

Minute of the Meeting of Birsay Community Council held in the Birsay Community Centre and via Teams on Thursday, 6 March 2025 at 19:30

Present:

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

In Attendance:

- Councillor R King.
- Councillor O Tierney.
- Councillor J Stevenson.
- Mrs N Tait, Orkney Goose Group.
- Mr S Hay, Orkney Goose Group.
- Mrs J Montgomery, Empowering Communities Liaison Officer.
- Mrs H Keveren, West Mainland Link Officer.
- Ms C Kelday, Community Council Liaison Assistant.

Order of Business

1. Apologies	2
2. Adoption of Minutes	2
3. Presentation - Orkney Goose Group	2
4. Matters Arising	2
5. Correspondence	5
6. Consultations	9
7. Financial Statements	10
8. Applications for Financial Assistance	11
9. Publications	12
10. Any Other Competent Business	12
11. Dates of Future Meetings	14
12. Conclusion of Meeting	14

1. Apologies

Resolved to note that apologies for absence had been received from Councillor D Tullock.

2. Adoption of Minutes

The minute of the meeting held on 28 November 2024 was approved, being proposed by Mr E Harvey and seconded by Mrs V Sinclair.

3. Presentation - Orkney Goose Group

Mrs N Tait and Mr S Hay representing the Orkney Goose Group presented members with an interesting insight into the work which the Orkney Goose Group, in partnership with various local and National groups, were undertaking to tackle the issue of Greylag Geese in Orkney.

They explained that Orkney had both migratory geese, which can see numbers of 40,000 – 60,000 over the winter months, along with resident geese which has been as high as 30,000. These numbers caused a real issue to agriculture, with estimates predicting each goose would eat up to 1kg of fresh grass a day, costing Orkney farmers one million pound each year. Many no longer grow crops and were importing instead.

The Group had various methods which were undertaken at opportune times of the year to tackle the problem and figures showed that there had been a decline in the resident geese with figures in 2025 estimated at 17,000, compared to 27,000 the previous year.

Funding is a major issue with small amounts awarded each year from the Scottish Government which is managed on behalf of the group by the National Farmers Union. A great deal of the work was being carried out by volunteers locally to assist with the project. They mentioned that Orkney was ahead of other areas in Scotland also facing the issue with Geese and successful methods were being passed on from the Orkney group. Following the presentation, it was:

Resolved to note the information provided.

The representatives of Orkney Goose Group left the meeting at this point.

4. Matters Arising

A. Local Place Plan – Friends of Dounby

Members were advised that Sustrans Scotland had held an initial hybrid meeting on Friday, 6 December in the Milestone Community Church. Those in attendance conducted a walking tour of the village identifying the issues with the infrastructure already in place. Council members present would now report the findings back to Sustrans and were awaiting the date of the next meeting. It was requested that the next gathering be in an evening to enable those working to attend, and it was:

Resolved to note the above information.

B. RSPB – Marwick Bay Access

The West Mainland Link Officer advised that she had met with the Rural Planner responsible for Core Paths at Marwick Bay to identify the area where the RSPB were proposing to erect bollards, and that a follow up letter had been submitted to the Council raising the concerns of the members of the Community Council, and confirmation had been received from the Rural Planner that she had written to RSPB to advise that they cannot support the installation of the bollards against the wishes of the community, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above information.

C. Treatment of Causeway

Correspondence had been received and circulated from Historic Environment Scotland relating to the cleaning of the Causeway at the Broch of Birsay. They had not been aware of any issues and advised that the same chemical was used by other Councils to clean areas at piers. They would, however, recognise this as a concern so would revisit. The Chair advised that he had also addressed this issue when meeting with Historic Environment Scotland and they proposed to trial areas of the causeway this year with non-slip waffle matting to provide additional grip along with signage to warn visitors of slippery areas, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above discussion.

D. Speeding in Dounby

Following requests at the previous meeting, a letter had been sent to Police Scotland raising the issue of speeding through the Dounby village. Police Scotland had requested from the Council that speed counters be installed in the village which had been done and there would be police presence in the village. The results of speed counters were made available at the meeting, and it was:

Resolved to note the above information.

E. Birsay Whale Bone

The Chairman provided an update, advising that Birsay Heritage Trust were investigating to see if any of the scans done of the Whale Bone over the years could be used to create a replica which would be positioned slightly further back from the coastline at the same spot as the original. It was proposed that the replica would be a fibre glass copy, and it was:

Resolved to note that an update would be available at the next meeting.

F. Dounby School Play Park

Members were advised that Dounby Parent Council were in the process of forming a sub committee to concentrate on funding for the proposed new play park at Dounby Community School. A letter had been received asking for a volunteer to represent the community council on the subcommittee. Discussion followed, and members enquired if the representative from Harray and Sandwick Community Council would be willing to represent them and provide updates as required, and it was:

Resolved to ask the Harray and Sandwick Community Council delegate if they would represent Birsay Community Council at the meetings.

G. Birsay Kirkyard Repairs

Members noted that the loose stone in the shed and the coping stone off the wall at the Birsay Kirkyard had both been reported, however no update had been received, and it was:

Resolved to note the above information.

H. Slip at Point of Buckquoy

Further to a letter being sent to Historic Environment Scotland on 14 September 2024 (as a regular user of the slip to gain access for equipment to maintain the Historic Scotland site on the Brough of Birsay), members were advised that a meeting had taken place on 4 February 2025 with representatives from Historic Environment Scotland and the Birsay Community Council Chair. At the time of the meeting the slip was fully covered with sand so the problem had resolved itself. However, the HES representatives did agree that any proposals from the community council would be backed by them. The slip was one of the areas which would be discussed as part of the Birsay Place Plan, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above.

I. Market Green Update

Updates had been received and circulated to members on the progress at the Market Green in Dounby. The latest update suggested that work was progressing well, and the contractor was attempting to find more resources. The Scottish Water approval was still required for waste and water, oil tanks had been filled, and the general site work was moving ahead.

The Chairman advised members that as part of the development work at the Market Green they were incorporating anchors in the concrete for the Christmas tree in future years, and Harray and Sandwick Community Council had also requested that interpretation boards be included in the finished project. Following discussion, it was:

Resolved to note the above information.

J. Kirkyard Maintenance Contracts

It was noted that members had agreed by email ahead of the tender documents being released that they should be for 12 cuts with the additional cuts being funded by the community council. Two tenders had been received ahead of the closing date on 10 February and were opened at the meeting. The committee were unanimous to award the tender for 2025/2026 to Michael Brass, and it was:

Resolved to note that Michael Brass was awarded the tender, and that any additional cuts would be funded from the Community Council Grant Scheme.

K. Benches

Members had agreed by email to proceed with the order for three benches for the parish, one for the Listening Wall and two for the proposed Vias Moss development. The Clerk advised that the benches had been ordered along with the Harray and Sandwich Community Council benches to secure the best price, and it was:

Resolved to note that funding for the benches will be from Community Council Grant Scheme.

L. Birsay Community Council Vacancy

Members were advised that, despite advertising on Facebook and regular emails to members, no expressions of interest had been submitted. Discussion followed and it was:

Resolved that members would continue with recruitment for the vacant seat on Birsay Community Council.

M. Birsay Place Plan – Steering Group

Members heard that a steering group had been formed to move things forward with the Birsay Place Plan. The group was made up of members of the community council along with business owners and interested individuals from within the parish. After tenders were submitted, Eyland Skyn had been awarded the contract to carry out the consultancy work for the Place Plan. The total cost of the consultancy would be £12,000.

It was also reported that an application had been submitted to Orkney Islands Council's Crown Estate Community Led Development Fund for £6,000 which would be match funded by the Birsay Community Council. The application had been successful, so discussion followed on how the remaining £6,000 would be funded, and it was:

Resolved:

1. That £4,300 of the remaining £6,000 would be funded from Community Council Grant Scheme spread over two years allocations.
2. That £850 would come from Birsay Energy Fund towards the £6,000.
3. That £850 would come from Community Development towards the £6,000.

5. Correspondence

A. Scottish Water – Ongoing Water Demand Issues

Correspondence had previously been circulated from Scottish Water providing an update on the ongoing demand issues on Orkney. While there was no customer impact, Scottish Water were continuing to take measures to ensure this did not change and had ten tankers on the island at the time to maintain supply to customers, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above information.

B. Scottish Water – Normal Service resumed

Correspondence had been circulated to members from Scottish Water advising that normal service had resumed after the period of additional demand and could report that the Water Treatment works had returned to normal operation, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the correspondence.

C. My Orkney

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Orkney Islands Council advising members of the services of 'My Orkney' the online Council portal offering individuals a quicker and easier way to report faults, make payments, apply for services as well as many other services, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above information and a post had been uploaded to Facebook.

D. AbilityNet Event

Correspondence had been previously circulated advising members of a digital voice Roadshow hosted by AbilityNet, a charity offering assistance to older and disabled people building a digital world accessible to all, and it was:

Resolved to note that the event had now passed.

E. Rural and Islands Poverty – Webinar

Correspondence had previously been circulated advising members of a webinar being hosted by the Improvement Service and representatives from the Poverty Alliance with the topic of Poverty in rural and islands communities being discussed, and it was:

Resolved to note that the event had now passed.

F. Voluntary Action Orkney – Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults

Following consideration of correspondence received from Voluntary Action Orkney advising members that the Communities Mental Health and Wellbeing Fund for Adults had opened for a second tranche of applications, it was:

Resolved to note the deadline for applications had now passed.

G. Dounby Parent Council

Correspondence had previously been circulated from Dounby Parent Council inviting a representative to their next meeting and advising members that they intend to form a sub-committee to move things forward with the funding for the proposed Play Park at the Dounby Community School, and it was:

Resolved to note that the meeting had since passed.

H. Ron Bailey – Safety of Lithium-ion Batteries

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated asking for support from the community council for the safety surrounding the use and disposal of Lithium-ion batteries, members agreed that the batteries were extremely dangerous if not disposed of appropriately, and it was:

Resolved to note that a letter of support had been submitted.

I. Birsay Hostel and Campsite Development Project

Correspondence had previously been circulated from the Sport and Leisure Services within the Council, asking for the support of the Community Council with their application to upgrade the existing facilities at the Birsay Hostel and Campsite. They planned to construct a new toilet and shower block, install hard standing and create additional pitches and electric hook ups, and it was:

Resolved that the Community Council had already submitted their support for this development.

J. Scottish Water – Responding to impacts of Storm Eowyn

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Scottish Water advising that their teams had worked to maintain essential service for customers wherever it would be safe to do in the face of the extreme weather conditions during Storm Eowyn, it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the correspondence.

K. NHS Orkney – Quit your Orkney Way

Correspondence had previously been circulated to members advising them of the services available from NHS Orkney to support those wishing to stop smoking and how the resources can be made available, and it was:

Resolved to note the above information.

L. Voluntary Action Orkney – Small Grants Scheme

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from VAO advising that the Small Grants Scheme had opened for applications, and that groups could apply for grants of up to £500 to assist with a project or activity to help the community, it was:

Resolved to note that this had been forwarded to the Birsay Community Association for them to consider ahead of the deadline which had now passed.

M. Orkney Quiet Route

Correspondence had previously been circulated to members from Neighbourhood Services and Infrastructure providing an update on the Orkney Quiet Routes project. The brief explained that, following in person community consultations, posts had been erected to collect data from identified 'Quiet Routes', and they would continue

to collect data. It was hoped to re-engage with the Community Councils in the near future, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above information.

N. Kathryn Johnson – Visitor Levy

Following consideration of correspondence received from a resident of the Western Isles asking that members respond to the Highland Council Visitor Levy consultation and requesting an immediate pause on the rollout until the full impact on island communities could be properly understood and addressed, it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above.

O. Birsay Heritage Trust – Fisherman's Huts

The Birsay Heritage Trust had brought to members attention that the Fisherman's Huts at Marwick required attention. The roofs were at risk of collapsing and the BHT were appealing to the community council to seek a solution. Discussion followed, and the Chair and Mr E Harvey agreed to meet with Mr M Hay from BHT to discuss how the Community Council could assist.

Members were also advised that Scottish and Southern Energy Network, who were based in Orkney at present, were offering some volunteer days to their staff to help with community projects etc., and it was:

Resolved:

1. To note that representatives of Birsay Community Council would liaise with Birsay Heritage Trust on this project.
2. That contact would be made with SSEN to see if they could offer some volunteers to help with work needed to the Fisherman's Huts.

P. Local Place Plan

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Development and Marine Planning, members were advised that there was some more flexibility in the submission date for Local Place Plans, and it was:

Resolved to note that Birsay was moving ahead with their plan and hoped to have it completed well ahead of the September deadline.

Q. Our Budget Challenge – Survey Results

Members considered correspondence which had previously been circulated, advising members the outcome of the Our Budget Challenge survey. The open consultation had seen responses from 1,077 members of the community which was an increase on responses from similar previous requests which the Council felt was an understanding from the public of the financial challenges faced. The correspondence also advised that the results would be available online for all to view, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the correspondence and the report.

R. Thank you letters

Resolved to note that letters of thanks for financial assistance provided had been received from the Orkney Pilgrimage, Orkney West Mainland Agricultural Society, S Spence, Harray Young Farmers and Dounby Senior Citizens.

6. Consultations

A. Orkney Islands Council – 20mph survey

Following consideration of correspondence circulated from Orkney Islands Council advising members that a public consultation was now underway asking for feedback on the Scottish Government proposal to implement 20mph speed limits on all appropriate roads within Orkney by the end of 2025, it was:

Resolved to note that members comments had been submitted.

B. Orkney Islands Council – Verge Maintenance Plan 2025

Members considered correspondence previously emailed requesting members of the community council submit their comments on the Verge Maintenance Plan for the 2025 season, the main change would be a single cut would now be done in September/October each year with additional safety cuts scheduled for all A Class Road visibility splays at junction and bends in May/June. Following discussion, it was:

Resolved to note that the closing date for opinions had now passed.

C. Scottish Government – R100 Broadband Evaluation

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated to members from the Scottish Government requesting members complete a survey on the roll out of faster broadband across Scotland, it was:

Resolved to note that the details had been shared on Facebook for the community to submit their opinions and the deadline for feedback had now passed.

D. Development and Marine Planning – Forest and Woodland Strategy

Following consideration of correspondence circulated from Development and Marine Planning asking for feedback on the Trees and Woodland Strategy, advising that despite there being no forests in Orkney it was a requirement of the local authority to submit, it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above information.

E. Scottish Community Development Centre

Following consideration of correspondence circulated to members from Scottish Community Development Centre advising that they would be hosting a number of

community conversations across Scotland to gather opinions on community benefits from offshore and onshore renewable energy developments, it was:

Resolved to note members could register their interest to find out more.

F. Scottish Fire and Rescue Service – Strategic Plan 2025-2028

Correspondence had previously been circulated to members from Scottish Fire and Rescue Service asking them to review the draft Strategy for 2025-2028. This critical document ensured that the Fire and Rescue Service remained fully committed to improving the safety and wellbeing of the communities both now and in the future, and it was:

Resolved to note the contents of the above information.

G. National Speed Management Review – Online Engagement

Members considered correspondence previously circulated from the Scottish Government about online engagement sessions relating to the National Speed Management review whereby they were considering reducing the national speed limit on single carriageways from 60mph to 50mph. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to note that the sessions had now passed.

H. SEPA – Proposed changes to Environmental Regulation

Following consideration of correspondence previously circulated from Scottish Environmental Protection Agency advising members and requesting they participate in the consultation of proposed changes to how they authorise and regulate waste management, water and industrial activities, it was:

Resolved to note that the deadline for the consultation was 30 March 2025.

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 £9,579.56 as at 19 February 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 £26,598.09 as at 19 February 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 £1,683,21 and the balance in the additional capping limit was £765 as at 19 February 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 19 February 2025.

8. Applications for Financial Assistance

A. Birsay Heritage Trust – HMS

Members considered correspondence received from the Birsay Heritage Trust thanking the Community Council for the £2,000 which they had already awarded however requesting that they reconsider as they had a shortfall of £6,000 to reach the target required for the project. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to offer an additional £1,000 to increase the total amount to £3,000 from the Birsay Energy Fund, upon receipt of evidence of expenditure.

B. Orkney Island Games – Island Games School Banner Legacy Project

Following consideration of correspondence received and circulated via email asking the community council to consider contributing to the Island Games legacy banner project whereby pupils at Dounby School would design and make a banner for one of the visiting islands (the banner would then return to the school after the event), it was:

Resolved to note that, due to the timescale, this had been agreed by email and the cost would be split with Harray and Sandwick Community Council with Birsay Community Council contributing 1/3 from CCGS, upon receipt of evidence of expenditure.

C. Dounby Community School – P7's trip to Hoy

Mr S Spence and Mr E Harvey declared an interest in this item and did not take part in discussion thereof.

Members considered correspondence received and circulated via email from Dounby Community School requesting assistance for the nine Birsay children in P7 who would be attending the Hoy trip. After discussion, it was:

Resolved to award £50 per pupil, a total of £450, from the General Fund.

D. Orkney Folk Festival – Birsay Concert

Correspondence had been received and circulated via email from Orkney Folk Festival requesting assistance towards the event being held in Birsay as part of the

42nd Festival and advising that the festival did receive funding from the Council however there was a shortfall in achieving a break-even situation. A discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to award £250 from the General Fund.

E. Orkney Natural History Society – Stromness Museum

Members considered of correspondence received and circulated to members from Orkney Natural History Society Museum requesting support for the Stromness Museum Natural History Collections Project. The Museum planned to digitise 5,000 items from their collections to make them more accessible locally, nationally and globally. Members felt that this was an invaluable piece of work and appreciated that they were an independent charity, and it was:

Resolved to award £1,500 from the Birsay Energy Fund on evidence of receipts.

9. Publications

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

- VAO – Newsletter – December 2025 and January 2025.
- VAO - Training and Funding Update – December 2024, January and February 2025.
- ORSAS - Quarterly Newsletter – January 2025.
- Scottish Water – Newsletter – January 2025.
- OIC Transportation Service Statistics – 2024.

10. Any Other Competent Business

A. Christmas Lights

Members had agreed via email to proceed with the purchase of replacement Christmas lights for the tree which were damaged by the extreme winds in December 2024. The quote for replacements and spares from the same company as previously used, including carriage, was £987.36, and it was:

Resolved to note that the lights would be purchased along with Harray and Sandwick Community Council with Birsay Community Council paying 1/3 from the Community Council Grant Scheme.

B. Bag the Bruck

Members were advised that it would be later in March before it would be announced if the Bag the Bruck campaign was happening this year. Members agreed that if the event was planned, they would advertise using Facebook and welcome applications from groups. The funding available for sponsorship would then be split equally between groups, and it was:

Resolved to await confirmation if Bag the Bruck was being carried out in 2025.

C. Proposed Closure to Dounby Amenity Site

Members requested that a letter of dis-satisfaction be submitted to the Council in light of their proposed closure of the Dounby Amenity Site as part of the budget cuts. The Clerk confirmed that a letter had been submitted on 30 December 2024 and copied to all four West Mainland Elected members. The results of the survey were made available, and the Council had since confirmed that the Dounby Amenity Site would not be included in the proposed cutbacks, and it was:

Resolved to note the above discussion.

D. St Magnus Church – Carpark

Members were advised that a member of the public had been in touch to inform them that there had been an incident involving a car and the dyke at the entrance to the carpark. The wall had crumbled and although rebuilt would need to be done professionally. The member of the public was querying if the Council would arrange, and who would be liable for payment. Discussion followed and members agreed that the responsibility lay with the individual, and it was:

Resolved that the Clerk would provide the member of the public with the name of suggested stone masons who could assist with the repairs.

E. St Magnus Church – Gates

A member of the public had brought to the attention of the community council that the gates from the St Magnus Church had not been replaced. They questioned if some sort of weight bearing mechanism could be attached to them as the opening and shutting was causing issues. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved that the Chair would chase up the return of the gate and it was hoped that the new hinges would make it easier to manoeuvre the gate.

F. Burn – Birsay Palace

Members were advised that the burn in the village at the Palace causes risk of flooding in extreme weather conditions. The issue was a concern however it was noted that whilst the Council had a responsibility to protect individual flooding of properties, individuals also had a personal responsibility to protect themselves and their property from flooding. Discussion followed and members felt that it would be beneficial for individuals to report the issue using the My Orkney portal, and it was:

Resolved that the Clerk would write to the resident who raised the concern and advise them to circulate to the residents in the area to log the issue on the MyOrkney portal.

G. Orkney Goose Group

Following the earlier presentation from the Orkney Goose Group, Ms K Coghill proposed that Birsay Community Council could offer financial support to the project to reduce the geese numbers in Orkney. Discussion followed and members were unanimous to award funding, and it was:

Resolved to award Orkney Goose Group £2,000 from the Birsay Energy Fund upon evidence of receipts.

H. Ditch Blockages

Ms D Clouston raised the issue that the Council were digging ruts into the ditches to assist with drainage however, rather than remove the turf they are leaving it in the ditches causing a bigger issue with blockages occurring in the ditches. Discussion followed, and it was:

Resolved to raise the matter via the business letter to Democratic Services and forward images to identify the issue.

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 22 May and 11 September 2025 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 22:08.