

Chair's Chat January 2024

It is always nice to start with good news but I don't want to sugar coat the feedback from our Community Council meeting on Monday night (15th January).

Community Council

In the last week Hugh Wilson, has had to resign as a councillor for personal reasons, this reduces our community councillors to just 6. There are now 3 vacancies. Any projects undertaken on behalf of residents are carried out by 6 people instead of 9. The responsibility of each councillor is 50% higher than it should be. This is not viable in the long term.

On Monday I resigned as Chair, again for family responsibility reasons. I am grateful to Charlie Robertson (Eckford) who has agreed to be acting Chair until the AGM in May. *Note this is not a long-term arrangement.* We need more people to come forward and be active on the Community Council if it is to survive. We especially need a secretary (honorarium available) and the councillor vacancies filled.

Elections will be held at the AGM on 3 June 2024, preceded by a period for nominations. This will be publicised through e-news, noticeboards and the website. Should more than 9 residents be nominated, elections will be held at the AGM. It would be most encouraging if sufficient people would step forward to help keep this important community resource functioning. Many hands make light work. Please contact us on cencomms@hotmail.com should you wish to know more or volunteer.

Kalemouth Bridge

It is clearly disappointing that the Ormiston and Eckford residents have seen press coverage indicating SBC have decided the way forward about the bridge without another discussion following the useful Community Council meeting on 15th September 2023.

Just to be clear, here's the sequence of events after that meeting:

- Immediately after the September meeting we wrote to the SBC employees who had given the presentation, summarising the concerns raised and suggestions made by the residents who were present (these are recorded in the minutes of the meeting).
- We received a quick reply from SBC, with a commitment to "prepare an 'Options' table to help with the on-going discussion and will speak with potential funding partners". They stated that a follow-up meeting to share new information with residents would be useful. They anticipated it would "be in Nov. at some point."
- The next email we received was on 28 November to the effect that "a report has been prepared and this will go before the [SBC] Council Executive on 5th December for approval". The report "proposed to progress a scheme to replace and renew the timber elements on the bridge. replacing them will safeguard the bridge into the future and ensure it can remain in use for pedestrians and cyclists. Subject to a satisfactory conclusion of obtaining external funding, it would be intended to undertake these works in Spring 2025."
- We wrote to SBC expressing our disappointment that the report, with its recommendation, was prepared, and the decision was made, without their proposal being shared with us in a time frame allowing reasonable community consultation.
- On 13 Dec we received additional information from SBC explaining that bridge strengthening options were considered after the September meeting but were considered too costly.

On 15th January the Council debated whether to form a subcommittee to advocate the restoration of the Kalemouth Bridge for vehicles. This proposal was not passed.

Given the magnitude of costs suggested for alternatives to the SBC decision, the Council preferred to focus our limited resources on the issues around the single access road.

The Council did agree to assist the formation of a group, independent of the Council, if residents wish to promote the restoration of the bridge for vehicles. The Council will encourage such a group to use the Council's enews and notice boards. Charlie Robertson will take the lead on distributing a leaflet to all the Ormiston and Eckford residents affected by the SBC decision so they are fully aware of the position, can express their views and be part of the "Friends of Kalemouth Bridge" if they so wish.

It is clear to me that the information flow from SBC about the Kalemouth Bridge could have been much better. The Community Council shares the information it has with residents by the website, the enews emails, the notice boards and, at times, leaflets. Our agendas and minutes are openly available. You can attend our meetings and observe how we work through our agendas. There are many ways you can stay up-to-date. We are open to any ideas on how to improve. Unfortunately, we can only share information once we have received it.

Recent cold weather and flooding have demonstrated that there are significant safety issues for Ormiston the residents now that vehicles cannot use the bridge. We are working to support residents in persuading SBC to address these safety issues immediately. SBC officials have agreed to work together regarding the flooding risk and are working on identifying the source of the flood water at the bridge abutments. I have forwarded the email from Paul Frankland about this matter to the resident who raised the matter in order to move this issue forward.

Projects

- Crailing Speeding – we are chasing up the SBC Roads department to find out why the progress on clearing self-seeded saplings and trees has not been completed and the promised road signage has not been installed. Following the meeting we reassured that the signage has been ordered.
- 20s Plenty in Nisbet – the petition has been completed and we are currently awaiting a response from the 20s Plenty team to find out why there has been no action by SBC. If action is not forthcoming, the petition will be presented.
- Flooding in Nisbet is being looked into with Lothian Estates and the SBC Emergency planning team – led by our resilience co-ordinators
- Sandy Scott (SBC councillor) is supporting us in trying to find a secretary for the Community Council and to deal with a blocked drain in Eckford.

The IT Review (Website, Email and File Management)

Website - After a great deal of research, we have decided to continue within the current system for the time being. The Website is 10 years old and a bit clunky. We will be working with Sheila Campbell to make it more user-friendly and easier to navigate. For now approximately 50% of our administrative grant from SBC (£540 currently) goes towards website costs annually. We are looking for someone with IT experience to work alongside Sheila, it doesn't have to be a councillor,

The full report can be accessed via the website.