

PORTMOAK COMMUNITY COUNCIL

14th April 2011

Mr Douglas Kent

Area Roads Engineer

Perth North Area

Signal Box Road

Blairgowrie

PH10 6ER

Dear Mr Kent,

Perth & Kinross Council - Gritting and Snow Clearance 2010 / 2011

Thank you for your letter requesting comments on the performance of the Perth and Kinross Council gritting and snow clearing service during the past winter, and asking for suggestions to improve the service.

Clearly there are a number of different standards upon which performance can be judged, but you do not specify these. However, based on the number of days that residents throughout Portmoak have been forced to stay indoors due to the build-up of snow and ice, it is considered that this winter has been the worst in terms of effective snow clearance for thirty years.

Previous comments and suggestions

It might be worth noting that whilst the P&KC Enterprise and Infrastructure report of September 1st 2010 commented on the returns from Community Councils for previous years, there was no follow up response returned to Community Councils, or indeed any indication as to whether suggestions had been taken up.

The report also makes reference to grit bins, but no communication with Community Councils has subsequently been made regarding these, and we would hope for involvement in that review.

With regard to access for vulnerable people it is accepted that it would not be possible to single out individuals for 'extra' assistance in these periods, but it must be considered that residents in some areas are becoming more aged, and help for them from the community is less evident than in previous years.

One previous suggestion made was the use of a more specific type of gritting lorry for residential roads. The large gritting lorry may be ideally suited to Category 1 roads but it is not designed for narrow roads, or those where parked cars are sometimes a problem. Approximately 66% of the roads in Perth and Kinross are not Category 1, and approximately 95% of the road network in

Portmoak is not Category 1, so there seems to be a lack of suitable equipment for snow clearing on the type of roads that predominate in Portmoak.

Last year parked cars were a problem, and again this year gritting appliances have found problems negotiating some residential road networks. It is appreciated that some residents park without consideration during times of snowfall and icy conditions, and this makes your task more difficult.

Specific problem areas this winter

Prior to the snowfall

Your letter requires comments on the severe snowfall in December and January. The P&KC website states that stand-by drivers are available for snow clearing between December and February. Perhaps this highlights the major problem last year, which was that the snow arrived in November 2010. However, it is noted that the September 1st 2010 report does state that the period of cover starts in October.

No gritting work had been carried out in Portmoak prior to the November 2010 snowfall, other than on Category 1 roads. This seems strange, since repeated weather forecasts in the Scotsman and Courier newspapers for the week commencing November 22nd 2010, warned of low temperatures and snow falls. It is appreciated that there are 11 roadside weather stations providing information, and it is hoped that one is situated within the Portmoak area. Even in a small area such as Portmoak, anecdotal evidence based on many years of local knowledge, suggests there are different micro climates.

One of our Community Councillors e-mailed Clarence with a winter maintenance enquiry on 21st November 2010. The e-mail was a request that when gritting work was carried out on Bishop Terrace, Kinnesswood, consideration should be given for gritting the whole of the road, and not just the lower part. (Only the lower part of the road was gritted in 2009/10 and consequently residents living in the upper part were not able to move when the snow and ice arrived). An acknowledgement of this e-mail was received from a customer service advisor.

Once again, the cul de sacs throughout the area were not gritted, due to the inability of the large gritting vehicles to negotiate these areas.

After the snow fall

In the days following the snowfall on November 25th 2010, the only road within Portmoak that could be cleared with the snow plough, was the A911 Category 1 road, which was aided by early gritting and the constant volume of traffic that uses this road.

The major problem encountered by the snow ploughs on the other category roads was the absence of prior gritting, which gave them less grip. In Gamekeepers Road, Kinnesswood, the snow plough was not able to work, and a local contractor with a JCB type vehicle was contracted to move the snow. A further problem is that the majority of roads in Portmoak are on gradients, making the use of snow ploughs more difficult.

In the residential areas of Scotlandwell and Kinnesswood, the snow was piled alongside the roads by the snow plough. Thawing took place during the day, and coupled with the road gradients in these

areas, this created fresh water streams flowing down the roads. At night when the freezing conditions arrived, these streams turned into rivers of ice. Further snow falls on the ice then created a bigger problem. We appreciate that these were very unusual and difficult conditions.

One issue this winter which did not create a problem was the drifting of snow due to wind. In the past, snow fences have been erected to stop snow drifting onto the A911 Category 1 road but these have not been used for some time.

Access to 'priority areas' in Portmoak

The standard set by P&KC is stated as...." to ensure that the transport links which are essential to economic and social activity can continue safely throughout most of the winter".and" will permit safe movement on the more important parts of the road and pavement network, taking into account the finance which has been made available." Furthermore, P&KC state "All roads and pavements have been assessed and given a priority. This priority takes account of how busy and how important the road or pavement is."

Whilst generally accepting and supporting the work carried out by P&KC in its overall aims, it cannot be seen how the economic and social activity of all areas can be assessed and why the Community Council has not been involved in the process of designating the "more important parts of the road and pavement network" within Portmoak. Furthermore it is not understood whether the economic aims are directed to private enterprise.

It would be advantageous if the community knew :-

1. Where our community is placed in the overall order of priority.
2. What has been prioritised within Portmoak in terms of economic and social activity.
3. The categorisation of the roads.

With finite resources, it seems important that the Community takes an active part in prioritising the work load to assist your task.

Portmoak Primary School

The school has always been considered a priority area, but no reference can be found to confirm this. This year the area received a visit from a snow plough and gritting lorry, but the build up of snow and ice created an obstruction at the entrance to the school. The route from the car park to the school was not gritted or cleared, as evidenced by the extremely difficult icy conditions prevailing at the January 2011 Community Council meeting.

Levenglen Nursing Home

This is a home for 75 patients and day staff of 25. There are local residents who work at the hospital. The Community Council would like to know if Levenglen has been categorised as a priority. As with the Primary School, no reference can be found to confirm this.

The blocking of the access road to Glenlomond for ordinary traffic, meant that some staff had to stay at the hospital on a number of nights during the bad weather. There was also a problem with routine food and drug deliveries, and access by emergency services was prevented when the road was blocked. It is fortunate that this road is used by farm vehicles, as they provided some relief to the height of the snow by their sheer weight and the size of their wheels, which created access for smaller vehicles.

Pavements and snow piling

Snow piling on residential roads by the snow plough was a problem. The snow actually required to be removed in some areas. This approach to the problem was not used. Clearing the road seemed to be a priority, but some residents could not get access to the road from their properties because of piled up snow and ice blocking their entrance to the road.

A small tractor and scraper were used to carry out pavement clearance in some parts of Portmoak. Although this was welcome, it was carried out when snow was still blocking roads. The machine could have been used more effectively, but the information from the driver was that he was only sent to clear the pavements. Unblocking driveways and entrances would have been more useful.

Resources

Your letter states that resources are finite.

The following was noted by a Community Councillor. During two consecutive weeks commencing November 29th 2010 a small lorry loaded with grit arrived in Bishop Terrace, Kinnesswood to fill a grit bin. Each time the occupants looked for a grit bin in a particular position, but no grit bin was to be found. Although this is a small example of wasted resources, it is simply a lack of communication. Again, more communication with Community Councils could be an advantage.

Red alert contractors

During this winter a major improvement to the roads in Portmoak was carried out by a local resident with the use of a JCB or similar piece of equipment. This was the lifting and moving of snow which P&KC was not geared up to do. It is understood that the resident did this off his own bat, simply to get things moving on the roads. It is understood that when P&KC could see the benefit in this type of work, his services were then contracted to do the same thing in Kinross.

The Community Council is not aware of any red alert contractors previously agreed with P&KC within Portmoak, but it seems a sensible suggestion to extend the benefits and principles of the red alert contractors to other people in the district.

Use of grit

The following is information which has been taken from a web site. This suggests that the salt / grit mixture used this year was of an inferior type compared to other years. It also suggests that the grit was mainly sand, and that the salt content was far lower than in previous years.

Although no credibility can be given to this information, evidence from residents at Wester Balgedie supports the view that the clearance of roads has not been to the same standard as in previous years. Although it seems that salt and grit does not work well below a certain temperature, the mixture used last year seemed to work better in equally cold temperatures.

Recommendations

1. Review the location and method of filling grit bins. Consider their inclusion/location in plans for new housing applications of five or more houses.
2. Review the process of snow *removal* rather than snow *movement* in areas where displacement creates further problems when thawing and icing continues.
3. Give Community Councils their road network categorisations.
4. List local contractors who are available to contract their equipment prior to next winter.
5. Decide on snow dumping sites.
6. Allow Community Councils input to the categorisation of priority areas.
7. Review the use of snow fences (especially in view of the absence of wind this year. Next year may be windy)
8. Review the use of the present fleet of snow moving vehicles to enable easier clearing of the majority of road network, and not just the Category 1 roads.
9. Refer back to all Community Councils with comments on the suggestions they make.

Portmoak Community Council would like to thank you for the opportunity of making formal comment, and looks forward to receiving any responses you may consider appropriate, as asked at (9)

We would also thank you for the work you did during what was the worst winter we have experienced for perhaps thirty years.

Yours sincerely

MALCOLM PARKIN

(Chairman – Portmoak Community Council)

