

## APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 13TH APRIL 2023, AT HOLIDAY INN

Community Council		
Name	Position	Present
Mervyn Barr	Chair	✓
Malcolm Collie	Member	✓
Heather Cook	Member	x
Donald Davidson	Member	✓
David Dent	Associate Member	✓
Becky Ferguson	Vice-Chair	✓
Audrey Findlay	Member	✓
Ben Horsburgh	Associate Member	x
Kate Lumsden	Member	✓
Elaine Manley	Member	✓
Rachid Meghezzi	Member	x
William Munro	Vice-Chair	✓
Gordon Prentice	Treasurer	✓
Diane Priestley	Member	✓
David Ritchie	Secretary	✓
Ken Stewart	Member	✓
Tim Yeomans	Member	✓
Cllr Iris Walker	Ward 13 Councillor	✓
Cllr Ron McKail	Ward 13 Councillor	✓
Cllr Craig Miller	Ward 13 Councillor	✓
Cllr Fatima Joji	Ward 13 Councillor	✓ (via Zoom)

**Guest Speakers:** Inspector Gareth Hannan (Garioch Community Policing Team)

Mr Andrew Bowie (MP)

**Members of Public:**

At hotel- Marlene Collie, Jillian Paterson, Charlie Flint, Gregor Ironside

On Zoom- Freda Imrie, Raymond Swaffield, Kristina Babris, Kelly Mcleish, Evelyn Ewen

1	<b>Welcome and opening remarks</b> Mervyn welcomed all and reminded the members of public that this is a meeting held in public, not a public meeting, so requests to speak should be made to Chair. Permission was given for meeting to be recorded.
2	<b>Apologies and Declarations of Interest</b> Apologies received from Heather Cook & Rachid Meghezzi
3	<b>Approval of Minutes of Meeting 9th March 2023</b> Minutes were approved, with no changes. Proposed Gordon, seconded Malcolm
4	<b>Shopping Centre Update- Centre Manager Ben Horsburgh –</b> Ben not present.
5	<b>Police Report &amp; Inspector Gareth Hannan</b> The Police report for March has been circulated (see appendix 2). Nothing in it of major concern. Mervyn welcomed our first guest speaker then Inspector Gareth Hannan introduced himself. He is moving to a new role shortly but his replacement has not yet been identified so he will continue to cover his Garioch area role till then.

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	<p>In the last week there has been 34 calls to Police from Westhill area (both 999 &amp; 101) that resulted in an incident being created, only 3 of which were crimes, including theft of the trailer from Scout Hut. A significant proportion of calls are dealing with out-of-hours calls for other agencies, e.g. Social Work, NHS, people in moments of crisis.</p> <p>There has been a large reduction in youth-disturbance calls in Westhill compared to a year ago</p> <p>The Westhill Police station is not now manned full-time, but there still should be a quick response when required to 101 or 999 calls.</p> <p>Re the long wait for calls to 101 to be answered, this is a national issue. It is due mainly to a large increase in number of calls over last few years. Gareth recommended that the Contactus@scotland.police.uk email be used instead of phoning 101. The email is monitored 24/7, and is likely to get a quicker response. If there is a danger to life or property, 999 should be used. The email address will be publicised on WECC website &amp; Facebook.</p> <p>Re speeding in Westhill, Gareth indicated that this is more of a perception than reality issue. When the Council Roads dept. monitor speeds using a speed survey box, usually it is found that there isn't a speeding issue.</p> <p>The Bob &amp; Roberta pop-up cardboard cut-outs of police doing speed checks can be requested to be deployed and they prove to be highly effective in slowing traffic.</p> <p>Members of public with issues re speeding should report them direct to Police, not to local councillors.</p> <p>Jillian Paterson raised the issue of irresponsible parking at Elrick Primary. She was requested to contact WECC about it and we can take it up with Roads Dept.</p> <p>Mervyn thanked Inspector Hannan for attending, wished him well for his new role and for his assistance to WECC for last few years.</p>
6	<p><b>Asylum Seeker Hotel</b></p> <p>See Appendix 1 for summary of the discussions on the Asylum Seeker Hotel. This was prepared by the Office Bearers and circulated/put on website &amp; facebook on 19<sup>th</sup> April.</p>
7	<p><b>Matters Arising/ Actions Update</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>File Share Options</b> (Malcolm) – update to be held over to May meeting</li> <li><b>Larg/Broadstraik Park</b> (Malcolm) – update to be held over to May meeting</li> <li><b>Academy Outreach-</b> Provisional meeting arranged with Head Teacher for week of 24<sup>th</sup> April. Few offers of help to speak to pupils from the Spring Bulletin article.</li> <li><b>Litter Picking-</b> Storage box for litter pick equipment now purchased and permission received to install it against pavilion wall. Gordon now got volunteers contact details from Raymond. A WhatsApp group will be created and they will be advised of a pick to be held on 22<sup>nd</sup> April.</li> <li><b>Lights Storage Unit-</b> Suitable storage units can be purchased from Costco</li> <li><b>Wi-Fi at hotel-</b> Possible issue causing poor connection sometimes may be age of the lap-top, bought around 10 years ago. We may buy a mobile router, similar to one owned by Malcolm. Also considered was the purchase of a new laptop. Agreed in principle, technical advice to be sought on best option.</li> <li><b>Pedestrian Crossings at Tesco roundabout-</b> Council will be assessing the roads there soon. They will also review the speed limit on A944 at the new Burnland development and on B979 around entrance to Carnie Woods car park. Gordon will also ask Council to consider moving of 30mph sign from east of Community Church on Old Skene Rd to west of Community Church.</li> <li><b>Community Map Scotland-</b> this should help us determine who owns pieces of land in Westhill. Could also help identify possible brownfield sites. It is free for first year. Agreed we should enrol for the free option for the first year.</li> <li><b>Sports Centre Feasibility Study</b> - Meeting to be arranged (Chair and Treasurer – via Zoom) with the 4 Councillors about how we can improve our chances in future of getting funding from Developer Obligations for this and other kinds of projects.</li> </ol>

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8	<p><b><u>Correspondence</u></b></p> <p><b>Review of secretary correspondence log for last 5 weeks.</b> (circulated)</p> <p>Mervyn mentioned the correspondence he has had with Andrew Bowie MP re the Asylum Hotel that has been circulated. In particular, our response to Andrew Bowie's statement on social media. This had been drafted by Gordon and agreed by the Office Bearers. A few members felt that all members should have been consulted on this first, but Gordon indicated that there would then have been a delay in responding to Andrew Bowie and we may not have been able to arrange for him to attend this meeting.</p> <p>There was also some concern that members were not notified in advance of the informal meeting that Mervyn, Gordon &amp; David Dent had with Mr Cherry of Mears. Becky would have liked to attend.</p> <p>There was general agreement that any future such meetings should as a matter of courtesy, invite all Office Bearers</p> <p>Mervyn suggested (and it was agreed) that we arrange an extra meeting of WECC members to review our internal processes, e.g. degree of empowerment for OBs and setting criteria for holding extraordinary meetings.</p>
9	<p><b><u>Ward 13 Councillors update</u></b></p> <p><b>Cllr Walker - Circulated report in italics:-</b></p> <p><b><i>GP surgery telephone line</i></b></p> <p><i>Following up on the issue raised from a constituent about the difficulty in getting through to Skene Medical Practice via phone, the practice has acknowledged the difficulties and that they try their best to answer as many calls as they can in a timely manner, but at peak times that can be very difficult. Their phone lines are provided by NHS which allows practice staff and partners to call internally to the hospital. Recent statistics show that they receive over 10,000 incoming calls per month and this is increasing. A percentage of the calls are not for the practice or the patient could have used another service instead of calling the GP.</i></p> <p><i>In the next few months NHS will be able to provide the practice with a call queueing service. This will be an automated service where callers will choose the appropriate service before joining the queue. They will know that their call is answered and what position they are in the queue. It is hoped that this will be put in place over the Summer.</i></p> <p><b><i>Scotland Loves Local Aberdeenshire Gift Card scheme</i></b></p> <p><i>These cards are now being stocked in council Service Points across Aberdeenshire. Although only a handful of Westhill business are signed up to the Scheme and we don't have a public-facing council Service Point, I have asked if the Library could be considered as a stockist. It would be great to have more local businesses sign up.</i></p> <p><b><i>No Mow May</i></b></p> <p><i>Greenspace @Aberdeenshire Council are encouraging residents to suggest areas in Westhill where they might like to see no mowing during May and to continue to mow less at different lengths and frequencies throughout the summer. Last year, a one-metre square on a typical lawn had 17 daisies and a smattering of buttercups and dandelions. Such a square of lawn would produce about two milligrams of nectar sugar and three microlitres of pollen daily. So, a 100 m<sup>2</sup> area of lawn would produce enough pollen to stock up six mining bee brood cells and enough nectar sugar to meet the baseline needs of six bumblebees a day. The purpose of this initiative is to support the pollinators, but equally essential to educate the wider public to leave their private garden uncut. So having those sites in the middle of the settlements, a section in the main parks, or at the crossing of the roads is vital.</i></p> <p><i>The sites are chosen by the Landscape Services Team and by residents commenting on the</i></p>

*GreenspaceAberdeenshire Facebook page. <https://www.facebook.com/AberdeenshireGreenspace>  
The chosen sites will have the attached signs put up in April, so everyone should be aware that it is left with this intention and not forgotten, and they will not be cut at all before the end of May.*

#### **Town Centre Health Checks**

*Following the survey last year seeking views on Westhill town centre, the report has now been published and is a snapshot of the responses as well as partner observations at that time. The report can be viewed at:  
<http://publications.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/dataset/town-centre-health-checks-2022>*

#### **Developer Obligations**

*The following projects have been allocated or have spent funds from Developer Obligations recently:  
Westhill Pool Disabled Access & Storage £50,000.00  
Westhill Scouts Tech Classroom £6,000.00  
Lawsondale Sports Centre Parking £41,895.85  
Westdyke Leisure Centre Additional Heating £42,639.80*

#### **Asylum Hotel**

*After a number of meetings regarding the Asylum Hotel, I am afraid we are no further forward in getting any public message from official sources.*

*I was asked questions and gave the following answers on air to BBC Radio Scotland recently.*

#### **WHAT IS YOUR MAIN CONCERN?**

*"Just now it is the lack of reassurance from any of our public agencies – The Home Office and our local partners. This is a Home Office initiative which requires a local response. I think our communities are best served when all spheres of government work together.*

*"As a local resident of Elrick myself, I share some of my constituents' concerns."*

#### **WHAT ISSUES ARE YOUR CONSTITUENTS RAISING?:**

*"They are concerned too about the lack of engagement – there isn't so much an expectation of consultation because there will never be a consensus on these kind of issues. But there is anger in the community over what is perceived to be silence from official sources."*

*"People are unsure about what to expect."*

*"People are generally welcoming and they get the humanitarian aspect, but they are concerned about the scale and the demographics of those coming to live in the hotel."*

*"They are raising concerns about safety, the pressure on health services and police resources."*

*"These are the nitty gritty issues that my constituents want to talk about and need reassurance on.*

*Most feel that the hotel isn't suitable accommodation for long-term living and they show a genuine concern for the wellbeing of the asylum seekers."*

#### **WHAT ARE YOU HOPING TO DO AS NEXT STEPS?:**

*"I will support whoever and wherever I can. Local community groups and our churches are already working together and are standing by, should they be required, and this is welcome. I will continue to ask for our community planning partners – the council, police, NHS to work together to engage and communicate with and reassure local residents. I don't think anyone is asking for state secrets to be divulged – just an acknowledgement of the concerns being raised and some sort of communication to say "yes, we are aware, we're on it and we're here for all residents of Westhill". We know the work is going on in the background – it just needs to be more transparent".*

**Cllr McKail - Circulated report in italics:-**

## **Asylum Seekers**

*Most of my mailbox over the past few weeks has related to the Asylum Seekers being accommodated in the Hampton by Hilton. The recommendation to use this hotel was taken by the Home Office out with consultation of the Council who were informed, not consulted, is my understanding. Understandably the Westhill residents who have contacted me are angry and frustrated (to put it politely) by the decision without being made aware of the placement through a public announcement. They have gained their information through social media and through the rumour mill. Reason I'm advised is that the policy of the Home Office to ensure dignity and privacy that they nor the Council were to publicise the arrival of these 173 males whose ages are 18 to 40.*

*As councillors the four of us have expressed similar views and it is anticipated that a media message may be issued providing answers to the many issues raised. What does seem important to me is that the asylum seekers who will have experienced considerable hardship in their long journey to arrive in the UK that we as a community welcome them rather than adopting an opposite stance.*

At the meeting Cllr McKail suggested we do a press release to highlight the positive steps we are taking. Instead it was agreed that a summary of the discussions from this meeting would be prepared and put on our website/facebook

## **Denman Park Pool Pollution**

*Shire council has emailed Scottish Water requesting another visit to the Denman Park ponds by their specialist clear up contractor. There is a meeting planned for Thursday 20<sup>th</sup> April to go through the draft designs for the contract to install a "downstream defender" filtering unit and the establishment of a reedbed water treatment pond in pond 3 below the stone bridge in the park. The 20<sup>th</sup> April meeting will be attended by officers from Aberdeenshire Council, Scottish Water and SEPA. Once a successful design is agreed then a public information leaflet will be prepared for sharing with the people of Westhill.*

## **Aberdeenshire Gift Card now available for pick up at council Service Points**

*Aberdeenshire Council will be stocking gift cards for collection at its main office Service Points. The scheme - supported by Scottish Government funding - aims to encourage people to shop local to support local business and to assist their recovery following the Covid pandemic. There are over 280 businesses signed up to accept the gift card across the region and cards can also be spent in all Live Life Aberdeenshire leisure venues. It works in the same way as a regular gift card - the only difference being that once you have picked up a card from a Service Point, they require to be loaded with funds online by visiting [www.loadthiscard.com](http://www.loadthiscard.com). There is no limit to the number of transactions or shops the card can be used in, provided there are funds on the card. Service Points are located within the main council offices. **Cards are available at Gordon House.***

## **Don't feed the Gulls**

*Shire residents are requested to assist with issues to tackle that of urban gulls by not feeding them. The message comes as nesting season begins and is in response to continuing complaints relating to gulls from communities across our area including noise, aggressive behaviour, fouling and the feeding of gulls. Gulls are doing particularly well in many towns and villages, including Westhill, which at this time of the year emails of concern fill Councillors mailboxes. Council-wide 600 complaints were received about folks feeding gulls resulting in warning letters being issued to those responsible. The 'gull season' starts in March and lasts until September although it is a year-round problem. However, the council's Protective Services currently have no statutory powers to take action against gulls and can only give advice to members of the public as to how they can help deal with the problem. Worth noting that Gulls are protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981, which means it is illegal to capture, injure or destroy any wild bird, or interfere with its nest*

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	<p>or eggs, unless you have a licence for each individual case.</p> <p><b>April is Aberdeenshire Council's first Equality and Diversity Month Programme</b></p> <p><i>This initiative runs alongside International Celebrate Diversity Month, a celebration of diversity highlighting unique backgrounds, cultures and traditions. The intention is to raise awareness around equality, diversity and inclusion by providing training, signposting to resources and to showcase the volume of work that goes on in Aberdeenshire Council to mainstream equalities and recognise diversity. Each week will cover a theme focusing on the Council as a service provider, as an employer, as a policy and decision maker and as an education authority.</i></p> <p>At the meeting Cllr Mckail requested ideas for projects to be considered for funding by the Garioch Area Strategic Budget, as per his 12<sup>th</sup> April email. They will be considered at next week's Area Committee meeting.</p> <p>Re the CAP survey suggestions that could be put forward for funding, Willie suggested that more benches to create informal meeting areas would be suitable, but would require consultation with nearby residents.</p> <p>It was agreed that Gordon should put forward the project to make two access routes in/out of Carnie Woods suitable for wheelchair users.</p>
10	<p><b>Rotary Update/Exchange-</b> David Dent</p> <p>Lazy Sunday Afternoon will be run again on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> June in field behind Ashdale Hall, same format as 2022, no beer tent</p> <p>Toilets for Denman Park- may be able to apply for part-funding from a national Rotary fund for community support.</p> <p>Concern raised about potential for vandalism, but the pods that would be installed are coin-operated and robust structures.</p>
11	<p><b>Orbital Trail + Links Project Update</b></p> <p>Circulated report from Gordon Prentice in italics:-</p> <p><b>Active Projects</b></p> <p><b>1. Carnie Woods Path Restoration &amp; Upgrade [1.1km]</b></p> <p><i>The contractor is expecting a start date around 29 August with an expected timescale of 6 to 8 weeks. If weather conditions are favourable in the summer, then clearance and earthworks could start earlier. It is also better for the environment to start work in August, to avoid bird nesting season which seems to extend every year.</i></p> <p><i>We have still to engage with the 110 volunteers who came forward to help with Carnie Woods restoration. There are now three tasks in mind:</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>1. Weeding the 7,000 new tree plants</i></li> <li><i>2. Carrying out visitor counts</i></li> <li><i>3. Removing all sections of boardwalk that don't form part of the new contract, and replacing them with membrane and quarry material.</i></li> </ol> <p><b>Access from Carnie Crescent:</b> <i>The Council's Senior Planner has advised us that we will need planning permission to construct a path from the car park to the boundary fence. I have approached Avant Homes for assistance in doing this. We have still to find a funding source for this work.</i></p> <p><b>2. Broadshade Avenue to Golf Club Upgrade [475m]</b></p> <p><i>The contractor managed to source a tree surgeon to clear the site of fallen trees and create a wider avenue</i></p>



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through the canopy. We have claimed the cost of this work against the GAIF allocation of £5,000.  
Path construction work commenced on 11th April. There has been some concern from nearby residents on the lack of consultation about this project.  
Gordon's view is that the factor should have advised the residents.

### **Funding Applications Pending**

**PBIP [Improving Access for all to Westhill's Health-Giving Green Spaces – Denman Park / Arnhall Moss]**  
Decision due this month.

### **Ongoing Maintenance / Upgrades**

WOT Annual Maintenance Schedule [requiring volunteers]													
Task	Sectors	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Pruning	1,3,4,5,6												
Strimming Undergrowth **	1,3,5,6b												
Weeding	2 & 4												
Clear drainage channels	6a												
Check signs/signposts	All												
Restore damaged areas	All												
<b>Sectors:</b>	<b>1</b> Broadshades					<b>4</b> Hidden Garden							
	<b>2</b> Gateway Sculpture					<b>5</b> Lawsondale							
	<b>3</b> Golf Course					<b>6</b> Meadowlands [a. farm track & b. lane]							
<b>** requires assistance from Community Payback team</b>													

**\*\*** Our 2022 contact in the Community Payback team has moved on to a new role in the Council. I have asked to be introduced to his successor – reply awaited.

Our first scheduled meeting [5<sup>th</sup> April] to reinforce parts of Lawsondale had to be postponed due to inclement weather.

**Link to Hill of Keir to/from the west:** No change, although there may be changes to operation and/or ownership of the land imminently.

### **Funding Update**

A total of £6,210 was spent this month; £1,279.80 to release the grant from FCC Scottish Landfill Commission and £4,831 on tree felling and to create a wider avenue through the canopy of trees and shrubs.  
Gordon reported that GAIF funds were received today.

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### **Planning Matters** (Diane Priestly)

Circulated report in italics:-

#### **Planning Applications**

*Wickes APP/2022/2010 -approved.*

*Greggs drive thru -building work has now begun.*

*Entier Ltd APP/2023/0520 -full planning permission for the installation of a generator*

*Broadstraik Inn APP/2023/0559 full planning permission for alterations and extension to INN including New Bin Store, replacement windows and external works*

### **Hill of Fare Proposed Windfarm**

*The Nae Fare newsletters are being regularly updated and are providing some excellent information, the latest newsletter has included a national petition to increase the ability of communities to be able to influence planning decisions for onshore windfarm development, the closing date is the 17<sup>th</sup> April.*

*Andrew Bowie is also asking for comments on the Hill of Fare proposal, you will find the survey under Andrew Bowie campaigns -there does not appear to be a closing date attached to this survey.*

### **Community Action Plan**

*The CAP survey has now finished and the planning group have been pulling together the information. We are also engaging with a variety of focus groups to ensure that anyone who did not complete the survey has the opportunity to express their thoughts about Westhill and Elrick so that we can start to look at compiling an Action Plan.*

*Need to engage with young people and young mum's groups. Agreed that a separate meeting can be held in June to review the survey results*

### **Webinars attended.**

*The **Resilient Communities Conference** was organised by the Scottish Government and is about sharing good practice and insight into supporting and working with local communities. There are several webinars planned throughout March and April covering a number of topics such as the sharing of good practice, community resilience and climate change and an inclusive approach to community resilience in emergencies. The first webinar included a number of presentations from Aberdeenshire Council who reported that they are in the process of developing a resilience strategy for Aberdeenshire and are also developing a website to ensure that there are good communications throughout all the groups within Aberdeenshire. All the resilience information is to be found on [engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk](https://engage.aberdeenshire.gov.uk). There were also presentations from Water Safety Scotland, SEPA (Scottish environment Protection Agency, Lifelines Scotland which is a project that supports the health and wellbeing of all emergency responders, Ferguslie Park near Paisley where flooding has been a big issue for residents, Community Resilience in Dumfries and Galloway where they have a Community Resilience officer and already have a Resilience policy in place.*

*There is another resilience briefing by Aberdeenshire Council on the 24<sup>th</sup> May to describing the role of the Local Resilience Partnership in an emergency and how Community Groups fit into a response alongside responders. **Scottish Sentencing Council** representative described the Scottish sentencing guidelines, if anyone is interest in this topic I can forward the PowerPoint presentation to you.*

### **Brown field sites survey**

*As part of the Aberdeenshire LDP Aberdeenshire Council are looking for information about the possibility of developing brownfield sites, one has already been identified in Westhill at the site of the burnt out building across from the A944 to be developed as affordable business units for rent.*

### **Local Place Plans**

*Aberdeenshire Council are encouraging the development of Local Place Plans. The planning Scotland Act 2019 states: a local place plan is a proposal to the development or use of land; it may also identify land and buildings that the community body considers to be of particular significance to the local area.*

### **Emergency alert warning on the 23<sup>rd</sup> April at 1500 hours**

*This public alert by the UK government will be sent to all UK smart phones, it should be noted that the Scottish and Welsh governments also have the ability to issues alerts in certain circumstances*

*You will not get an alert warning if your device is*

- *Turned off or in airplane mode.*
- *Connected to a 2G or 3G network.*



- *Wi-Fi only*
- *Not compatible*

*Diane Priestley*

Currently the Planning sub-group is only Diane and Willy, compared to 4 people originally. Becky offered to join the group.

There has been no uptake from residents to join a steering group for the CAP, after requests in last 2 Bulletins.

**13** **Financials** (Gordon Prentice) Circulated report in italics:-

***Matters Arising 9 March:***

***Financial Transactions – March***

***Income:*** £5,620, comprising £5,481 Bulletin advertising income from 28 advertisers, plus £50 from Vinespring Church, £45 from scaffold hires, plus £44 bank interest.

***Expenditure:*** £14,731 – comprising £6,985 to Bulletin printer, plus reimbursement of £576 to David Ritchie for related honorarium payment and expenses; in addition, £7,170 was paid from the Main Account as per statement below at **Appendix 1**.

***Outstanding Commitments:*** £633 - for supply/install qty 2 Jubilee Drive signs

***Bank Balances at Month End:*** £32,676

***Main Account:*** £12,531

***Bulletin Account:*** £20,145

Unspent but previously approved project expenditure of £2,576 was approved for carry forward to 2023/24.

***Westhill Bulletin***

The estimated surplus for the **Spring Issue** is £1,816 compared to budget of £3,100 if all 4 invoices outstanding at the end of the month [totalling £515] are paid.

***Annual Income & Expenditure Account for Year to March 2023***

See first draft circulated **for approval**. It shows that our funds in the bank reduced by £3,056 this year compared to a budgeted deficit of £3,341, but still leaving a healthy balance of £32,676 [£15,259 after adjusting for commitments at year end]. **The draft accounts were approved.**

Had it not been for the last minute payment of £4,831 to our Orbital Trail contractor which is due to be reimbursed, we would have reported a surplus of £1,775 for the year largely because expenses on Phoenix Fund and Storage Container [totalling £3,591] didn't materialise.

***Independent Verifier:*** Assuming draft accounts are approved, I plan to deliver them to Alan Moir of Fyfe Moir & Associates for the annual review soon after. Alan has been asked to provide an opinion on the accuracy of the accounts ahead of the next meeting, so that we are able to present them to the AGM in good time.

**14** **Green Westhill** (Mervyn Barr)

60 trees have been planted on Kinmundy Hill and 100 in Denman Park.

Compost for the summer baskets and planters to be bought soon. We will provide the shopping centre with some plants for their baskets.

Will look into forming a Friends of Denman Park group.

15	<p><b><u>AOB &amp; Close of Meeting</u></b> Meeting closed at 10.30pm <b><u>Date of Next Meeting-</u></b> 11th May at Holiday Inn, with Zoom option.</p>
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## **APPENDIX 1- ASYLUM HOTEL UPDATE**

**Summary of Meeting Agenda Item 6 - Westhill & Elrick Community Council, 13/04/2023**  
(This was put on the WECC website & Facebook pages on 19<sup>th</sup> April)

### **CONTEXT**

Westhill & Elrick Community Council (WECC) is made up of volunteer community councillors, who work non-politically in a number of different ways to promote and protect the quality of life for residents of Westhill and Elrick. Westhill & Elrick's (Ward 13) four elected Councillors are also members of the Community Council but without voting rights.

As a Statutory body we communicate regularly with Aberdeenshire Council (the Council) and we (along with other community organisations e.g. churches) were first made aware of the planned arrival of 173 male asylum seekers around the 15<sup>th</sup> of March 2023. There was no prior consultation or public announcements made but information related to this has filtered into the public domain by various routes including our own Web posts (<https://westhillelrick.org/>) on 30<sup>th</sup> March and 5<sup>th</sup> April 2023.

In the interim there has been no further specific information on the asylum seekers provided by the Home Office or the Council. However elsewhere there have been further developments. The Council have been active in contacting community groups e.g. churches and those with previous experience in working with asylum seekers, to identify practical ways that help can be offered.

There have been a range of posts, expressing differing views on Westhill & Elrick related Facebook Pages.

Also our local Westminster MP Mr. Andrew Bowie, has issued a statement online. He also offered to attend our Meeting, an offer that was readily accepted.

As per our previous statement on 30<sup>th</sup> March, WECC fully support the aim of the Council, "to work in partnership with the Home Office and their agents Mears, to mitigate any negative impacts on the Westhill community and maximise the strengths, goodwill and resilience in our community".

With this in mind we are concerned that the lack of information taken with the lack of initial consultation has led to some strong views about the situation and some serious concerns for the safety of women and children of Westhill in particular. Accordingly we tabled an Agenda item (6) for our meeting on the 13<sup>th</sup> April to discuss the situation. The notes below capture the main aspects of this part of the meeting and topics discussed. The formal Minutes of the whole meeting will be circulated in due course.

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- **PRESENT**

Present at the meeting were 14 community councillors, 10 members of the public (4 in person, 6 on Zoom); plus 4 (Ward 13) elected councillors, Andrew Bowie MP and Inspector Gareth Hannan (Garioch Community Policing Team).

WECC welcome the contributions of all and in particular participation of members of the public as it helps maintain better representation of the spectrum of views held on this issue.

Please note - Inspector Hannan had previously been invited to the meeting regarding separate matters within Westhill as discussed earlier in the Agenda, but stayed on for the discussion regarding the Asylum Hotel.

- **ASYLUM SEEKERS**

- At time of writing (18<sup>th</sup> April), no asylum seekers have yet been transferred to the Hampton by Hilton Hotel.
- Plan is for 173 between 18-45 to arrive over the next 8/9 weeks in groups of 20.
- All male – due to those arriving across the Channel being predominantly male.
- They will be a complete mixture from highly educated professional people to unskilled workers.
- Only basic personal details will likely to be available in confidence to MEARS e.g. name, country of origin, date of birth, occupation, reason for applying for asylum, family contacts in UK.
- MEARS' experience indicates (depending on circumstances) typically some 75% will eventually be assigned refugee status. The remainder tends to be economic migrants who will be refused residency.
- Because of their age, they are likely to be fit and healthy individuals with few medical needs.
- They can undertake voluntary work but not paid work.
- Those waiting for more than 12 months for their application to be processed may apply for a time-limited work permit.
- Indicative processing time will be 6-12 mths tbc.

- **ON LACK OF CONSULTATION** - Generally extreme disappointment was expressed at the total lack of consultation from the Home Office (HO) or the Council. Advised that this is HO policy and is applied across GB. All present agreed that it would be helpful to now have definitive and regular communication from the Home Office.

- **ANDREW BOWIE MP** - was offered the opportunity to make a statement to the meeting, which he did explaining his position as already expressed online. He emphasised that he has consistently taken and expressed the view that Westhill is not suitable to house this number of asylum seekers. He discussed his reasoning with those present, and added clarification that he has been passing residents' feedback to the Immigration Minister. He then explained that Home Office policy is not to issue any form of communication to communities or community support groups. The role of community integration is primarily fulfilled by their contractor, Mears.

## APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 13TH APRIL 2023, AT HOLIDAY INN

He continues to reiterate his position that he thinks that Westhill was an inappropriate location for such a large group of asylum seekers and will continue to lobby the Home Office and Government Ministers to that effect.

He has also since met with officials from Aberdeenshire Council who have been placed in a similar position, to work out how best to respond to the situation our community now finds ourselves in. He believes that the community of Westhill and Elrick with support from the Council, community groups and other humanitarian agencies, will rise to the challenge of welcoming these new arrivals.

- **THE ROLE OF ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL** - in this process was discussed. Aberdeenshire Council has no authority or decision-making powers in relation to asylum seekers and accommodation, but are working with community groups to minimise negative impacts and maximise community resources.
- **HOTEL LIFE** - Questions were raised regarding day-to-day life for those housed within the hotel. It was noted that they have no recourse to public funds, so cannot claim benefits etc. but will receive £9-10p per week for personal expenses. They will receive 3 cooked meals a day and have access to laundry facilities. They will be dependent on charitable donations e.g. for clothing and footwear. Once the asylum seekers arrive and their needs are assessed by Mears, we as a community will have a clearer idea as to what their priority needs are. For example, we were informed that a person in Banchory is willing to help English speakers become English teachers. Details tbc.

Concerns were also raised over what there is to do for these men during the days, as they are not allowed to seek employment, although they can volunteer, and there are not many facilities for them to use in the surrounding area. Without sufficient amenities or activities, there are concerns for the mental wellbeing of those being housed in the hotel.

Postscript - After the meeting closed one member of the table tennis club volunteered to teach table tennis.

- **FEARS FOR SAFETY** - regarding the significant fears for the safety of women and children, with such an influx of single men into the area. This was explained by a member of the public who said there are women (and potentially others) who feel unsafe walking around after dark currently, and adding in a large number of men to the area may increase that fear.

Inspector Hannan added clarification that there have been no significant incidents regarding 100+ male asylum seekers resident for over a year, at a similar property within Aberdeen City. In his experience of Aberdeen there is some evidence that they are more likely to be victims of crime than perpetrators.

Postscript - This chimes with a view expressed by the MEARS Manager who has stated, that in his experience, most asylum seekers by far, are peaceable law-abiding people, with a willingness to fit in to whatever host community they find themselves in.

## APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 13TH APRIL 2023, AT HOLIDAY INN

- OTHER SUPPORT NEEDS - Further concerns were raised about the pressures on healthcare, policing and other local amenities. The needs of the asylum seekers are unknown at this point, and will remain unknown until they arrive and have been assessed by Mears. Only then will WECC and other support organisations be in a position to offer and provide specific support.
- CHALLENGE - Most people present agreed that the majority of people will want the best for anyone seeking asylum, and feel sympathetic to the situation that they find themselves in. Westhill and Elrick is a very welcoming area, with a number of community groups ready and willing to help those who arrive in a variety of different ways. It was discussed how faced with the conundrum of wanting the best for all people, but having real concerns about safety; pressure on local amenities and concern for the wellbeing of those being housed in hotels; how can all these priorities co-exist with one another.

The challenge now is how to work on each of those points to alleviate concerns and provide the best outcome for all involved. It was agreed that if the Home Office is intent on going through with this policy in Westhill, then it is a better for our community to offer a hand of welcome to achieve successful and harmonious integration for however long this takes.

- Any offers of help can be sent to [asylum@aberdeenshire.gov.uk](mailto:asylum@aberdeenshire.gov.uk)
- Any questions or concerns can be sent to our MP and other elected officials. A helpful source to do this is through [www.writetothem.com](http://www.writetothem.com)



**APPENDIX TWO- POLICE REPORT FOR MARCH**



**GARIOCH COMMUNITY POLICING TEAM  
VISIBLE, ACCESSIBLE AND EFFECTIVE**

**Community Council: Westhill and Elrick**  
**Reporting Period: 1 to 31 March 2023**

**Current Policing Priorities:**

Our priorities are:-

1. ASB – Proactive patrols to provide community reassurance and to deter/detect instances of ASB and Vandalism.
2. PROACTIVITY – Increased use of Stop and Search and plain-clothed patrols to deter/detect drug and acquisitive crime.
3. ROAD SAFETY – Enhanced speed checks and other speed reduction measures.

**Crime Overview and Explanation:**

<b>CRIME TYPE</b>	<b>CURRENT PERIOD</b>	<b>PREVIOUS PERIOD</b>
Assault	3	2
Housebreaking	1	0
Public Nuisance	4	1
Road Traffic	3 accident, 5 other	1 accident, 4 other
Drugs	0	1

*Assault – Includes all recorded instances of violence.*

*Housebreaking – includes all break in's to domestic and commercial premises, including attempted break in's.*

*Public Nuisance – All youth annoyance and calls in relation to anti-social behaviour.*

*Road Traffic – all calls in relation to Road Traffic Accidents and Offences (speeding, illegal parking, obstruction etc).*

*Drugs – all reports incidents in relation to drugs dealing and use.*

## APPROVED MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON THURSDAY, 13TH APRIL 2023, AT HOLIDAY INN

### **Assault:**

There has been 3 incidents reported. Two relate to parties known to one another with no injury sustained. Appropriate action was taken. The other relates to an altercation at Westhill Service Station involving customers. One male was arrested and charged and he was also reported for drink driving.

### **Housebreaking:**

There has been 1 incident reported. This relates to a housebreaking where entry was forced to a farm shed. Some tools were stolen and a child's motorbike was set on fire. Enquiries are ongoing.

### **Public Nuisance:**

There has been 4 incidents reported which relate to youths loitering, school pupils gathering, items being thrown and a door being knocked before running away. No criminality has been identified with no persons traced when area searches have been made.

### **Road Traffic:**

This period has seen 3 reported accidents, each involving two vehicles with no injuries sustained.

The other reports relate to manner of driving with no offences detected.

Concerns have been raised about speeding and parking at Elrick Primary School. Local and Roads Policing officers have been tasked to provide passing attention and will deal with any offences robustly.

### **Drugs:**

There has been no reports.

### **Significant Crime/Issues within Your Community:**

There have been no significant events this reporting period.

### **Planned Community Policing Activity/Advice:**

I know speeding is a concern in the community and our speeding operation continues on a rolling basis. Feedback is required to direct resources to problem areas.

I am aware of concerns regarding the slow response when persons call 101. 999 should only be used if the caller requires an immediate or emergency response.

We can also be contacted online for issues of a non-serious nature via our Contact Us Form – <https://www.scotland.police.uk/secureforms/contact/>

On receipt an incident is generated and allocated accordingly.

### **Conclusion:**

This is another stable report and if there are any issues that you wish brought to Police attention, please let me know.

Emma Forbes, Sgt. A0645