



## HIGHLAND COUNCIL BANKRUPTS 77 YEAR OLD PENSIONER

Its extremely difficult for any individual to mount and sustain a campaign, even if the matter lies close to his/her heart. However I do believe beliefs should be highlighted to the general public at large, by whatever means the believer has at his/her disposal. I am lucky I have the ability to write and publish my own wee newssheet, both on paper and on the web. In total some 2,500 people read my submissions every month. (Sometimes I ask myself why?)

For about eight years before my 75th birthday I steadfastly refused to pay my TV Licence. Despite numerous threats and visits from the Sherriff Officers I maintained my refusal until I became too old! On many occasions before my 75th birthday I pleaded with the TV Licensing Authority to take me to court, but equally they steadfastly refused to do so. My argument then was that an OAP is an OAP regardless of what age they were at the time. So why should a 75 year old plus, as I am now, be exempt from 'coughing up' the fee and a 65 year old made to pay?

You see I would have raised the TV Licensing Authority's discrimination against SOME pensioners in the European Court. I suppose that threat and the possibility that the said L.A. would have £Ms to refund stayed their hand. Unfortunately my protest is now 'water under the bridge'.

Never-the-less OAPs are still getting a sh-t-house of a deal from the Government of the day, regardless of what political Party or Parties are at the helm.

Lets go back to 2010, the average increase to an OAP pension was £2.49. I was so disgusted that I called the Pensions Office in Belfast and asked if there was any way I could turn down the increase as I 'felt guilty' accepting such a generous increase! I was told that there was no mechanism for such a generous offer and that if I felt so wronged perhaps I should

give the miserable weekly increase to charity. Mind you that particular increase was not as bad as one under Tony Blair's Government when we got a whole 75p weekly increase. (This fiscal year OAPs have had on average an increase of £4.46, just about enough to buy three litres of fuel or a third of a bag of coal.)

Eventually Highland Council's patience ran out and they instigated Bankruptcy proceeding against me. Apparently as they have current debts amounting to £23,946,294.39 they have to do something. Now let me put your minds at rest this huge amount does not all relate to me. Apparently the council's debt recovery programme garners 97.52% .

I am sure that the Highland Council Finance Director Alan Geddes will forgive this OAP for skipping the 0.002% of that total when he claims that some £617,655 is not recoverable.

The FOI request made by me to the Freedom of Information Officer Miles Watters by e-mail to [miles.watters@highland.gov.uk](mailto:miles.watters@highland.gov.uk) relating to the number of bankruptcies over the past few years due to unpaid council taxes amounted to a total of 154.

The most crazy thing about their determination to 'floor me' is that only yesterday I got a demand from Highland Council for the present year's taxes. Why on earth would they (Highland Council) think that after all this hullabaloo my stance would have changed and I would be willing to pay?

The only way to change the central Government's disregard for the plight of UK OAPs is for us to show our disgust and refuse to participate in elections and local council rulings. Word of **warning** in England you can be jailed for refusing to pay local taxes, not so in Scotland. Cheers.

# INVERGORDON COMMUNITY COUNCIL REDUNDANT *YET AGAIN?*

To all intents and purposes, at least as far as this writer is concerned, the Community Council of Invergordon has had a takeover. (What a pity its not a makeover.) Or perhaps one could say, been subjected to a bloodless coup.

The largely hysterical anti-incinerator ICARE Trust and its supporters, appear to be able to manipulate, not only the somewhat befuddled C.C. but so too most of the candidates, for the dubious honour of a seat in the Scottish Parliament after the forthcoming election.

Not a hundred years ago the Invergordon C.C. had to be disbanded due to it operating quite outwith its constitution. Namely it had elected and non elected members who did not qualify for that honour, and were making dubious decisions. That is another tale and has been well documented in past issues of the 'Highlander'. What we are seeing today however is ICARE hijacking the role of the Invergordon C.C.

According to one report in a local weekly, 'The gauntlet has been laid down by a team acting on behalf of Balnagown Estates, which is helping to bankroll a legal challenge against proposals which have sparked a storm of protest'. Personally I would tend to modify that statement by adding the word 'allegedly' before the word 'sparked'. Apart from the same few people appearing in the press and one or two misguided townsfolk displaying anti-incinerator badges, little else is evident.

A spokesperson for the estate said. "We want to make it clear to the community of Invergordon that they must give us a mandate to take this issue to the Scottish Government once again. The decision on whether the appeal will be granted a Public Local Inquiry lies entirely at the discretion of Mr Dent and we need the community to help us make this possible by writing letters of support."

ICARE director said "This is a vital stage in the campaign and it is now more important than ever that the community rally support from their family, friends, neighbours, children and work colleagues, to make it clear that it is only by way of a Public Local Inquiry that you, as a citizen of Invergordon, can have your say on whether this incinerator comes to Invergordon".

I contacted Mr Colin Bell by telephone, at the

within the catchment area. Mr Bell explained that a pro or anti petition on the project was not an issue, as the Reporter will consider ALL aspects of the proposal before making his decision.

I was assured that long drawn out Public Local Inquiries are things of the past as the Government wants all planning applications to be dealt with promptly. Apparently such a ruling will give a boost to the economy. The building of the incinerator at Invergordon would do just that. Lets not forget the farce over the Roskeen sewerage works some years back. Now that it is up and running no one even notices it.

Below, an extract from correspondence relating to the appeal. There is more, but space and relevance prohibits publication. Ed.

Dear Ms Ross

**PLANNING PERMISSION APPEAL: ERECTION OF WASTE TO ENERGY COMBINED HEAT AND POWER PLANT; CROMARTY FIRTH INDUSTRIAL PARK, INVERGORDON**

Further to previous correspondence regarding the above, please find enclosed the agenda for the forthcoming pre-examination meeting.

Items 4 of the agenda provides the reporters provisional thoughts on the procedures to be adopted for re-determining the appeal.

**PLANNING APPEAL: PPA-270-2017-1 PROPOSED WASTE TO ENERGY COMBINED HEAT AND POWER PLANT, CROMARTY FIRTH INDUSTRIAL PARK, INVERGORDON**

**AGENDA for PRE-EXAMINATION MEETING on 28 APRIL 2011**

**7 PM at INVERGORDON ACADEMY**

1. Welcome and introductions.
2. Issues and topics to be considered by the Reporter.
3. The implications of the Planning etc. Scotland Act 2006, and the Town and Country Planning (Appeals) (Scotland) Regulations 2008.
4. The Reporter's provisional assessment of the issues/topics requiring further procedure:

further written submissions:

- development plan provisions - The Highland Structure Plan and Ross and Cromarty East Local Plan;
- natural heritage impact;
- archaeological impact;
- material considerations – policy guidance including the emerging Highland-wide Local Development Plan but excluding the Zero Waste Plan;

further written submissions or hearing sessions:

- traffic - access options and capacity of junctions; arrangements in the event of an unplanned plant closure
- landscape character and visual Impact
- economic impact – impact on tourism; stimulus to local economy

hearing sessions

- alternative site/process – autoclaver at Inverness
- conditions (without prejudice to the outcome)

hearing session or inquiry session

- Zero Waste Plan – implications of 2025 targets; control of content of waste treatment; control of level of waste treatment; high efficiency requirement

# SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT HUSTINGS

ORGANISED BY THE *ICARE TRUST*

Only the Trust and God knows why the Invergordon C.C. let them!

I suppose the hustings meeting organised by the anti-incinerator petitioners and held in the Invergordon Museum, shows a true reflection of the regard the general public have, for not only would-be politicians, but so too for the hysterical self-appointed do-gooders, who apparently believed that such a staging would give them a higher profile. Sadly (for them) that was not so.

Hustings in Tain and Dingwall are almost always guaranteed a full house, but not so the ICARE Trust organised Invergordon punt.

Altogether, including 5 would-be MSPs and the two Local Highland Councillors, Maxine Smith and Martin Rattray plus of course the chairman for the night, Tina MacCaffrey, there was (only) a grand total of 38 souls present.

Well that says it all, if ICARE could not rally their members to show support for their pet hate, then something tells me that it is only by a 'three line whip' Ms MacCaffrey is able to rally her troops when needed.

What has come out at the meeting is the fact that ICARE was able to bully (or manipulate) all but one of the candidates into writing to the Reporter allegedly supporting ICARE's stance against the Planning Permission Appeal.

One can understand that attitude from the SNP List Member Rob Gibson, as his party was in the minority at Edinburgh, so backing the minority of public opinion in this Scottish Parliamentary Constituency comes as no surprise to me.

However he did say that it wasn't the role of Scottish Ministers to interfere directly with the work of Scottish Reporters. Does this ruling apply to SNP List Candidates as well as Ministers one wonders? If so then what the heck is the would-be SNP MSP doing? Was he trying to influence the Reporter on one hand and try to appease Tina MacCaffrey and her cohorts, in the hope of gain even a few votes, on the other?

Lets not separate the SNP hopeful from the rest, apparently all but Robbie Rowantree (Lib Dem) admitted to sending letters, as requested by ICARE, to the Reporter hoping to influence his final decision over the Incinerator at Invergordon.

Questions over the 'Big Shed' led to prospective MSP John MacKay disclosing that he has a cousin working in the 'shed' and that it also provides jobs, so he supported it. Of course the proposed Incinerator won't be supporting jobs. Well that is the inference I am obligated to accept. But then perhaps if the candidate's cousin was to be employed his (MacKay's) opinion would be influenced favourably towards approval.

The Tory candidate did point out that communities, especially C. Cs. should have some input in the development of Local Land Use Plans, especially as the current plan is up for review.

Unquestionably public interest in politics and politicians has taken a sever dent after the corruption in the UK Parliament was exposed and even worse the ability for many of the elected members to escape punishment. Such is the extent of disgust that many people, myself included, have sworn never to take part in future voting, whatever the election is for.

The Green Party's, God bless their cotton socks, candidate Eleanor Scott was totally opposed to Nuclear power in any form, and who can blame her after the catastrophe in Japan?

Wind power is severely limited and its annual output is pitiable. There is far too much hype, especially by the SNP, as they seem to believe that it is the way forward for all our energy problems.

However all candidates were in unison over the redeployment of the Nigg Ferry Yard as a centre of industry in the Highlands.

Now on a more domestic matter, how many of the 'paper' (rather than Web) readers have noticed that there are new traffic lights installed at the Smelter Pier/Saltburn Road crossing?

For quite some time these lights were disabled and the present day traffic flowed even better without them. So am I, like you, to read something into the lights' reintroduction? Does it mean there is going to be an increase of huge vehicles unloading heavily laden ships with waste as cargo, or has the Highland Council's Roads Department got cash surplus to its budget needs? Apparently not, judging by the potholes in Barbaraville.

# CHARITY BEGINS AT HOME

The Japanese National Police Agency said 12,009 people have been confirmed dead and 15,472 officially listed as missing people (total 27,481) on Wednesday afternoon local time. And as many as 2,746 people were injured. The whole civilised world has suffered shock from such a shocking tragedy and as such is moved to provide aid in various forms to the suffering population. This tragedy becomes the most devastating natural disaster in Japan since the great Kanto earthquake in 1923 that killed more than 142,000 people. Both tragedies were unpreventable, as the force of nature can be horrendous

Governments and ordinary folk all over the world feel it is their duty to help unfortunate victims of the tsunami. And rightly so, there is nothing to cleanse the soul and the feeling of guilt as much as giving to someone or something that appeals to our conscience and who may be worse of than ourselves.

Would it surprise you to know that during the winter of 2009/10 here in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland we experienced a tragedy in the loss of life of some 28,160? That is a wee bit in excess of the Japanese tsunami total. But guess what, barely an eyebrow was raised, by the huge total of largely preventable deaths that occurred during that cold snap. (The figures for preventable deaths among OAPs are not yet available for 2010/11)

So one asks just why is the Government and for that matter charities, including the Red Cross, not doing something about it? Possible not enough world wide publicity? Could 'let the old buggers die' be the Government's motto?

There are in excess of 13M OAPs in the country and the total is rising daily. When will the British Government stop believing in the old British Empire status and start paying more attention to the poverty and depredation we have here at home? The sun has long since set on the British Empire so lets accept the fact.

One report in a national paper stated that 1.3 million children live in relative poverty. What hope is there for a sustainable living standard here in the UK when kids

Of course while I can only point fingers at the British Government there are some who could make it very difficult for 'The Establishment'.

We are never very far from someone or some organisation who continually promote equal rights for women. Personally I believe that women should have equal rights in every respect, but so too should have men.

Retirement ages must be co-ordinated if the demands for equal rights are to be implemented. But one of the anomalies between men and women seems never to be mentioned. Widows are entitled to a pension, whether they need it or not. Widowers do not get a penny.

Now if a widower was to raise this anomaly in the European Court he could well be successful and if he were just stop and think what back allowances the Pensions Minister would have to finance.

Pensions were introduced to alleviate the financial stress of First World War widows who were penniless when their men were killed. Since then various variations have come into force, but there has been no word of equality for men, ever.

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I promised Highland Council Chief Executive Alaister Dodds that I would advise readers not to pester his FOI Officer with frivolous questions as I myself have already posed some twenty questions to the good man. None of them I consider as frivolous. Apparently the H.C. can refuse to reply to questions in some cases.

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I would like to say at this stage that the Sherriff Officers from Scott and Co were very mannerly when they came calling and one even said that he admired a man who stood by his beliefs.

The staff and management of the Government appointed trustees too are most helpful. KPMG have a calm dignified approach which does not cause stress. Mind you with 1,000 bankruptcies a week they have plenty of practice when it comes to dealing with someone like me.