

North Knapdale Community Council

Minutes for North Knapdale Community Council meeting held with Scottish Canals at Crinan Coffee Shop at 5pm.

In attendance: Catherin MacLennan NKCC, Andrew Wilson NKCC, Ross Ryan NKCC, Chris Perring, GJW Dunlop, Lilah Mehaffey, Richard Adair, Donald Booth, Frances Ryan, Nicolas Ryan, Nick Walker, Alexi Murdoch, Mike Macintyre, Courtney Howlett, Alan Hutchison, Councillor Douglas Philand, Mark Smith of Scottish Canals, and Chris Breslin of Scottish Canals.

There had been a misunderstanding about the start time, and Mark Smith (MS) arrived at 530pm. He apologised for being late, and introduced himself as Head of Destination for Scottish Canals.

MS said that he had been contacted By Ross Ryan and others regarding the new parking meter at Crinan Basin Car Park. He was attending the meeting to listen to comments and to attempt to justify the installation of the parking meter.

The machine had been MS's idea. As Head of Destinations MS job was to encourage tourists to come to the canals and to spend money. MS said the meeting was awaiting the arrival of Chris Breslin, who had overall responsibility for Crinan. Chris was running late.

MS initiated the process of installing the meter at the time that the new toilet block at the basin was being constructed. This was about 3 years ago. The car park belonged to Scottish Canals (SC), but as a result of a Traffic Order Argyll and Bute Council (ABC) had been responsible for maintaining the car park. The order related to 48 spaces, but the toilet block had taken up 10 of these. There are now 38 spaces. SC had agreed as part of the agreement relating to the toilet block, to take on the maintenance of the car park. The machine was predicted to generate between £6,000 and £10,000 per annum. This would help to cover the maintenance of the car park, but also wider infrastructure such as

Dunardry bridge. There were parking charges in place at Falkirk Wheel as well.

Why had there been no discussion, or even a letter to license holders, for example? What about people who work in Crinan, and village residents, and village businesses? MS apologised for the lack of engagement. NKCC had lapsed at the time the decision was made. It was regrettable that the parking meter had not come up during the Canal charette discussions. SC had no plans to remove the machine. They were considering resident permits.

SC have no way, or plans, to enforce the charge. All at the meeting could park gratis. It was in the interests of North Knapdale to encourage visitors to pay, as this would contribute to the maintenance of the car park, and of the wider Crinan Canal.

The machine could have an impact on a fragile tourist economy. An extra £2 on a cup of coffee was a lot. MS did not concur. A recent NKCC meeting had heard that people were eschewing Crinan Coffee Shop due to the charge. Residents of Lochgilphead and Ardrishaig were not coming out any more because of the charge.

Could local business contribute to the car park maintenance? To top dress the car park would cost between 16 and 24,000 pounds. 4x that to rebuild it.

SC funding comes 50% from a Scottish Government (SG) grant and 50% from revenue. SC have an obligation to act commercially and to reinvest: for example, in the repair of Dunardry Bridge.

SC had looked at other income streams including renewables. Until recently, grid capacity had been tied up, but shortly, there would be spare capacity. Hydro schemes required a large capital investment. A scheme at Daill Farm could produce 50KW, which would be viable, but the nearest grid connection was some distance away. The best option might be microgen at the wasters etc. for use locally (5-6 KW)

MS was surprised to hear that the toilet block was not open to the public. Access is controlled by a keypad. He would speak to Joe Murphy of SC.

The view was expressed that there is not enough free parking in Crinan.

It was restated that the ground for the car park belonged to SC, but that ABC was responsible for maintenance as a result of a parking order. That order referred to a 48 space car park. It had been allowed to lapse by agreement as SC could now generate revenue by charging for parking.

Nick Walker of the Puffer raised the issue of the flooding and muddy ground above the car park towards Lock 14. He had written a letter, but had received no reply. MS agreed to a walk around after the meeting to look at issues.

Was there disagreement between ABC and SC about subsidence along the canalside? There had been historically, but now they worked on a 50/50 principle.

MS agreed to put the views of the meeting to his board members. He would look into alternatives. MS restated, however, the income obligations facing SC. The floor raised 'a number' of properties that had been empty for some time. This was not deemed a very commercial decision. MS stated that this had been the case as they were being refurbished.

SC have an obligation to pursue self-sufficiency, and to reduce reliance on grants. They are not allowed to borrow to do so, however.

Chris Breslin arrived at 6:04pm. He apologised for being late, but the traffic had been very slow, and there had been a misunderstanding as to the start time of the meeting.

The difficulty of attracting visitors to Crinan was raised again. MS agreed to put the meeting's views to his directors. Charges would not be suspended in the short term (although the machine was not currently working.) There was disagreement between the floor and MS as to whether £2 was off-putting to tourists. Nick Walker made the point that SC had a stated aim of working symbiotically with the community. The machine was not symbiotic.

MS was surprised to hear that the Canal had been shut on the Sunday of a bank holiday weekend. Yachts tend to go to Ardfern as the Canal hours do not suit them. It is often shut when yachts want in or out.

The fragility of Crinan as opposed to Falkirk was raised. The lack of consultation was once again decried. The loss of even 3 or 4 carloads could have a big impact. MS agreed to temporarily suspend charges and to put the meeting's views to his directors.

The point was made that when the car park was first installed, it was a great relief to the village. Free parking meant that it was not such a struggle for lorries to pass through the village. John Dunlop of the Boat Yard said that £2 may not be much, but that people would still seek the free option.

The 'urban nature' of the transaction was raised. The machine had a cognitive impact on visitors.

Was it possible to pay by card, or with notes? This was possible via the sea lock office. Change was also available here.

Did the machine impact negatively on the SG goal of increasing physical activity?

SC was now committed to regular meetings with canal communities. These would compare priorities. There was a commitment to earlier disclosure. Chris Breslin was not aware of the imminent arrival of the parking meter at the time of the Charette or at the towpath meetings. More consultation on the Charette was imminent. The report was imminently to be passed by the ABC area committee.

Discussion began on the new towpath surface, and its unsuitability was raised. It was yet another urban intrusion. The funding for the new surface had been provided by Sustrans, and the material had been fully approved by Historic Scotland.

The speed of cyclists was raised, and MS suggested some signs. Would signs not add to the general clutter? The surface was deemed unsuitable. It hurt dog's feet and scratched the decks of boats. MS said he would look into sweeping the surface, and stated that it would be smoothed.

The lack of consultation on the towpath was again decried. There was now no right of appeal, and still a lack of accountability.

It was agreed that local input can help and would preserve a busy canal.

Chris once again apologised for being late, and he hoped it would be some good news that the Charette goal of getting more people to stop in Ardrishaig would be helped to be met by a successful application to the Regeneration Capital Grant Fund which would help to regenerate a part of the old Gleaner site. This would be around the older buildings there, and would contribute to the installation of a waterside walkway. The grant was for £500,000. Such grants were easier to obtain for Ardrishaig as it had a greater degree of deprivation.

The meeting drew to a close, and thanks were expressed to Mark and Chris for attending. They thanked the members of the community for taking the time to attend.