

Morvern Community Council (MCC) meeting held on Tuesday 11th February 2025 at 7pm, Village Hall

Present MCC representatives: Henriette Laidlaw (HL), Miles Welsh (MW), Helen Jones (HJ), *Clara Montgomery (CM)*, Jenni Hodgson (JH)

Apologies from: Douglas Taylor, Terra Grier, Sarah Fanett, Andrew Baxter, Tom Finley Frazer

Meeting is quorate

Members of the public: 10

No declarations of interest.

1. Welcome

2. AOB requests: telephone box maintenance, NHS surgery survey

3. Minutes of last meeting were approved by email. Matters arising:

a) Local Place Plan will be submitted to Highland Council (HC) this Friday (14th Feb). Steering group will organise a community presentation of final plan.

b) Agi Stanley Fotos from the Sunart, Moidart, Morvern, Ardnamurchan and Ardgour Tourism Association (SMMAATA) talked about the Proposed Visitor Levy Scheme for Highland and encouraged all to respond to the statutory public consultation before 31st March 2025. Local authorities now have power to charge visitor tax (percentage, not flat fee). Council can decide how much. HC is proposing a 5% charge on accommodation providers only. Businesses have to pay VAT on this 5% levy that they charge on behalf of the council. Some small businesses have said it could get them just over the VAT threshold, so they'll pay more tax and will have to put prices up. Risk that available accommodation will be significantly reduced, which will also affect other businesses, such as restaurants.

Few exemptions: e.g. motorhomes (except on campsite), cruise ships, day visitors. People who claim disability benefits get exemption: will need to pay the tax to accommodation provider, but can reclaim it. Local people are not exempt, so if you go and stay in HC area for hospital visit etc. you'll have to pay. Trades or locum doctors who visit will also need to pay.

Money collected from this levy will be ring-fenced for "tourism purposes", but not clear how or where HC aims to spend it, so might not be reinvested in the areas where it was collected.

It won't just impact accommodation businesses in the area, but all of us if we need to stay somewhere overnight in our own area.

In addition to individual responses, MCC will respond, including comments/concerns from the floor:

=> Result will be more wild camping/campervans.

=> If there's going to be a levy, the money should be re-spent in the area where it came from.

=> Flat rate would be fairer.

=> Is it going to make tourism here less attractive?

=> It will increase other costs for us (i.e. hiring contractors)

=> It's businesses that are paying it, not really the visitors. More admin for them.

Please fill in consultation, either on paper or online. Also a petition, to send legislation back to parliament for amendments, as it isn't fit for purpose.

Visitor Levy (Scotland) Act 024: <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2024/8/contents/enacted>

Highland Council Consultation in PDF format:

https://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/file/29900/visitor_levy_consultation_document

Petition to Government, to re-evaluate and amend the legislation: <https://chnng.it/TrQ2sS9Lwk>

- c) Community newsletter and calendar: Isla (MCDC) is putting together a plan for this.
- d) Roads: A grit bin has now been placed at Miners' Court. **Action: HL** will contact Highland Council again regarding the potholes (Kiel Road intersection, junction at Hub/Store), missing Passing Place signs and the dropped pavements at Torr na Faire. The situation is increasingly dangerous for all road users, incl. cyclists and mobility scooters.
- e) Village tidying update: residents had asked in autumn for trimming overgrown trees/shrubs on land belonging to MCDC, Ardtornish and FLS.
Response from MCDC: quotes for Hazelwoods management plan were so high that MCDC have decided to go ahead with guidance from Nature Scot.
Response from Ardtornish (regarding area in front of High Street and Kyle): Ardtornish are happy to fund the cost of managing it, but don't want to decide how it's going to be managed.
Action: HL to meet with tree surgeon and work together to get it done before bird nesting.
FLS has yet to come back with response, but they may be amenable to a community buy-out.
- f) Childcare: MCC are keen to support the current consultation regarding wrap-around childcare in the area. HL has spoken to Sarah Fanett about it, who mentioned an example of good practice in Sutherland. Sarah has arranged meeting for this Friday (14th Feb) which HL will attend, hopefully with some of the local stakeholders.
- g) Care Homes update: Dail Mhor had big recruitment exercise, but are 1.5 FTE short to be able to reopen as a respite unit. They will still accept applications if anyone is keen. People are starting to look at how the building can be repurposed to deliver services for the future. Also considering interim solutions (e.g. reduced service, day care) to retain the staff they have now recruited.
- h) Telephone connection during storms in the future: MCC has received messages from the community regarding the lack of connection during storm Eowyn. Old copper phone lines were only thing that worked, but they are being phased out. HL raised this with Brendan O'Hara, our MP, power cuts more likely here and lack of communication more impactful here.
- i) Police update: Drivers stopped during the festive drink drive campaign provided negative tests which is really pleasing. Police will continue to carry out checks. Reminder about reporting

Road Traffic Collisions (RTC): If it is a no injury RTC drivers should exchange details, this is classed as a non-attendance RTC. If there are any injuries, road obstructed or damage to road furniture then this needs to be reported. If you injure or kill any of the following animals because of a RTC (sheep, horse, ass, mule, pig, ox, cattle, goat, dog, fowl) you must report it to the police. For other animals it is advisable (but not compulsory) to inform the police so owners can be contacted or road cleared.

4. Youth's update: nothing to report.

5. Planning applications: Ardtornish wants to turn farm shop/shed into a café and apply for a licence. They have contacted local businesses to inform them. No proposed changes outside.

Renewed lay-out for proposal of 3 houses at Ardtornish (MCC had commented on it before). No significant changes. **Action: HL/MW** to respond with same comments as last time.

Recent planning application in Drimnin has been withdrawn.

6. MCDC Update: new architects for housing project. Existing proposal was too expensive. Affordable houses need to have affordable rents, which wouldn't cover our mortgage. MCDC is meeting with Kate Forbes about it. Making houses more standard: 2/3 beds rather than 4 bed. Kit houses (cheaper than bespoke). Aim is for houses to be ready Sept 2026.

7. Treasurer's Report:

No movement on Common Good Fund.

Since our last meeting, we have paid £74.25 for village hall hire and minute taking. Balance: £3799.59
£2230.84 needs to be transferred across. Not changed bank account yet.

8. No other correspondence

9. AOB:

Natural Capital Partnership and the Delivery of Community Benefits: ongoing.

Surgery news: HL meeting with Teresa end of Feb to go through all the responses. **Action: HL** to report back next meeting.

Telephone box maintenance: monthly check needs to be done (cleaning, checking everything works, checking state of decoration). If any problems, contact MCC. Currently only 3 people, so please contact MW if you can help.

April meeting: Suggestion: April 8th Village clean plus short meeting.

Meeting closed at 20.25

Next meetings:

March 11

April 8

May 13

June 10

August 12 (Drimnin)

Sep 9

Oct 14

Nov 11 zoom

Dec 9