

Community hopes to take over cemetery

NETHER Lochaber Community Council is to make a bid to take over ownership of a graveyard from the Highland Council.

The move follows a row between the community and the local authority last year after the 200-year-old dry-stone wall around Craig Mhor cemetery at Onich was uprooted and replaced with modern fencing. The community council claimed the decision to replace the wall was taken by the council without any public consultation.

Fort William and Ardnamurchan councillor Andrew Baxter told the community of the council's plans last October.

After the wall was demolished, members of community went to great lengths to recover the

pieces of stone, which were dumped at Invercoe beach.

Speaking to the *Lochaber Times*, community council chairman Iain Jenner said: 'Given the effort the community council made to recover the stone wall after it had been dumped on Invercoe beach last September, it makes sense that ownership is transferred to us.'

'The graveyard should be a community council asset because of the intrinsic value it has. Some people have grandparents buried in that graveyard and Reverend Alexander Stewart is buried there which raised the profile of Nether Lochaber.'

Mr Jenner said the community council plans to raise funds to employ a professional dry-stone waller to put the wall back or run

a training course to show residents how to rebuild the wall.

Poor maintenance is another reason the community wants to take over the graveyard. Mr Jenner said: 'They [the council] don't get the grass cut monthly any more following budget cuts. We want to take it on because it's part of Nether Lochaber's cultural history.'

'We want to be advised further on it. We were told in September they would look into the process of us acquiring it, but we have heard nothing more since.'

Councillor Baxter added: 'The local community has decided it wishes to take over ownership of the graveyard and be responsible for future maintenance.'

'Following the council-endorsed vandalism of the dry-

stone wall last year, which saw the stone removed and dumped on the foreshore across the loch, I support the community's efforts.'

'Let's hope the council can be quick in completing the transfer before the graveyard becomes completely neglected.'

'I've a meeting next week with the officer responsible for graveyard maintenance to discuss problems elsewhere and I intend to take her to visit Craig Mhor.'

A Highland Council spokesperson said the process can be completed through an assets transfer within community planning legislation and there are specific timelines laid down for responses. She said: 'Our ward manager has been in touch with them and clarified this process.'



Councillor Andrew Baxter.