



CREICH COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Minutes of meeting held
on Tuesday 19th January 2021 at 7.30pm
on Zoom

Present: Marcus Munro, Vice & Acting Chair (MM), Mary Goulder, Treasurer/Secretary (MG), Russell Smith (RS), Norman MacDonal (NM), John White (JW), Keith Williams (KW), Rikki Vettes (RV)

Apologies: Pete Campbell, Chair (PC), Brian Coghill (BC)

Invited guests: Karen Anderson (KA) and Chris Bell (CB) SSE Renewables

Also present: Kirsteen Currie, Highland Councillor, David Watson, KoSDT (DW), Michael Baird (MB)

Police representative: None present

Item 1. Welcome/apologies (as above). Police report. Acting Chair Marcus Munro opened the meeting. No police report received although the details of the date and time of the meeting had been acknowledged by the police contact. The police are invited to have a representative attend via the Zoom link but there seems to be some doubt as to whether that is possible for them. KC offered to arrange the meeting via Teams instead if this would allow an officer to attend. She has been present at online meetings with police so is aware that this is possible. Feedback to the police. **MG/Police Action.**

Item 2. Speakers Jodie Ross and Jason Gardiner, due to attend tonight regarding the Kyle of Sutherland Community Resilience Plan, kindly accepted postponement till February to allow time for the full agenda.

Item 3. SSE Representative regarding the proposed Glencassley windfarm development.

When arranging this meeting it was arranged that only one SSE representative could take part to ease any congestion on Zoom but a silent observer to take notes was permitted. A presentation email had been circulated prior to the meeting. KA explained the changes made since the original proposed development in 2012. The maps showed the change of site to nearer the existing Achany windfarm, which has led to the alteration of the name of the development, now known as the Achany Windfarm Extension. Owing to progress made in technology, turbines are now bigger and more productive which allows a reduction in the number required. Twenty turbines are now proposed, each at a height of just under 150m as this reduces the lighting required over that height. Access will be via the existing access then extended into the new section. That existing infrastructure will be used as much as possible though additional infrastructure will be required during construction. SSE aims to submit the updated Planning application by May/June 2021. Owing to the current/expected Covid restrictions, a public exhibition is very unlikely. An online process will be set up to allow public feedback instead. Asked how the whole community would be made aware of this and how to attend, KA agreed that a postcard drop to every household would be the most efficient method. Online only feedback may well produce only limited results and not be representative of local opinions. KA will take these points back to the team. MM pointed out that the area is already well populated by windfarm developments and that local feeling regarding some upcoming proposals is running high. He urged SSE to be clear and transparent on all details. KA confirmed that only one access/exit is planned, a second one has been removed from the plans following objections from SEPA. Asked about SSE's proposals for Community Benefit, KA stated that the company wished to keep this separate from the planning stage and she was unwilling to enter into a discussion. Community benefit is not a planning consideration and therefore discussions would wait until Planning consent was decided. She said that the company is being encouraged by

Scottish Government to offer shared ownership schemes and could arrange for that team to meet the CC. DW stated that a lot of work has gone into researching community ownership schemes and the viability is not yet proven. The process is extremely challenging and could leave communities servicing large loads with little reward. Community Benefit must be discussed prior to Planning consent as thereafter there is no compunction on the company to provide it. Basing any offers on previous schemes is no longer acceptable as those payment figures, set many years ago, are no longer relevant. The community is entitled to know what the benefits will be in order to assess its response to the development proposal. It was pointed out that Sutherland has the worst figures for fuel poverty in the UK yet pays the highest rates of electricity tariffs. Some form of direct payment to each household should be possible. It was understood that discounted energy would be difficult as SSE no longer supplies electricity direct to customers and there are many providers now offering widely ranging schemes and tariffs. An annual payment to each household would be the easiest way. The existing community benefits, while welcomed and well utilised, do not reach everyone. A direct payment would go some way to offset the drop in property values due to the proximity and down sides of the development. Agreeing to take these views back to SSE, KA and CB withdrew from the meeting at 8.30pm.

Item 4. Minutes of November meeting/matters arising. The minutes of the November meeting, also held on Zoom, were approved as a true and accurate record with one amendment. Proposed by John White; seconded by Norman MacDonald.

Item 5. Regular updates:

- (i) **Planning & Licensing.** (RS) Nothing relevant in Creich's district. In Ardgay an application from Gledfield Estate was noted and in Lairg's area one regarding four turbines for the proposed Strath Tirry development.
- (ii) **TECS.** (1) The recent road works on the A839 Rosehall to Lairg road are welcomed but two issues have arisen as a result. Most importantly the resurfacing and resultant smooth black tar finish on the south east approach to Minister's Bridge is a major cause of concern in the icy conditions. A barrier must be erected at that end of the bridge. Accidents have happened in the past and now any vehicle which fails to make the turn on to the bridge will plunge directly into the deep drop to the gorge below. This should be considered a matter of utmost priority. Additionally in places the edges of the new surface create a drop of several inches to the adjoining rough ground could seriously damage the tyres of any vehicle. Potholes everywhere are bad but in particular the ones on the Glencassley glen road are 6-9 inches deep in places. A serious hazard for any vehicle. Many potholes also on the Altas road and where another problem is blocked drainage at the Tapachy road end where surface water streams across the road. This is an issue on the Bonar brae from the school down to the shop. Especially dangerous in icy conditions. Cllr Currie is requested to act on all these issues. **KC Action.**
- (iii) **Financial report.** (MG) The balance of the Treasurer's account is £3,758.47 reflecting three outgoing payments in November and December: Auditor £65, Faclan Word Service £75 and £168.85. Following the submission of the audited accounts to Highland Council the annual admin grant was paid into the account on 9th December - £536.21. No activity on the account since the payment to Faclan on 14 December 2020. The No.2 account balance stands at £36,003.83 and is unchanged since July 2020 at which time two incoming payments were received from Coire na Cloiche windfarm -£18,463.00 and £1347.00. The annual tranche from Beinn nan Oighrean was also received at the end of July - £3,387.50. No activity on this account since then.
- (iv) **Rosehall.** (JW) See TECS issues.
- (v) **Invershin.** Inveran bridge. KW has had discussions with Colin Howell and the legal team. Efforts continue to establish ownership. Funding is available for repair but only to the owners. THC Road Engineers will make efforts to try to make the bridge safer, but it

is deteriorating and is a public safety issue. The right side when viewed looking upstream appears to be in danger of collapsing into the river.

- (vi) **Bonar Bridge.** (1) KW has enlisted employees of the Kyle of Sutherland Fisheries Trust to clear and tidy the land opposite the Post Office. A long-term solution for maintenance must be found e.g. a special group established which can see appropriate funding for the work. Secretary will send thanks to KoSFT for their efforts this time. **MG Action.** (2) The CC agreed to continue full support of Ardgay CC's efforts to change the speed restrictions on the Ardgay-Bonar straight. Anyone witnessing speeding infringements is encouraged to report the registration number of the vehicle on 101. Tracy Urry of Highland Council is THC contact on this issue. The stretch within Creich CC's boundary should be reduced to 30mph limit. CC will support KoSDT in its efforts to effect the change and as part of its proposed development establish a crossing point.
- (vii) **Highland Councillor's report.** Unfortunately, Cllr Currie was experiencing technical issues with Zoom and was unable to access most of the meeting, therefore no report available.
- (viii) **Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.** (DW) 'Stonehenge' site, actually within Ardgay CC's boundaries, is proposed for development as a camper van parking area with appropriate facilities. The existing free car park area will be retained with the Trust taking over responsibility for its maintenance and that of the public toilets. Pitches for motorhomes will be created along with chemical waste disposal facilities. Four pitches are also to be established at the Falls of Shin car park. Liaison with the motorhome communities has been positive. A covered eating/washing up area will be on site, but shower facilities will be provided at The Hub. It is hoped to encourage use of The Hub by the visitors. Any profits made from the charges levied will go to maintenance of the toilets and site. Awaiting results of funding applications for the proposals to proceed to Planning application. Funding has been secured for the Falls of Shin project. Talks continue with SEPA re compliance with regulations. The present maintenance post could be extended to take in the new site. Bookings will be handled electronically with site being unmanned.

6. Windfarm updates. (See Item 3)

7. Correspondence. Any relevant correspondence had been forwarded.

8. Any other competent business. DW advised that due to the current lockdown situation the Trust and the Bradbury Centre are once again operating the services provided in the first lockdown last year, e.g. prescription collections, help and support through the Food Larder, etc. Full details available from the Trust office. All present expressed concerns regarding the new variants of the Covid virus, urging more care by everyone. Some anxiety expressed about workers coming into the area but travelling out of it at weekends and then returning.

9. Date, time and place of next meeting. Due to the continuing restrictions it is proposed (tbc) that the next meeting will also be held using Zoom, on Tuesday 16th February 2021 at 7.30pm. Any matters raised by members of the public will be addressed on their behalf.

10. Private session. Beinn Tharsuinn/Rock by Sea funding applications. Discussion confirmed the decision to transfer £10,000 into the Endowment Fund being managed for the CC by Foundation Scotland. **MG Action.**

Meeting closed 9.35pm.