

# BALLATER & CRATHIE COMMUNITY COUNCIL (B&CCC)

[ballaterandcrathie.org.uk](http://ballaterandcrathie.org.uk)

Minutes of a Meeting held on 10th March 2014, Mike Sheridan Room, Ballater

<b>Present:</b> James Anderson (WJ) Jane Angus (JA) Pat Downie (PD) Finance Francis Duguid (FD) Vice Chair Billy Duguid (BD) Anne Reid (AR) Sheila Sedgwick (SS) Cllr Geva Blackett (GB) Cat Houston (CH) Minutes Stuart McFarlane (SF), Roads Manager, Aberdeenshire Council (AbCo)	PC Jeff Hall, for Police business Crew Manager Barry Florence, for Scottish Fire and Rescue Service Allan Harrison for Ballater Royal Deeside Ltd (BRD) Members of the public <b>Apologies received:</b> Graham Adams (GA) Chair Ian Cameron (IC) Susan Matthews (SM) Secretary Cllr Peter Argyle (PA) Cllr Katrina Farquhar (KF), also Cairngorm National Park Authority elected representative.
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<b>1. Welcome &amp; Apologies for Absence.</b>	<b>ACTION</b>
<b>2. Police Business.</b> PC Hall reported a break-in to an outhouse at the Bridge of Gairn in February. A vehicle had also been stolen from Crathie. It had been recovered but the perpetrators not, enquiries were ongoing. He said people still needed to be vigilant and it was easy to get complacent. There had been four Mountain Rescue callouts this month. He encouraged people to use the 101 phone service to report non-emergencies, saying he does not mind a "wrong spot". There is also the anonymous Crimestoppers service. PC Hall added that police continued to monitor the Bridge Street parking situation. Once better weather arrived the yellow lines would be reapplied outside the Alexandra Hotel. As regards Hawthorn Place and further yellow lines to Bridge Street he said he had contacted AbCo and they had responded that a Traffic Management Review for village had been carried out in 2012 and that they had no plans to revisit the review in the foreseeable future. BD asked how many officers were on patrol in the area at any one time. PC Hall replied that it varied. A lot of police work is intelligence-led, but they do walk the area as well. The minimum requirement was for two double crews to work out of Banchory, but there was rarely that few. As a united service, patrols can cross boundaries now and this means they can assist other areas when required, and vice versa. JA enquired if the service had enough Special Constables. PC Hall replied yes, they presently had three, but they would never say no to more joining, as there was quite a long learning process to become one. He added that he would speak to his inspector who could perhaps come to the community council and give a clearer picture of police numbers for the area.	
<b>3. Fire Service</b> Crew Manager Barry Florence said the service had received five calls in the	

intervening month: two chimney fires, two false alarms and one child rescue. Two personnel had attended an advanced wildfire course, an event they are attending more so now. Two more had attended blue light training.

They continued to work at the Community Fire Safety Programme and had conducted a leaflet drop. It was hard for them meet the demographic of the recommended target groups, as Ballater is not high in areas of deprivation or houses of multiple occupation. Home Fire Safety Visits are ongoing and very reassuring for people. They can be booked online and people will be visited by two officers, probably people they know, and learn pointers that could save their life. He encouraged anyone who knows anybody vulnerable to go to the website or contact the station. There is no charge and there is evidence these visits do work by reducing fire deaths.

Recruitment is ongoing. There are 13 personnel at present with two due to leave soon. They have been short of crew on three different occasions. They must have four to have a one-pump capacity, and one manager per four crew, but they have the option to add crews from Aboyne or Balmoral if necessary. Personnel availability is monitored by a computer system; once they move beyond three miles of the station, they must log off by text or email.

PD suggested that the service could make use of an event at the V&A Halls on May 9<sup>th</sup> to have a table and publicise the need for more retained firefighters.

#### **4. Stuart McFarlane, Roads Manager, AbCo**

Stuart McFarlane (SF), AbCo Roads Manager for the Marr and Kincardine & Mearns areas, came to the meeting to answer a number of members' queries about roads. He had received a seven-point list of queries from SM.

##### ***Verge Cutting:***

First issue was the recent verge cutting in the area. SF said the Council had got that wrong. Roadside vegetation was inspected once a year and a contractor was handed a map indicating where cutting should be done. This year there had been a new contractor, and the council had "fallen well short" in checking if he had the right equipment. Once reports of damage came in, his staff had had a look and the work was stopped immediately. Any new contractor will be subjected to new specifications and council workers were already out, repairing damage where they could. SF pointed out that he had a budget of £30-40,000 to carry out this work on 600 miles worth of roads in Marr alone. If they used chainsaws and loppers in every case, the work would prove too expensive and they would not get much done in the year. A landscaper had gone out and inspected the damage and concluded that no plant was dead as a result of the contractor's work.

GB read an email from a resident in AbCo were asked to consider the following:

"They commit sufficient time and manpower to tidy up the worst of the damage.

Specifically where a tree has been damaged severely it should be cut down. Where trees have been scalped the branches should be pruned back to the trunk/main stem.

Where there is excessive debris this should be cleared away.

I appreciate that this is a big undertaking and will involve spending additional money however this was environmental vandalism and cannot simply be left as it is. It is a seriously bad advertisement for the Council.

In future if the Council is planning such works perhaps some guidance for land owners/managers should be given on what is required so that in sensitive locations

they are given the chance to carry out the works before the Council send in the tractor. Notification as to when the works were planned would also be appreciated. I hope that we have all learned from this, we cannot change what has happened, all we would ask is that the mess is tidied up and that it does not happen again."

SF apologised and said the council had simply got it wrong. The results had been "unsightly and horrible".

FD asked if there was a case for the council to claim against the contractor for the remedial work that has to be done. SF said they had stopped the contract which was perhaps financial penalty enough. Anyone who felt they had had private property damaged should get in touch with the council, he added. John Armitage (public) added his Hawthorn hedge, believed to be in the region of 70 years old, was beyond repair.

### **A939**

SF indicated he had visited the area of road which had raised concerns among the BCCC and found it to be in need of repair. BD said in one particular place a fence post was all that was shoring up the road. If that were to give way the road would be damaged in such a way as to necessitate a lengthy closure. SF stated that £60K had been allocated from the 2014/15 Roads Maintenance Budget which would be used to start addressing the problems and also introduce some more passing places. He indicated that the road would not be sorted in one go, it needed a lot of work and he had £6m budget to cover everything on 600+ miles of road. He added that the A939 had relatively low traffic levels, but that it affects a lot of people when it closes.

GB added that she had been told the pointing on the Gairnshiel Bridge was also apparently in need of repair and asked that if the road must be closed to deal with the repairs mentioned previously, perhaps the bridge could be done at the same time.

### **Easter Balmoral**

SF indicated that £20k has been allocated from this year's budget for the addition of four or five new passing places for this road, and that the work would involve closure of the Balmoral Bridge for a required period.

### **Parking Restrictions**

Parking in the village was reviewed in 2012. SF said at that time AbCo would have looked at the considerations and come to the BCCC for comment. The use of yellow lines had to be balanced with the needs of businesses, who wanted people to be able to park and come and use their shops. There had to be statutory consultation and public consultation before they put yellow lines down. New comments regarding Hawthorn Place for example will be looked at the time of the next review, which is scheduled for 2016, unless there is a huge safety implication.

SF echoed Jeff Hall's statement that the yellow lines outside the Alexandra Hotel would indeed be replaced when the better weather allowed it.

BD raised the possibility of introducing a Puffin crossing to Bridge Street, which would not require the loss of parking spaces, and which has a simple light system where a red light changes to green if there is no one crossing, reducing possible irritation to drivers. SF said this was a possibility for the village but that a pedestrian survey would need to be carried out to justify it. It was established that the school crossing patrol had not been replaced since the previous incumbent had left the job in December.

GB suggested that perhaps Planning Gain could be used in the advent of a new Co-op

site being introduced to the village, whereby the new crossing and its cost could be included in any planning permissions. She suggested a letter of support from the BCCC to the area manager could help.

JA pointed out that in some areas of the village, *tarmac pavements* are deteriorating, in her view because weed-killing was carried out at an inappropriate time, and the weeds come back.

BD raised the issue of *Potholes*, in particular some at the west end of the Pass of Ballater, which the Council claims to have repaired, but photo evidence showed otherwise. WJ referred to the Balmenach Farm road as also being poor, adding that water probably runs off the hill all the time, but there was something wrong there. GB indicated she had had a reply from Ralph Singleton regarding the drains in Station Square in which he had asserted that the area was served by gulleys, rather than a soakaway, which were not connected to piped drainage system. Investigations will be carried out in the near future to see if there are any possibilities to connect them to a drain, but even if there is, the funding would have to be identified. This is unlikely to be until 2015-16 as the Road Maintenance Programme for 2014-15 has already been allocated, subject to Area Committee Approval. She has asked the Road Inspector to have a look to see if any immediate gully emptying would be of any benefit. GB added that she had been told that at the time of the Craigendarroch development, nothing was done to improve the drainage infrastructure of Ballater and the village is subsequently relying on a Victorian system that was not really fit for purpose.

PD alluded to her neighbour in Deebank Road, who has to jump over a wall to exit her property after heavy rain owing to the puddles produced at her gate, and SF took a note to investigate this. (Post meeting note - SF has responded in writing to this and his e:mail forwarded to PD).

BD wished it to be noted that SF had been invited to come and speak to the BCCC, he had immediately responded, and his presence at a BCCC meeting was arranged within two to three weeks, and that the BCCC appreciated this speedy level of response.

It was suggested that signage indicating the one-way passage on Viewfield Road could be clearer on the Queen's Road side, with many drivers still committing errors.

SF added that ABCo had a good online system in place for people to make comments and report problems. A pothole was defined as a defect measuring 50mm deep or more. Any reports made online were sent directly to a hand-held device of an engineer out on the road, and problems could potentially be dealt with within 24 hours.

WJ added the Glenmuick Road needs attention and it bears a lot of traffic in the summer.

John Armitage (public) added that he had read that Glen Muick was now the most popular glen in Scotland and the road was very important for visitors. There had been a "massive increase" in traffic over the last two to three years.

PD queried the lack of fence near the Dee on the South Deeside Road leading from Ballater to the Glenmuick Road. WD also questioned the lack of white lines, which used to be there.

FD thanked SF for his time and said if he could answer even half the BCCC's queries he'd be doing well.

##### **5. Minutes from the February meeting.**

The minutes of the February meeting were agreed as an accurate account, with the

exception that the suggestion that the Barracks could be used for car parking had not come from GB.

**6. Matters Arising from the February meeting.**

SS said she had attended the induction of St Kentigern's new rector, Vittoria Hancock, on behalf of the BCCC, BBA and The Eagle, and it had been well attended. GB indicated that she had thankfully been released from her prison visit last month and went on to add that it was not a holiday camp, as some had reported. It has a good gym and a library, and most inmates are in single cells. Many of the prisoners have jobs and there has to be decent working conditions for them, as well as prison staff. A vast number of inmates are illiterate and those that can read and write are encouraged to achieve further qualifications. They can acquire life skills such as cooking and get help with drug and alcohol problems. Men, women, young offenders and seniors are all housed there. There are TVs in cells for which inmates have to pay a £1 a week out of an average £12 a week wage. It has a good regime; security is tight, with cameras everywhere and sniffer dogs used too. GB concluded that the visit had been a "fantastic experience".

JA raised the issue that Ballater Library can no longer choose the books it wishes to shelve, but instead take what it gets. Books are no longer purchased from Dumfries but from the south of England. It was established that borrowers can still order any book they like from Ballater Library, and make use of the extensive online catalogue. WJ asserted he was pleased to hear that the snowplough from Glenshee was now able to go down to Blairgowrie and clear the other side of the mountain in the process. GB indicated that there had been "all sorts of problems" this year as regards parking and clearing snow in the area. One weekend was particularly bad, with skiers abandoning cars on the road and preventing others getting through. FD suggested that should this incident be repeated, the snowplough could be used to remove said cars. GB stated that the North Perthshire Member of the Scottish Parliament, John Swinney, was now involved, adding that Councillors from this area should make a point of attending the planning meetings held at Glenshee every year.

**7. Reports.**

**AbCo:** GB drew members' attention to a new social housing resource in the form of the Scottish Government's Local Lettings Initiative and said she hoped it could perhaps be applied in some way to the new housing due to be built in Sir Patrick Geddes Way. She asked if the BCCC would like a council officer to come and explain the initiative in more detail and this was agreed. GB added it was not a solution to the problem but that it could assist in the short term.

**Fly tipping**

Concern was expressed about repeated fly-tipping over a fence at the west end of the Pass. It had not been established who owned the land, as the Hilton, Charlie Birse and Invercauld all denied ownership. GB added that someone had recently had a clear-up but that more black bags had appeared. She said she had emailed Mar Area Manager Les Allen, who had suggested a community clear-up and also taking number plates of the vehicles suspected of being involved. BD asserted that if a community clear-up was arranged, then it would simply be accepted that the community would do it, and the problem would continue. PD suggested that the landowner needed to be identified. FD countered that it was maybe a police matter and should be passed on to them. GB

GB

suggested the police were too stretched to deal with such a thing and would probably just log it but that she would report it to them.

**CNPA**

No one present.

**8. Election.**

Election date has been set for March 20<sup>th</sup>. There are three candidates: James Anderson, Michael Foreman and Phil Swan. Polling will be open from 10am-1pm and 5-9pm in the Victoria Hall kitchen. There are two vacancies for Ballater, and no candidates for the Crathie vacancy.

JA, PD,  
SM

**9. Ballater News.**

**Victoria Week:** CH said the final brainstorming session would take place on Thursday 13<sup>th</sup>. The group had recently received funding from Royal Lochnagar's Citizen Fund which would enable it to buy more ducks for the duck race. Ballater Films has two showings on March 22<sup>nd</sup> - Turbo at 3pm and Sunshine On Leith at 7pm, the latter being a fundraising event for the V&A Halls.

**BRD:**

***Monaltrie Park toilets***

AH said CKF had established for them that AbCo does indeed own the present toilets building in Monaltrie Park and that they were open to someone taking them off their hands. BRD had so far expressed an interest in seeing what they could do in that direction.

***Heritage Centre***

This had been discussed at the recent joint meeting with the BCCC. One option is to site a centre behind the old station building, an area which was already covered. The site could be more expansive if it made use of the unused ground on the other side of the pathway to the left. Employing a consultant and funding a feasibility study would cost in the region of £20k and BRD were next looking at ways to fund that. FD asked if they would be looking to utilise the tunnel at the end of the waste ground. AH said personally he would like to see that happen. GB suggested they could tie into the new round of LEADER funding. AH replied there was also the possibility of using revenue from the Caravan Park. The first year had enabled BRD to fund the new warden's building and the next five years would be spent going through the "snag list", bringing the site up to scratch.

***Old School Building***

AH intimated that the North East Scotland Preservation Trust was no longer interested in the old school building site and was now earmarked for possible affordable housing. Nick Mardall had asked could they look again at that site, depending on what the community wants. It had previously been mooted that perhaps small businesses could use them for meeting rooms etc. GB asked what more does the community want than affordable housing.

AH added that the new reception centre at the Caravan Park was on target for completion, and would be ready for the park's opening on April 1.

**Ballater Business Association (BBA):** SS reported that the organisation had had its AGM and there had been no changes in office bearers. There was no further solution to the business rates problem. There would be more emphasis on the BBA's website, including increasing its advertising facilities to businesses further afield than the

<p>BBA's usual remit.</p> <p><b>V&amp;A Halls:</b> JA reported that the halls planned to have a grand opening on May 9<sup>th</sup>, when community groups would be invited to promote themselves. It is also hoped the new trustees would be elected later in the evening. JA stated that a consultant engaged to present information regarding the feasibility of a learning centre had "come up with something", but that it needs work. GB added that the halls redevelopment had been granted £12k by AbCo's Planning and Resources Committee. PD expressed concern that the new carpets in the Albert Halls were already getting messy and suggested that perhaps hall users could generally be encouraged to use the alternative entrance and stairs to preserve them. It was suggested that she speak to Bell Macaulay about this.</p>	<p>PD</p>
<p><b>10. Scottish Government Consultations.</b> Nothing to report.</p>	
<p><b>11. Planning Matters.</b> BD indicated that he had sent relevant emails to all parties and they were invited to respond or feed back if they felt it necessary. He expressed concern that the CNPA had "called in" the application for eight new houses on Sir PGW, and suggested that the BCCC send a letter in support of the development, as such an interest made him "twitchy". GB contended that the CNPA's interest was not necessarily a bad thing and that the application would be called in if it fell under any of the four aims of the park.</p>	
<p><b>12. Finance.</b> Nothing to report.</p>	
<p><b>13. Correspondence.</b> Nothing to report.</p>	
<p><b>14. AOCB.</b> AR said she had had complaints from a few quarters about the condition of the Hilton staff house in Victoria Road. She said it is apparently an eyesore and this doesn't make the Craigendarroch look very good. PD replied that they were working on it and had had a tidy-up at the end of last year. They plan to do more as the spring comes in.</p> <p>SS said she had had a few enquiries as to when the Community Council intended to have another public meeting regarding the bus station/new Co-operative developments. It was established that such a meeting would not be instigated by BCCC, but by Stagecoach, who had gone away from the last meeting with several issues to address before the next.</p>	
<p><b>14. Date of Next Meeting.</b> Monday 7th April in CRATHIE Church Hall following the AGM at 7pm. The meeting closed at 9.45pm.</p>	

For a copy of these minutes in a larger font contact the secretary on 0785 2414024.