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Dornoch airstrip takeover move may be grounded

by **Judith Napier**

A CONTROVERSIAL plan by Sutherland District Council to allow a group of aviators to take over Dornoch Airstrip may never get off the ground.

It has been condemned by community groups on the grounds that most of the fliers are not Sutherland natives.

Sutherland Flying Club wants to lease the airfield on Dornoch Common Good area. It does not plan many changes, but hopes to introduce an annual membership fee to reduce administrative costs.

It also wants to cut landing fees which, at £5-£6 per half tonne, are higher than Inverness Airport. And it would shoulder maintenance costs, including

grass-cutting, insurance, phone and firefighting.

The district council, as trustees of the Common Good Fund, approved the plan without consulting the community council.

Now local people are demanding councillors reconsider their decision at the next full council meeting.

Flying club chairman Stan Moodie yesterday said members did not want any conflict with locals. "We're a very enthusiastic bunch of fliers who don't want to go against the local community," he added.

Highland Region operates the airfield, which is popular with fliers and golfers who not pay rent, but meet annual maintenance costs. It is understood

it has no objections to the proposed transfer.

Local councillor Duncan Allan is angry that Sutherland District's amenities committee voted against him to approve the transfer.

"There is very little of our land left to us. What is left should be left in the hands of Dornoch people to do with as they wish," he said.

Yesterday, he was more hopeful of a solution that would suit all sides.

"I think an agreement could quite easily be reached," he said. "But the community council is grievously disappointed that it was not consulted."

Chairman Jim McGillivray said: "We note that, on this occasion, the district council

dispensed with the traditional courtesy of referring any Common Good matter to the community council."

He confirmed the council had held a "frank and positive" discussion with the flying club and supported many of the objectives.

He said his members had drawn up a package of measures to go to the district council, and hinted that might include the community council taking on the airfield on its own account out of local authority control.

The amenities committee's recommendation will be raised when the full district council meets next month.