

Buckie Area Forum

Minutes of the meeting for Buckie Area Forum held on 27th October 2010 in Buckie Townhouse.

Present

Barry Taylor **Chair**, Alan Beresford **Vice Chair**, Sarah Murray **Secretary**, Ian Moir **Treasurer**, Anna Parker, Zafar Ali, Alistair Farquhar, Emma Marandola, Sonya Warren, David Barnett, Lauren Hay, Stuart Cowie.

In Attendance

Cllr Gordon McDonald, Cllr Joe Mackay, Cllr Anne McKay, Gillian Bailey (CSO).

1.0 Welcome & Apologies

The Chair opened the meeting by welcoming those present and explaining the fire safety procedures & toilet facilities. The chair also explained that due to the impending budget proposals the EGM due to be held tonight would be postponed and held at the next meeting instead. Introductions were made to members of the public attending the meeting. Apologies were then invited from the Chair. Apologies were received from Cllr Ron Shepherd, Cllr Douglas Ross, Cllr Anita McDonald, Cllr Gary Coull & Charles McKay.

2.0 Minutes of Last Meeting

The Buckie Area Forum – August 2010

The minute of the previous meeting was proposed by Sonya Warren and seconded by Anna Parker as a true record of the meeting.

3.0 Matters Arising

The townhouse lease has now been completed and an amicable agreement was reached to keep the hall open in the meantime.

There were no other matters arising.

4.0 Arradoul Residents Update

The chair gave a brief update on the situation and a decision is to be made during a meeting at the council chambers directly with the Arradoul Residents on 7th December. The chair congratulated the residents on their campaign so far and on the presentation they gave the council. Emma Marandola has a copy of the presentation should anyone wish to have a look. Emma commented that they were hoping for a successful result based on their valid reasons for the site not going ahead rather than budget constraints.

5.0 Budget Consultation

The chair stated he had received a document with the correct figures detailing the varying running costs for many of the halls threatened with closure. He mentioned that these figures were different from those published previously. He invited comments from the floor.

Glen Campbell, Events 4U, stated that the figures quoted were still misleading as he paid a lot more in rent than the published figures show. He stated that he had aired his grievances regarding the facilities at the Fishermen's Hall, i.e. being left with limited cooking facilities and broken equipment and not getting any reduction in return from the council. Glen also outlined the effect these proposed closures would have on his business. He employs 38 local people and has held 8 weddings in 2010 alone. He now cannot guarantee bookings for the coming year and it has had an immense impact on his business already. Cllr Joe MacKay responded saying that there was to be a meeting held on 1st December with the Chief Executive of Moray Council in attendance to answer questions directly.

Cllr Anne McKay then stated that only people representing community groups will be given priority admission should there be an influx of members of the public.

The chair responded to this by saying that the Community Councils and local Area Forums had been approached by the council asking who they would recommend for invitation but a unanimous decision had been made by the Forums and Community Councils alike that they would refuse to pick invitees on the basis that the facts and figures had not been produced and therefore they did not hold sufficient information to make decisions regarding issues that could affect numerous groups/people. The chair then read out an email from Alison McCloughlin stating that it was definitely not meant to be a public meeting.

Gillian Bailey commented that the email and intention had been misunderstood by the Forum and they had not been asked to pick and choose.

The chair recommended that anyone with an interest turn up at the proposed meeting to show a united front for their respective organisations.

Alan Beresford stated that although Moray Area Forum was supposed to be kept in the loop regarding these situations they were still awaiting a response regarding the invitation only email.

Many groups use all the halls threatened for closure and all were invited to have their say by the chair;

Buckie Lyric Theatre Group

This group have over 40 members and they use the Fishermen's Hall for 2 weeks per year to perform a pantomime for the local community. They don't charge for people attending the group and it is getting more and more popular with the youngsters in the town. They would have to turn youngsters away if the hall were to close as there would be no point in having the group if they have nowhere to hold their panto.

Church of Christ

They use the Fishermen's Hall for 1 week per year for fundraising to enable the young people of Buckie & the surrounding areas to come and hear the gospel. They have approximately 285 children everyday of their week and they do this at no charge to the children. They feel that if you close the halls you are effectively closing the communities.

Buckie OAP Association

This has been running in Buckie for over 70 years and has approx. 130 members. They hold concerts and other events in the Fishermen's Hall. Nowhere else has the capacity to hold these events. The council originally started this group and should they close the Fishermen's Hall then the group would fold, causing many elderly people to lose a vital lifeline.

Cullen Community Art Group

This has been running for approx. 25 years and is a great tourist attraction. They hold various exhibitions throughout the year and without these halls/community centres there would be nowhere for them to hold these.

Buckie Choral Union

Another tourist attraction, with visitors coming from Skye and many other places out with Moray. Again they would fold without the facilities they currently have in Buckie.

Alison Munro – Dancing School

The dance school hold a festival once a year with over 90 pupils taking part. Visitors also come from afar to participate and to watch this festival. This has been running for 35 years now.

Portgordon Art Group

They have 30 members stretching along the coast from Portgordon to Cullen. The centre they use in Portgordon still needs a janitor for one side of the hall so the costs wouldn't be reduced by closing the other half? It makes no sense to close this hall.

Cullen Community Centre

This is the only residential centre in the area and they have approx. 1500 residents over the summer months. There are 19 confirmed bookings for next year already and visitors come from as far as Germany to use the centre.

At this point the chair responded by saying that as it was obvious that all ages use these halls and facilities he cannot understand how the council can justify these proposed closures. It is obvious that not only will the community lose vital facilities; money will also be lost from the town.

Buckie Community Centre

At present the coffee bar is run by people with learning disabilities and the costs to Social Work for finding alternative things for them to do will far outweigh any closure costs. This will also have a huge impact on the social side of their lives. This opportunity helps to take them out of the institutional way of life and have everyday experiences.

Further comments were then invited from the floor;

Ian Moir mentioned that the knock on effects from cutting services should be made fully aware to elected members but this is obviously not happening at present and that surely money could be saved elsewhere instead of targeting frontline services and facilities. Anne McKay responded by saying that cuts were also affecting councillors, for example, no refreshments are provided at meetings. She stated that these are things that are not seen by the public but she could not provide any better example.

Gillian Bailey urged local people to consider community management for all the halls. The chair responded to this by saying it is an option but the first option would be to keep all the halls open "status quo". The chair explained some of the challenges in community management, one being the length of time it takes to get these things organised. Using the townhouse as a prime example – it was closed for 3 months before Buckie Area Forum managed to sort out details of the lease.

In response to Ian Moir's comments on knock on effects, Keith Mackay expressed his concerns regarding the local communities, increased crime, more drink and drugs on the street as there will be less for the youngsters to do. He declared that he has personal experience of these issues through his work in the NHS. All were in agreement regarding this.

At this point a list was read out of the users of the Fishermen's Hall over the last 12 months and it was fairly extensive. Arguments were put forward that the town hall in Elgin is also under used and costs far more to run than any of the halls in Buckie or the surrounding area but it isn't in the proposals for closure. Jim Smith also pointed out that the Fishermen's Hall was originally built by local fishermen for community use and many questions were raised over whether the hall belonged to the Common Good Fund. Gordon McDonald responded by saying that there are various on-going discussions at present to ascertain this position All valid points to be put forward at the official consultation.

The chair reiterated that all groups should stick together and send emails and letters to the email address given out by the Moray Council.

It was agreed that to take this forward an action group be formed, with reps from the various affected groups. The chair stated that all concerned had to assume that the closures would take place and to form a collective group as well as individual groups to stand a better chance of winning the fight to keep the halls open.

All in attendance were assured that Buckie Area Forum would be putting forward their arguments along with everyone else.

Other issues regarding the budget proposals were discussed at this point along with money saving ideas being discussed at length and everyone was reminded to put their ideas forward at the official consultation as these ideas would be listened to.

6.0 Moray Offshore Wind farm

The Chair summarised Moray Offshore Wind farm's proposed project and stated that there may be a 'glimmer of hope on the horizon' for Buckie. He thanked both Gordon McDonald and Anne McKay for getting involved and helping to bring this consultation to Buckie for consideration. Jobs would be created, skilled training would be provided and fantastic opportunities for all local people would be created. He maintained that although it was still early days he would urge locals to attend any future meetings/consultations to voice their opinions. The next public meeting is to be held on November 17th at Buckie Townhouse by the SFF.

7.0 Community Issues

Alistair Farquhar told all present about the next production being put on in connection with Buckie Festival and handed out flyers for this, being held in Cullen Town Hall.

Ian Moir asked for clarification on planning issues regarding Barhill Road. Gordon McDonald answered that improvements were being made to the road, due to new water mains, as part of the planning rules.

8.0 Date for Next Meeting

The next meeting is to be held on Wednesday 19th January at Buckie Townhouse at 7pm.

The chair thanked everyone for their attendance and urged everyone to put forward their concerns. Thanks were received from Liz Imlach for facilitating the meeting.