

Biggar Community Council

Bonfire Subcommittee Meeting

25/11/21

Present: Lesley Craise
Al Stewart
Peter Rae
Laura Shirley
Jimmy Ritchie
Councillor Alex Allison
Councillor Ian McAllan
Councillor Eric Holford

21 members of the public

Update

Since the last meeting, an insurance quote has been obtained and we have ascertained that the final decision about the bonfire lies with the Licensing Committee of South Lanarkshire Council.

People asked questions about various aspects of the process to date.

Ian, Alex, and Eric presented the Council's position and advised that it is unlikely the Licensing Committee will go against the advice of the Events Safety Advisory Group.

Andrew Wilson who manages the Bonfire Website pointed out that lots of people are enquiring whether the bonfire will go ahead this year.

Susan Ward outlined two questions

What are we willing to accept for this year?

What is our longer term strategy?

Most people at the meeting agreed that they would want the Bonfire Committee to keep fighting for this year's bonfire.

A member of the public expressed concerns about holding the bonfire because of the gas pipe and also because of the pandemic at a time when emergency services are stretched. Lesley explained that we are going to ask people to wear masks.

Lesley invited other people to speak who might be against the bonfire going ahead this year. Two people expressed opposition because of concerns about the spread of Covid.

A member of the public stated that not everyone in the town is happy with the bonfire going ahead.

Lesley explained that steps were being taken to ascertain the views of the town.

Steven Ward informed the meeting that he has created a "Save Biggar Bonfire" logo.

Various members expressed the need for caution in dealing with the press.

A member of the public expressed the view that more details are needed about the nature of the issues as Scottish Gas Networks sees them. Al explained that the bonfire has been moved so it is not on top of the gas pipe now. It seems as if the issue is possible explosion rather than heat transference. There was discussion about what we know about the gas pipe.

Lesley explained that next year strenuous efforts will be made to get the gas pipe shifted. Councillor McAllan informed the meeting that Cleland Sneddon, Chief Executive of South Lanarkshire has committed to trying to get the gas pipe moved next year.

A member of the public expressed the view that two issues were getting mixed up – Covid and the gas pipe.

Press Release

Lesley explained that a press release has been prepared. Various people expressed concerns about a press release. Lesley shared her screen to enable people to read the press release. Concern was expressed that this would burn bridges with SLC.

A member of the public suggested tempering the press release. Others concurred. Alex Allison pointed out that the Council will not get formally involved until the date of the Licensing Committee and that up until that point the Council could not be criticised. A member of the public suggested that we should try and clarify what the intentions are of the various agencies going forward. Al explained it was very unclear whether the bonfire would be allowed if the gas pipe was moved.

There was exploration of the purpose of the press release – Lesley explained that it would be intended to influence members of the Licensing Committee. Lesley proposed toning down the press release. There was further debate about this. Each member of the meeting was asked for their opinion. Alex advised that he did not think criticism of the Council at this stage would be helpful. Ian felt that a press release would not help.

The majority feeling of the meeting was to go ahead with a toned down version of the press release.

Susan Ward had previously suggested approaching the schools to get children and young people's views about the bonfire so that all sections of the community were represented and could have a say. We agreed that Susan should approach the schools.

Public Meeting

It was agreed to hold a public meeting in the Municipal Hall on Friday 3rd December. Lesley advised that masks would be worn, and social distancing would be observed.

Jerry suggested we ask the relevant agencies what we need to do to make the bonfire happen in 2022. We have asked what size the bonfire needs to be but have had no answer.

Plan B

One plan is to move the bonfire to the Showfield. Alex fed back what the Chairman of the Farmer's Club had said, including that a decision would need to be made by the Committee. Scottish Gas Networks are reluctant to state what size of a fire would be acceptable at the Corn Exchange.

Alex stressed the need to get accurate information about what happened in 1993 when the gas pipe was probably laid. He explained that two Freedom of Information requests had been made, one to SLC and one to Scottish Gas Networks. Each refused to divulge any information, on the grounds that the information belonged to the other. Lesley stressed the need for information in writing.

Al presented information from a trawl of past editions of the Lanark Gazette, citing a notification which stated that the gas pipe was to be replaced in May 1993. Lesley said public meeting could be used to see whether people favoured moving the bonfire or holding some sort of celebration on the existing site. Alex and Ian pointed out that a new application for a public entertainment license might need to be made in the event of either option being favoured and that time is very short to do this. Lesley stated that if an option B is proposed, then she hoped SLC would be flexible about timescales for that.

An option of a smaller fire, with entertainment, was proposed.

Al expressed the view that trying to move it to the Showfield might be more dangerous. An event at the Showfield would be very dependent on weather and toilets and lighting would be needed. The TTRO would also need to be altered. There was no support for asking the Farmer's Club about the Showfield.

A member of the public suggested asking everyone to bring light to the bonfire site, torches etc.

Ian McAllan was asked if he could go back to Cleland Sneddon about the possibility of amending the application without going through a complete resubmission process. Eric suggested that the committee could amend the application.

Date of Next Meeting

7:00pm on Friday 3rd December at the Municipal Hall