

Minute of the Meeting of Birsay Community Council held in the Birsay Community Centre and via Teams on Thursday, 20 November 2025 at 19:30

Present:

Mr R Delday, Miss K Coghill, Ms D Clouston, Mr E Harvey and Mr S Spence.

In Attendance:

- Councillor R King.
- Councillor J Stevenson (via Teams).
- Councillor O Tierney.
- Mr P Hansen, Events Officer, RSPB Orkney.
- Mr J Wells, Senior Sites Manager, RSPB Orkney.
- Mrs H Keveren, West Mainland Link Officer/Clerk.

Order of Business

1. Apologies	2
2. Presentation – RSPB Orkney	2
3. Adoption of Minutes	2
4. Matters Arising.....	2
5. Correspondence	6
6. Consultations	8
7. Financial Statements	9
8. Applications for Financial Assistance.....	10
9. Publications	11
10. Any Other Competent Business.....	11
11. Dates of Future Meetings	12
12. Conclusion of Meeting	12

1. Apologies

Resolved to note that apologies for absence had been received from Mrs V Sinclair, Mr F Tulloch and Councillor D Tullock.

2. Presentation – RSPB Orkney

The Events Officer and the Senior Sites Manager with RSPB Orkney gave a comprehensive overview of the Birsay Reserves during 2025.

They advised that the Loons in Birsay was the biggest wetland area and remained important for Harriers and Waders. It was the largest reserve for breeding Curlews in Orkney, but the numbers reported were in decline due to other predators. They also reported a steady downward trajectory in the population of seabirds at Marwick but a positive increase in the numbers of Kittiwake and Guillemot. Gannets had colonized at Marwick Head with 40 nests reported there in 2025.

Members were also advised that the RSPB were actively involved in peatland restoration to reduce the carbon footprint from carbon emissions; they were currently rolling this out in the Tingwall area and hope to move this onto areas in Birsay in the next phase of the project. They stressed that they wanted to engage with the community and this was not to stop people actively cutting peats but to restore banks that are no longer being utilised.

The team were keen to strengthen links with the community and explained various ways that they had engaged with groups and how this could be developed in the future.

Members from RSBP Orkney left the meeting at this point, and it was:

Resolved to note the presentation and information provided.

3. Adoption of Minutes

The minute of the meeting of Birsay Community Council held on 11 September 2025 was approved, being proposed by Ms K Coghill and seconded by Ms D Clouston.

4. Matters Arising

A. Friends of Dounby – Sustrans

Members from Birsay Community Council had attended the meeting with Harray and Sandwick Community Council held on 29 October. The Walk Wheel Cycle Trust, formally Sustrans, had joined the meeting via Teams to give an update on the 2024/2025 Mobility Audit and the plans for the next phase.

The Mobility Audit had included a review of the existing infrastructure and a full movement study involving the Friends of Dounby in a walk through the village identifying barriers to walking, cycling and wheeling. An open survey was also carried out to the wider community to invite their comments and build a clear picture of how people move around and a guide to improvements for the future.

The next phase in 2025/2026 would focus on developing selected proposals into concept designs, forming a masterplan for Dounby. This would include further community engagement to refine and validate the ideas. They planned to engage with local residents, care home and the school to invite feedback from a wide section of the community.

A confirmed date of November 24 and 25 had been arranged for a meeting with 'Friends of Dounby' along with Community engagement in the village.

The initial design solutions included new and improved pavements, improved pedestrian crossings, places to stop and rest, enhancements for the Village centre, an accessible bus shelter and measures to manage vehicle speeds.

They planned to build on the momentum of the Market Green project highlighting how the Dounby Community Plan continued to drive positive change, and they were keen to keep the Community Council updated as things progressed. Following the update, it was:

Resolved to note the report regarding the Mobility Audit and ongoing work.

B. Birsay Whale Bone

The Chairman advised that members of Birsay Heritage Trust were in the process of making a replica of the Whale Bone in plastic, that they had been gifted a donation of bronze, and that they would be gathering quotes along with exploring funding options to have the whale bone eventually replaced in bronze, and it was:

Resolved to note the update provided.

C. Market Green Update

Various updates had been circulated to members ahead of the meeting as work progresses to near completion at the Market Green. Members of Birsay Community Council had discussed with Harray and Sandwick Community Council at their recent meeting the suggestions for the opening of the project to be delayed until Spring 2026. General discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved:

1. To note the information provided.
2. To report via the business letter that one of the toilet cisterns was constantly filling up.

D. Steering Group – Birsay Place Plan

It was reported that the Birsay Place Plan had been submitted to the Council on 16 September and was now lodged. The full invoice had been received for the consultancy and payment arranged. The £6,000 grant funding from the Community Led Leadership Group would then be reclaimed. The Steering Group had since met and prioritised the various projects in the parish and a WhatsApp group had been set up. Members were also advised that an Expression of Interest had been submitted to the Crown Estate Community Led Development Fund for assistance towards some

of the projects. Members questioned the consultant's role in an advisory capacity going forward, and it was:

Resolved:

1. To note the contents of the report.
2. To enquire with the consultants if funding was available to utilise their services.

E. Birsay Heritage Trust – Fisherman's Huts

The Chairman advised those presents that the work had been carried out to re-turf the Fisherman's Hut by members of the community council. No response had been received at the time from Scottish and Southern Electricity Network as to whether they could provide volunteers, and it was:

Resolved to note that SSEN might be available to assist with other community led projects.

F. St Magnus Kirk - Gates

Members are advised that the gates had been restored and rehung at St Magnus Kirk and the work completed, and that an invoice had been received for the hinges, and it was:

Resolved to note that £141.12 had been paid from Community Council Grant Scheme for the restoration of the gates.

G. Visibility Concerns

Members were advised that the Council's Roads Support team had thanked members for raising the concerns with them and would continue to monitor the areas, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above.

H. Passing Place – Wilderness, Hillside Road

The condition of the road surface in the passing place at the above location had been raised previously via business letter. The Roads Support Team Manager had advised that there was no update available at present and given the current backlog they couldn't give a timescale for the work to be done, and it was:

Resolved to note the update provided.

I. Dounby Community Woodland Proposal

Further to the presentation at a previous meeting from Sandy Gunn, Research Co-ordinator in the ICNZ Programme, a Facebook post had been done to gauge interest in the project to plant trees in the community. Two responses had been received from members of Birsay parish and, with their permission, contact details had been shared. The Chairman advised members that the project was keen to engage with local landowners. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to note that no areas could be identified within Birsay at this point for the Community Woodland Proposal.

J. Fencing at Quilco

A requested had been submitted to the Council via business letter to replace the fencing along the pavement from the village to the Quilco Housing estate. Images had been supplied to the Council to identify the issue, and it was:

Resolved to note that no official update had been received ahead of the meeting.

K. Weedkiller - Dounby Village

Following the successful clean-up of the village held in July, and the proposal to make it a yearly event, a request had been submitted to the Council to request if they could facilitate a spray prior to the tidy up with a pet friendly weed killer. A response had been received explaining that the Council do have trained weed sprayers so this could be a possibility if given plenty of advance notice.

The Community Council were also advised that, alternatively, they could hire a contractor themselves, however careful consideration would need to be given to the clear rules and regulations around the use of pesticides and consultation would be required with the Roads Authority if they were spraying public footpaths. A discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to add this item to an agenda in Spring 2026.

L. Smiley Faces – Dounby Village

Further to the previous discussions and requests for the purchase of five Smiley Faces for the village as traffic calming measures, Roads Support had advised that they had received confirmation that funding had been secured for the purchase of Smiley Faces for Dounby, and that orders had been placed. It was hoped to have installation complete by March 2026, and it was:

Resolved to note the content of the report.

M. Birsay War Memorial – Chains and Posts

Members heard that a pre-assessment application had been submitted to the War Memorials Trust identifying the issues with the chains and posts at the War Memorial in the Birsay Cemetery. Notification had been received that funding was eligible however this did not automatically mean that a grant application would be successful. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to request a quote for the works at the war memorial from W D Mechanical.

N. St Magnus Kirkyard – Rabbits

Following discussion at the last meeting about the issue with Rabbits in the St Magnus Kirkyard, Mr E Harvey had agreed to look into ferreting options. However, it

turned out there was Myxomatoses amongst the rabbits. Members agreed to monitor the situation and, if necessary, look at options at a later date, and it was:

Resolved to request a quote for work on the gates from W D Mechanical.

O. Yesnaby Road Markings

A business letter had been submitted to the Council to request that the road markings at Yesnaby junction at the bottom of Voy brae be addressed as a safety matter. The Council had reviewed and confirmed that a few junctions in the area had been refreshed and repainted, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the report.

P. Teams Access – Community Council Meetings

Following issues with Teams access at meeting it had been raised via business letter that the Clerk be given access to allow entry to meetings. A response had been received that this was not possible for those with non-council email addresses however they hoped they had figured out how to allow immediate access and bypass the waiting room, and it was:

Resolved to note the update provided.

5. Correspondence

A. Share your View on Tourism in Orkney

An invitation had been received and circulated previously to members, requesting one member from each Community Council attend a one-hour stakeholder interview as part of the Our Orkney, Our Story project, an initiative to guide the future of tourism in a way that was sustainable, regenerative and rooted in community wellbeing. Mr R Delday had agreed to attend the interview and had found it very beneficial, and it was:

Resolved to note the correspondence and report.

B. Community Right to Buy Review – Island Meeting

Correspondence had previously been circulated to members from the Scottish Islands Federation, advising members that the Scottish Government were hosting online meetings relating to the Community Right to Buy which was introduced in Scotland in 2003 empowering local community to acquire land and assets, and it was:

Resolved to note that the event had now passed.

C. Rabbit and Wildlife Management

Correspondence had previously been circulated to members from a specialist Wildlife Management company who were in Orkney carrying out rabbit control and enquiring if the parishes had any requirement for Pest or Wildlife Management, and it was:

Resolved to note the correspondence.

D. Scapa Deep Water Quay

An update had been received and circulated to members from the project team dealing with the Scapa Deep Water Quay, advising that additional information had been submitted to the Council and a further planning consultation period was underway, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the correspondence.

E. University of Highlands and Islands Archaeology Institute – 10 Year Anniversary

An invite had been received and circulated to members from the University of Highland and Island Archaeology Institute, requesting attendance at an event to celebrate a decade of achievements, and it was:

Resolved to note that the event had now passed.

F. Patient Advice and Support Service

A letter had been received and circulated from the Patient Advice and Support Service asking members to raise awareness of the service. They offer support to anyone who uses the NHS to understand their rights and responsibilities as a patient in Scotland, raise concern, give feedback or comments and if required raise complaints, and it was:

Resolved to note that the poster and flyer had been displayed in the Palace Stores.

G. Burial Grounds Grass Cutting

Following consideration of the information previously circulated to members from the Council relating to the Burial Grounds Grass Cutting. There was an obligation that the Council was responsible for the management of the burial grounds owned by them and the cost of grass cutting was a significant cost and they seek to find ways to reduce these costs, discussion followed and it was:

Resolved to submit the following feedback for consideration:

- Query if the terminology Active and In-Active could be explained.
- Point out that less cuts will make the cuts they do take longer.
- If reductions had to be made, suggest that less cuts be done for the inactive burial grounds and 6 cuts for the active.

H. Dounby Parent Council – Invite

Following consideration of correspondence circulated to members inviting them along to the next meeting of Dounby Parent Council, and also a request to be co-opted members of the parent council, discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to note that the meeting had now passed.

I. Islands Centre for Net Zero – EV Charger Birsay

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Elaine Salomon, Project Development Coordinator for Islands Centre for Net Zero, advising members of a funding opportunity available to support the installation of EV chargers to landowning businesses in the area, it was:

Resolved to advise ICNZ of a few local businesses that they could contact.

J. Powers for Community Councils

Information had previously been circulated to members from Michael Gallagher advising members of a petition launched to encourage new powers for Community Councils, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the document.

K. Thank You Letters

Members were advised that letters of thanks had been received from Scotland's Charity Air Ambulance, 1st Dounby Guides, Birsay Community Association and Mrs S Thomson for financial assistance provided, and it was:

Resolved to note the thank you letters.

L. Scottish Islands Federation – Island Digital Connectivity Resilience

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Scottish Islands Federation, advising members of an online meeting covering the topic of island connectivity resilience and how the weather and storms can negatively impact the connectivity on the islands, it was:

Resolved to note that this event would be held on 24 November 2025.

6. Consultations

A. Orkney Coastal Change Adaptation Plan Workshop

Correspondence had previously been circulated to members from the Council inviting members along to a workshop to discuss the development of the Orkney Coastal Change Adaption Plan to improve understanding on coastal erosion and flood risk in the area, and it was:

Resolved to note that this event had now passed.

B. European Marine Energy Centre – Fall of Warness

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from European Marine Energy Centre advising members of an application to extend the construction and operation of the Fall or Warness Tidal Test Site for an additional 2 years, and that the consultation period was open, it was:

Resolved to note that responses should be submitted by 20 November 2025.

C. Have Your Say on Tourism – Community Workshops

Members considered correspondence from the Council, copies of which had previously been circulated, Council inviting residents to join workshops to help shape the future of tourism across the islands. The workshops were planned for Pickaquooy Centre with three dates in November, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above.

D. Orkney Coastal Change Adaptation Plan – Online Introduction Event

Correspondence had been circulated to members advising of an online workshop being offered by the Council and Mott MacDonald to discuss the development of the Orkney Coastal Change Adaptation Plan, and it was:

Resolved to note that this event had now passed.

E. Northern Isles Ferry Services User Surveys – Transport

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Northern Isles Ferry Services requesting members complete a survey relating to their usage of the Northlink routes between Aberdeen and Orkney to allow a better understanding of the needs of islands residents, it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the correspondence.

F. Trust in Government Consultation

Following consideration of correspondence circulated to members from Scottish Community Development Centre advising members about a series of sessions being offered on the topic trust and what it means to them and how that relates to positive and negative experiences with government, it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the correspondence.

7. Financial Statements

A. General Fund

Following consideration of the General Fund statement, copies of which had previously been circulated, it was:

Resolved to note that the estimated balance was £8,742.89 as at 3 November 2025.

B. Birsay Energy Fund

Following consideration of the Birsay Energy Fund, copies of which had previously been circulated, it was:

Resolved to note that the estimated balance was £16,148.09 as at 3 November 2025.

C. Community Council Grant Scheme

Following consideration of the financial statement for the Community Council Grant Scheme, it was:

Resolved to note the balance remaining available for approval in the main capping limit was £830.46 and the balance in the additional capping limit was £780 as 3 November 2025.

D. Community Development Fund

Following consideration of the financial statement for the Community Development Fund, it was:

Resolved to note the balance remaining available for allocation was £9,831.09 as at 3 November 2025.

8. Applications for Financial Assistance

A. Birsay Heritage Trust – Old Meal Mill

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated to members from Birsay Heritage Trust, requesting funding towards the restoration of the Old Meal Mill at the Barony Mill, discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved:

1. To request, via business letter, to have more information on ownership of the derelict mills.
2. To invite members from Birsay Heritage Trust along to the next meeting to give a short presentation on their plans to enable members to make an informed decision.

B. 1st Dounby Guides – Glasgow Trip

Following consideration of correspondence received from Dounby 1st Guides requesting assistance for the six residents from the parish to participate in an educational trip to Glasgow along with a request for a donation to the unit, it was:

Resolved to award £400 from the General Fund and £200 from Birsay Energy Fund to be split between the travel and a donation to the unit.

C. Birsay Community Association – Bairns Christmas Party

A completed application had been received from Birsay Community Association requesting funding towards the Bairns Christmas Party, and it was:

Resolved to note that members had agreed via email to award £300, subject to Community Council Grant Scheme approval.

D. Birsay Community Association – Birsay Lunch Club

An application had been received from Birsay Community Association for assistance towards hosting a festive lunch for the Birsay Lunch Club, and it was:

Resolved to note that members had agreed via email to award £500, subject to Community Council Grant Scheme approval.

E. Mrs S Thomson – Alness Under 16's

A completed application had been received from Mrs S Thomson on behalf of her son who had successfully signed for Alness Under 16's which would entail regular trips away, and it was:

Resolved to award a total of £150 as per policy for three trips from the General Fund.

9. Publications

Resolved to note that the following publications had been forwarded to members:

- VAO – Newsletter – October and November 2025.
- VAO - Training and Funding Update – September, October and November 2025.
- ORSAS – Quarterly Newsletter – September and November 2025.
- PTSB Switch off information – October 2025
- Scottish Water – Stakeholder Edition Autumn/Winter 2025.
- Free Training Sessions for Rural and Islands Community Councils.

10. Any Other Competent Business

A. CGU Road Repairs

Ms K Coghill had raised concerns that the repairs to the road after the works being carried out by CGU was unsatisfactory and some of the backfilling of tar had left quite big incisions in the road. This had been raised with the Council and the work had been repaired, and it was:

Resolved to note the report.

B. Dounby Tree Lighting

The Dounby Tree Lighting was scheduled for Friday, 5 December at the newly developed Market Green. The Tree, new lights and selection boxes had already been ordered. The Town Brass Band had confirmed along with Friends of Dounby School hosting Santa's Grotto in the Milestone Community Church following the Tree Lighting. Discussion followed to confirm the other arrangements, and it was:

Resolved:

1. That all costs involved in the Tree lighting would be split with Birsay paying 1/3 share and Harray and Sandwick 2/3 share.
2. To note that a quote had been received from E Frasers, Electricians for the cost of £1,332 plus VAT to erect and dismantle the lights and that this should be accepted and would be shared as above from the Community Council Grant Scheme, subject to approval.

3. That the cost of Selection Boxes, Cable Ties, Ratchet Straps, all weather box, hire of the church and the donation to the Town Brass Band would all be split and paid from the General Fund.

4. To note that the Ministers of the Milestone Kirk would be asked to deliver the Christmas Message, children of the school had been advised of the event and would learn the songs at school and the oldest and youngest member of Dounby Community School would be asked to switch on the lights.

5. That members of both Community Councils had been asked to assist with putting the tree up on Tuesday, 2 December and also at the Tree Lighting Ceremony on Friday, 5 December.

C. Ministry Hut – Parking Area

Ms D Clouston advised members that the parking area at the Ministry Huts in Birsay was full of potholes and in need of some repairs. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to note that this should be added to the Birsay Place Plan.

11. Dates of Future Meetings

Following consideration of dates for the next meeting, it was:

Resolved that the next meetings of Birsay Community Council would be held on Thursdays 19 February and 21 May 2026 at 19:30 in Birsay Community Centre and via Teams.

12. Conclusion of Meeting

There being no further business, the Chair declared the meeting closed at 22:03.