about the Bankend potholes. DG said DGC should be sending us monthly reports about what they've done eg about the footpath. If the builder has had his money but not finished the work then action needs taken. Finally, Cllr Slater mentioned the beacon. He wrote to the chairman of the company that owns Scottish Gas but didn't get a reply. Will keep trying [SORRY, CAN'T MAKE ANYTHING OF THIS. FOLLOWED BY SOMETHING ABOUT KINGHOLM QUAY BUT NOT OUR AREA SO I OMITTED IT].

Cllr Malcolm Johnstone has also been in touch with DGC about the lack of a pavement. The latest information is that DGC visited on 31 October and Cllr Johnstone agrees it is immensely frustrating. Trying to get DGC to pursue planning enforcement action is the problem. On the subject of speeding, he is still trying to get DGC to download the speeding information we need. He'll need to try someone else.

Not in Caerlaverock ... but on the subject of roads, a speaker from the floor complained that Craigs Road is an absolute disgrace.

NatureScot

Report from Suzanne McIntyre.

- The path network is now fully open (old boardwalk replaced)
- Bins not being emptied by DGC (same problem as DG already discussed)
- Problem in summer with the smoking of marijuana in the Back o' Wood bird hide. The hides were locked at night and at the weekends for a few weeks, which helped. Police are supporting, and cameras are up.
- Huge box of fireworks was set off in November, despite clear signage. No damage but would have disturbed the birds.
- But visitors have generally been well behaved.
- NatureScot to trial (with other reserves in Scotland) a scheme for visitors to voluntarily pay for car parking in Caerlaverock. Payment will be online, with no hardware in the car parks. There will be no enforcement.

WWT

Winter birds are pouring in. Barnacle Geese numbers continue to recover after the bird flu of 2021/22. Whooper Swans are here in good numbers, with large broods. New ponds, dug in late summer, are filling with water and birds are using them. The Visitor Centre has had a revamp. WWT are trialling a new admission price of £5 (half the old price).

Historic Environment Scotland

Visitor numbers: 34,092 for the year to date (1 Mar – 24 Nov). Winter opening hours (until 31 March) are 10am-4pm, with last entry at 3:30pm - but the grounds remain free and accessible at all times. Playground issues have been fixed and the area reopened. Repairs to the Visitor Centre and Cottage are ongoing, with moat clearance next. We are hoping to have access to one of the front towers reinstated, following further inspection and necessary repairs, as budget to enable this has come through. The top section of scaffolding will be removed as work in this area has been completed.

As part of the University of Glasgow (Dumfries Campus) 'The Economics of Circular Tourism' course, students have been looking at Caerlaverock Castle's potential as a sustainable tourism destination. HES took part in Heritage Careers week with an onsite event on 2 November. Staff are developing some free Christmas activities for the visitor centre.

Caerlaverock Estate

The Estate has been nominated for two environmental awards (RSPB and Scottish Land & Estates). Work is about to start on ten new wildlife corridors: fencing is coming down next week with planting planned for January. Also in January, work will start on another 4-5 ponds in the Shearington area. The festive menu has just started in The Boathouse. The Estate are feeding into a lot of consultations including the proposed Galloway National Park and Anna urged everyone to engage with it and have their say.

Following the recent heavy rain and resultant flooding, Anna is working on a review of water management and the ditch network across the Estate to see if we can better control the movement of water. Contact Anna if you have any immediate, specific concerns.

Rubbish

Following a comment from the floor that motorhomes are leaving their rubbish in the Castle Corner car park, discussion turned to the provision of bins in Caerlaverock and continuing problems getting them emptied. DGC will not lift rubbish in bags so local people have to clear up the mess, whether at Castle Corner or the Quay End. DG wants CCA, Caerlaverock Estate and NatureScot to have a face-to-face meeting with DGC but it is hard getting DGC to engage. He repeated that as a non-profit organisation we should not have to pay for the bins or the emptying thereof. DG provided

background on the current situation: the DGC lorry that emptied the big bins keeps breaking down, or staff go sick, or there is some other excuse for the bins not being emptied weekly as DGC had promised. DGC then (without consultation) replaced each of our big bins with two small bins which are emptied by a different vehicle (except for the Big Rock large bin which was replaced by one small bin). DG has complained about this whole situation. The complaint was upheld but the bins are still not being emptied. The next step would be for DG to take it to the Scottish Public Services Ombudsman.

Caerlaverock School

Staffing remains at 2 teachers, 1 Probationer & 1 Support for Learning teacher.

Volunteers are key to supporting the school. School roll = 23 pupils.

Learning and teaching has included making & selling crafts for the 10 December Barbour Hall Christmas Fayre. The school's Christmas Show takes place on Wed 18 December at 6pm; all welcome. Thank you to Caerlaverock Estate for the Christmas tree. The school visited WWT. Caerlaverock Curling Club visited the school and had the children making posters for a competition. Some pupils were invited to a Hallowe'en wedding at The Boathouse.

School Model Consultation: schools are rated on a scale out of 16 and Caerlaverock was rated 10, so not quite meeting the required standard. The consultation will be presented to DGC Education Committee in April 2025 so it remains business as usual for now. Cllr Malcolm Johnstone commented that a review of any school has to go through the proper consultation process which will take years.

The **Open Afternoon on 27 November** was a great success, resulting in 4, possibly 5, new entrants, plus another possible two who are only 1 year old at present. The school will advertise future school events on the Caerlaverock Neighbours facebook group.

Parental Involvement and Engagement: during Scottish Careers Week the school had talks from parents whose jobs included chef, environmental scientist, occupational therapist assistant, police constable, farmer, nurse and careers advisor.

DG commented on how important the school is to the Caerlaverock community. He would welcome anecdotes on facebook from parents about how good the school is.

Kyle Johnstone, following his update on junior football (below), repeated that the parent council are keen to promote events and everything the school is involved in, while also trying to make money for the school. They are currently looking for donations of any old kitchen units.

Barbour Hall

Alice reported that they are needing funds to upgrade the disabled toilet. Events since the last meeting have included a bingo night (to be once a quarter) and a Race Night. The annual Christmas Fayre takes place on 7 December. Fitsteps still takes place on a Monday at 7:15pm. Let's Get Sporty are running multi-sport sessions for children P1 to P7 on a Friday 4pm-5:30pm. DG announced that the Community Team will provide us with 50 bags of kindlers this winter in return for a donation to the Barbour Hall of £1 per bag. Will be available to pick up from the Barbour Hall with an honesty box for donations.

Allotments

The allotments AGM was held in the autumn. All available plots are taken and there is a short waiting list. The water has been turned off for the winter. Allotment-holders are already looking forward to next year.

Nith Inshore Rescue

No report received.

Caerlaverock Kirk

The future of the Kirk is currently under review and a meeting with the Elders was held recently.

Hutton Hall

A new committee has been formed and is working well. Tuesday and Thursday bowling and ladies' clubs are back up-and-running for the season. Our Christmas event is on Sunday 15 September – all welcome. The invitation to join the Friends of Hutton Hall has generated a lot of support; there is still time to become a member (8 December is the cut-off). DG hoped that the former bowling green beside the Hall would be brought back into community use before too long.

Junior Football

It is now winter and they are using the Barbour Hall for training (Thursday nights, 6pm-7pm and 7pm-8pm) – the school field is too wet and the MUGA (multi-use games area) surface of the fenced-off sports area is slippery. They have started taking donations from parents to cover cost of hiring the hall.

Any Other Business

Community Website

Fred reported that the motorhome pages are still the most visited. The “What’s on” element is also extremely popular since Barbour Hall, WWT and Hutton Hall events are now all on this one page. Fred invited the school to add theirs. “Where to stay” is also well up. A lot of visits are now generated from Google searches since Fred optimised our pages so they come closer to the top of Google search results. We now have a Local Clubs page so please contact Fred to add your group. Fred and DG are going to create a Community Projects section where people can see the status of all the current Caerlaverock projects.

Grass-cutting and community projects

Grass cutting has finished for the winter. Community projects tackled have included the churchyard tidy-up and tidying the war memorial. The black-and-white squares on all three bridges need repainted. CCA will pay but, as with all such projects, volunteers are needed.

Speeding, limits, roads

Already covered.

Flooding at Kelton Bank

John Carson read out a letter which Rona sent to DGC regarding this issue. Kelton Bank floods every time there is heavy rain and locals have to clear it up. The problem seems to be the final outflow from Kelton Bank onto the merse, which can become blocked. DGC replied that the defect is already logged on their system, the case is closed but they will continue to monitor it. After comments from Cllr Slater, DG offered to put Rona and Cllr Slater in email contact with each other.

Hutton Trust

3 more beneficiaries have been identified. The stringent eligibility requirements make it hard to find people (eg must have been born in the parish and still live here).

Airds Point

Rob Wells is looking in to it. It seems quite simple: if we are going to have a new sewage system we need a benchmark figure for River Nith water quality before work begins.

Proposed Galloway National Park

DG commented that there is a lot of information available and urged everyone to make their views known. He asked whether we wanted to submit a community view or do it individually, or both. To better inform local opinion, DG will organise a meeting where the two opposing sides will give their views and answer questions. Cllr Johnstone commented that we do not yet know what form the NP would take. He met Mairi Gougeon (Scottish Govt Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs, Land Reform and Islands), who assured him that if we don't want it we won't get it. He also met the chief executive of the Cairngorms NP who commented on the amount of disinformation going around.

Speeding

The problem of drivers speeding through the 20mph zone was again raised by Terry Harrop. After discussion, it was agreed that all we can do is educate individuals to obey the law and show consideration for their fellow residents. We can't expect the police to be here 24/7. We could spend £14,000 on an electronic sign but it would still come down to individuals doing the right thing.