

Minutes of Ordinary Meeting 14th October 2024
@Bonar Bridge Village Hall 7pm

- 1. Present:** Scott Veters: Chair (SV), Caroline Munro (CM), Hayley Bangs (HB), Colin McFarlane (CMF), Iain Bowles (IB), Shona Patterson (SP), Russell Smith (RS), Iain Maclean (IM)

Cllr Michael Baird: Highland Council (MB), David Watson: KoSDT (DW) + 19 members of the public

Apologies: Norman Macdonald

2. Chair's Introduction

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the following code of conduct for meetings of Creich Community Council.

Expected Code of Conduct at Community Council Meetings

Following the Creich Community Council meeting on 16th September at Invershinn Hall. The Community Council feels that it is necessary to issue a statement on expected conduct at community council meetings. This is to ensure that the community council is able to conduct the business of the meeting with opportunity for full discussion between members, to allow for minute taking, and to ensure that members of the public are given equal opportunity to have input.

Sometimes the community council are going to have contentious or difficult issues to discuss, issues that may be raised by the community or statutory issues that we are asked to comment on, and it is our role, as guided by the Highland Council Scheme for the Establishment of Community Councils to ensure that we act as a voice for the local area including issues of public concern. These are issues brought to us, that does not mean that they are issues we personally support but do have a duty to address.

We would ask that the following is adhered to in meetings to allow for smooth running and a respectful environment that allows fair and inclusive comment.

- Items on the agenda will be discussed by the CC members without interruption from public attendees.
- Members of the Public will be given the opportunity at the end of the meeting to raise issues/points under AOCB.
- It is the Chair's role to ensure everyone who wishes to, gets the opportunity to speak. Please raise your hand to note your interest to speak.
- Please do not interrupt when others are speaking.
- The CC will ask members of the public to leave if there is any aggressive behaviour.

3. Force 9: A representative from Force 9 attended to speak about the proposed Balblair wind farm. A technical advisor was not present. Discussion included:

- layout of turbines, battery storage, tracks, borrow pits, cables, control of run-off.
- effect on local economy.
- effect on environment.
- access to site.
- traffic management - deliveries (stone, concrete, turbines), workers
- grid connection - when and where to
- timetable for work if consented.
- community benefit - how much and how delivered.
- work for local companies, employees - during construction and long term.
- community consultation - independent survey of local residents, feedback from consultations
- an assessment of the cumulative effect of the proposed development with other planned developments (those that are operational, those that are already consented and those where an application has been submitted but not yet determined)

Andrew Smith, Head of Planning and Development for Force 9 presented.

The scheme has been scoped with an application due to be submitted before Christmas after which time the Highland Council will become a key consultee. Consultees have been asked what environmental factors need to be considered.

The application is a section 36 scheme (exceeds 50MGW combined capacity) so it will go straight to the Scottish Government. The HC will make their views known to the Scottish Govt. If Highland Council don't object to the scheme the Scottish Government will take a decision. If HC do object that will open a public enquiry.

Steven from Cavendish introduced - Public Relations.

Site access designed with computer modelling; no trial runs carried out. Turbine components land at either Invergordon or Nigg. To A9 over Dornoch Bridge through Rogart and Lairg to side entrance, same access point as the proposed Garvery wind farm. Coriolis sharing access point with Force 9.

Grid connection application made no formal offer received from SSEN yet. Connection point at Invershin substation (quite constrained).

Design development initially 9 turbines designed for maximum energy capture and in consideration of environmental factors. After communication and engagement with key consultees the design is now compressed into the NW area of the site with 1 fewer turbine [8]. Substation and construction compound at site entrance to the north. Roads designed carefully, difficult, hilly site, relatively small. Challenging to ensure access tracks don't impact important habitats (peatland etc) and reduce the impact on the environment. Physical restraints include steep slopes, peatland, telecoms links & mast, consulted with **JRC/GRC?** Keep turbines away from sight lines of telecoms links.

SSEN 400kd powerline to north, Force 9 have liaised with them re turbine layout.

Environmental considerations important habitats mapped, bird species, archaeological

information, and proximity to residential properties.

Zone of theoretical visibility presented showing visibility of turbines. Force 9 intend to go out into the field and adjust/test the visibility plan.

Slides showing views of planned proposal compared to scoping proposal presented. Change of design from scoping showed. Pushing turbines to N and W has reduced physical impact.

F9 to send slides - the slides will not be on website until application sent in. [[Home - Force 9 Energy - Balblair Wind Farm](#)]

Cumulative picture slide showing the projects they understand to be operational, consented, in planning or scoped.

F9 will model on computer software what Balblair will look like. There will also be simulations of what Balblair and Garvery will look like together. A landscape architect will make an assessment of the effect the site will have, taking into account all developments.

Not all consented projects get built - cumulative assessment calibrated in place of certainty (operational, consented etc)

Presentation was only put together this morning (not all wind farms on the slide - Inveroykel/Strath Oykel)

F9 - we can't continually assess, there needs to be a cut off at a given date agreed with consultees (Nature Scot, HC, and community councils).

Clarification re Height of turbines

180 m to blade tip

Turbines 2 & 3 200m to blade tip

MoP why is the site area of the turbines so large compared to the compacted site of the turbines?

F9 We will be proposing a Habitat Management Plan to maximise biodiversity gains from the site so the site looks larger than the area the turbines are in.

Will not be blocking up water courses, cuts made into the peat to try and dry up the peat will be blocked up to re-wet it. Carefully controlled construction process - v few incidents of environmental discharge in Scotland. Peat is carefully placed back on to the turbine base of concrete.

Traffic & Transport

Traffic associated with the site: lorries, excavators need to come in, crane deliveries (abnormal loads - under escort), no rock deliveries. If Garvery gets consent and builds first they will have the access roads. Steel deliveries - steel for turbine base cage. Materials for substation and battery storage.

Traffic and transport issues will be carefully managed, controlled, and communicated.

Concrete biggest disruption - each base needs to be poured in a single day, equivalent of 8 days out of a two year construction period.

Turbine components: 9 per turbine to be delivered to site. Delivered in batches of 3 under police escort as abnormal load.

Environmental impact included in the “high-level” outline traffic management plan to be submitted with the application. If planning consent achieved, HC should add a condition for a detailed traffic management plan. Outlined at planning - detailed at consent.

Control of run-off General drawings shown (not site specific) that illustrate typical techniques for managing run. No detailed ground investigations taken place, only peat probing. Investigations will happen when there is consent.

Benefits of the project according to Force 9

£40m capital spend - sustaining jobs in construction.

10 jobs typically created in construction.

4 jobs during operation

Community benefit £5k/MGW

Climate and Biodiversity crises addressed.

MoP Community Benefit level of £5k was a starting figure. The broad community does not consider £5k sufficient - had it for 15 years now would like to look at other ways (not just money) the community can benefit. (Advised to submit feedback as to how community benefit can be distributed)

Clarification No community benefit for battery storage.

Question re pylons, F9 unable to answer as that is a separate issue.

F9 have a mutual interest and agreement with SSEN on the position of turbines assuring space for SSEN to have space for their project.

MoP [re community benefit] You said no way we will go above that (£5K) as no one will work with us in the future.

F9 Refuted this and said that they we wouldn't want to set a precedent

Timeline

Application in Dec 2024.

Determination 2026

Q1 Preconstruction 2026-29

Construction 2029-31

Energisation 2031-32

Water courses are monitored for at least a year before construction, then monitored during construction and after construction.

Pre-construction monitoring is to understand seasonal variations. This happens when we have consent, not before.

Water quality monitoring plan - 1st year sets baseline, once construction starts if there are changes then there are investigations - SEPA.

MoP Are there environment reports of water quality before and after construction? You can't put a spade or digger in the ground for construction near a water source without impacting the burns. Would like to know the feedback from previous projects.

F9 will look into it and get back to you. We are not extracting water.

MoP As soon as you put a digger in the ground you are impacting the land and the water courses.

F9 On all projects we stay 50m away from water courses. No construction activity within the vicinity of water. I take your point that there might be a hydrological change, will look for studies of this.

MoP not just water quality but quantity, will have an impact on quantity as you will be addressing the existing draining that has been put in over a number of years.

F9 It just means water will be slower coming off the hill.

F9 Community Benefit will be £180k per annum 36MGW. Typically, we support projects that have been identified in Local Community Plans.

Clarification Foundation Scotland will not be managing the fund.

Projects identified in community plan listed on slide - community benefit could support these.

MoP some properties or businesses will be affected disproportionately to others - those affected the most should benefit the most. Is any need for all of the wind farms?

F9 The need has been established by the onshore wind policy.

MoP You're a UK-wide developer, doing this down south, is community benefit the same>-

F9 not aware of any community benefit down south

RS-The cement lorries and deliveries, will they come over the Struie and through Bonar Bridge?

F9 Our environment assessment will contain a detailed construction traffic management plan. This information will be worked out with the HC controlled by conditions attached to consent.

RS You've done 2 public consultations and asked for feedback, what has been the result of having consultations?

F9/PR 145 people attended events submitting 65 feedback forms. Design has changed based on that feedback. Issues raised: impact on wildlife, visual impact, construction traffic, light pollution, battery storage. Support for application was not asked for, just feedback.

SV asked for a show of hands in support of the project. 1 in favour, all else against.

MoP battery storage is barely mentioned - battery storage is the doomsday scenario for us

here. If there's a fire on top of hill who is going to put it out?

F9 The planning process does not look at H&S concerns. Planning does not cross into other areas - this is for H&S exec. Risk assessments comes through another legislative process. The Environmental impact assessment only looks at significant environmental effects. When we've asked consultees what topics we need to consider, we've had no response that tells us we need to focus on the minor issue of battery storage for the planning application.

MoP Battery storage is the fire hazard.

F9 There has been 1 fire in the UK. We have made an application in principle. All the detail will come post consent. The Community can make representation to the local authority. F9 does not know who will provide the batteries yet

MoP raised issue of thermal runaway and potential for major disaster.

4. Minutes of September meeting approval

David Watson (DW) p12 item 19 Governance of KoSDT, DW not happy that this was raised in full at the meeting, we could barely hear it. There were a number of serious unfounded allegations re breaches of charitable law. We have the right to respond to these. Clause 94 mentioned in minutes was never raised at the meeting. DW read out the relevant minute.

DW serious allegations - told to send an email wanted to do it now.

The Correspondence was not read in full, an extract included in minutes. Issue re postcodes, they were taken out under advice from SCVO in 2014.

There was an administrative error, we have minutes to show we were in discussion with OSCR. Nothing untoward has happened. The allegations are that we duped the community. These allegations were read out by the community council, so it becomes a community council matter.

HB The item under discussion is to approve the minutes of the last meeting which can only be done by the councillors around the table. You can bring this up under AOCB.

DW These are very serious allegations, not gone through half of it. Allegation re 2024 filing that we have inserted a clause without consulting the members.

HB If we are sent something we can bring it up - eg Bridge Hotel, it's competent business.

PC, Chairman of KoSDT I regard this as detrimental to KoSDT reputation. There is an accusation from the community council that we did something dishonest. We were never made party to that letter, we were not allowed to see who it came from and yet you read some of it out, included it in the minutes and did not discuss it with myself or David. Did not ask if there was any truth in it. If there had been truth, we would have told you. there is an extraordinary vendetta going on to damage the Trust.

Mr. Campbell requested that it be recorded in the minutes that the members of the Trust present at this meeting do not approve of the minutes.

DW Point 94 - did you investigate this?

HB I looked at things generally in the amount of time that I had. After the last meeting I went back to OSCR and asked them if there was anything and they couldn't give me anything, they sent me all documents on file. For our matters arising there is nothing to say that there was a special resolution, or anything submitted or any request to change to Companies House or OSCR between 2014-2024

DW Article 94 is the same as clause 76 in Lairg Learning Centre's and clause 76 in Kyle of Sutherland Hub's.

MoP stepped in. The Chair has already said it's not to be discussed. this needs to be taken off the table and sorted out amongst yourself at another time.

CM proposed the minutes be accepted; CMF seconded.

5. Matters arising, if not on agenda

None

6. Financial report – CM

A/c 1: Payment received from HC £536.21 - Balance £683.89

Beinn Tharsuinn - Balance £34,413.62

Coire Na Cloiche - Balance £16, 661.15

Rock By Sea - Balance £24, 059.62

7. Secretary's Update

- Email re remembrance wreaths.
- Invite to Force 9 – Balblair windfarm to attend next meeting.
- Information sent to minutes secretary for inclusion in minutes on September 16th meeting.
- All funding applicants emailed and notified of award status following September meeting.
- All funding awards and payment details sent to treasurer.
- Email sent in support of Crawfords Motion
- CnC email circulated re change of contact.
- Contacted Companies House
- Replied to enquiries re-funding.
- Follow up call re Bridge Hotel.
- Replied and sent all info to Creich traffic concern group.
- Draft scoping response re Coillie Beith windfarm, approved version sent.
- Updated info re meeting on Facebook
- Booked Bonar Hall for meeting.
- Updated approved CnC guidelines, put on website.
- Letter to John Robertson
- Draft minutes sent for comment.
- Notified HC of change of CCC Beinn Tharsuinn director
- Circulated code of conduct
- Suggested agenda sent to Force 9 in response to their email.
- June and September minutes uploaded to website.
- Approved agenda uploaded to website.
- Investment fund queries sent to foundation Scotland.

8. KOSDT

DW Sallachy Wind Farm, FCA advice re junior debt offer received. Sallachy wind farm has been sold. **Borolex?** has bought it and want to meet in November. May be able to renegotiate, they may take it off the table. Unknown if they will honour memorandum of understanding that has been signed.

Correspondence from Shetland and Canada wanting to speak to us about our experience re community shared ownership.

AGM 6th November 2024

9. Resilience plan

Nothing to add.

10. Local Place Plan

MoP Have written back to Oberlanders the architects involved re batteries. There is a section in the plan that talks about wind farms and infrastructure. I have asked them to add a bullet point to say consultations of such developments to include developers or contractors to address residents' concerns, especially environmental and safety issues at consultation events. Information to be provided at scoping/planning stage re safety; how explosions will be managed/contained, how thermal runaway will be prevented from spreading, how contaminants will be stored on site and removed.

Oberlanders have replied thanking me for the feedback and said they will review and incorporate in due course.

11. Planning & Licensing – RS

All Applications circulated: no comments received.

CC needs to read Balblair impact assessment to be able to submit a detailed response.

CC abeyance meant CC was unable to comment on scoping for Balblair and at Garvery planning enquiry.

12. Rosehall, Bonar Bridge & Invershin updates/matters raised.

Rosehall - representatives had fed into the Local Place Plan

Bonar Bridge HB contacted Creich Traffic Group

Corrosion of the bridge - MB has in hand.

Cost of road signs - MB no update yet, CC may need to find some funds to put towards them.

HC will install.

Police Rep coming to meetings - MB to speak to Calum Smith

Invershin speeding - MB spoke to DCI Calum Smith who will liaise with HC speeding team and police camera team re Balblair Straight.

13. HC Councillor's report including Tec Services – Cllr Baird

Pavements in BB raised at council. They are on shopping list but low priority - if not done this year next

White lining - HC has had problems with machinery, out for repair.

Road between Tulloch Hill and Rhinamain very bad due to deliveries to new house that's being built. Can HC get in touch with the developers of the house to get them to contribute to repairing the road surface.

14. Windfarm updates - HB

A scoping letter has been sent Coillie Beith. Everything else in hand. Another new one in - Inveroykel wind farm proposal. HB will send out link via email.

ACTION: CC need to reply to scoping email. HB to send response into Coillie Beith.

HB has the visual images from Force 9.

ACTION: HB to put on FB and CC website

Nov meeting: Lisa Markie Graham (SEEN Transmission) wants to share details on 2 projects - Garvery and replacement of Shin to Loch Buidhe overhead line.

ACTION: HB to ask them to send information beforehand so they can get some questions ready

15. SSEN Pylons CM to update.

Ofgem, Nat Grid, and associated transmission groups have been reorganised and the overarching requirements for development have changed to take pressure off the associated social impact.

Looking at high voltage direct current lines - burying lines, looking at AC V DC systems.

Can have buried high voltage cables.

DC - pylon, most wind farms generate at DC.

HB (re undergrounding cables) The community council position is clear (on the website), we will not be supporting any individuals in their desire to move pylons away from their property to someone else's. CC looks at how it would affect the whole area.

16. Public Toilets

HC (Debbie Sutton) no prospect of returning toilets to use due to lack of money, plumbing is rubbish - visitors to use Ardgay toilets.

IM - those toilets have been recognised in a Rangers report, as a highlight spot for toilet waste around the toilet block. Currently being picked up and cleared by the Rangers.

ACTION: CC to write to HC objecting to keeping toilets closed (via MB)

17. SSE Hydro Fund – IM

Fund is now live.

ACTION: HB to publish link on FB. Fund is specific to Creich min £10k up to £100k.

Multiple events can be put on a single application. Two lots of funding - Rosehall meeting in

Dec than back in July. Scheme to run for 5 years, £10million in the pot for 39 hydro scheme areas .

18. Correspondence

Questionnaire re Fuel Poverty from Scot Govt - handed to DW.

Shin Falls - car parking issues. Cash machine to be installed to be able to pay for parking at Shin Falls

Sign at Falls of Shin reads 'community owned visitor centre'

ACTION: CC to write to Pure Leisure to take down

Community Council Engagement Survey received.

Letter from a member of the community that was also put on social media today re the actions of a community council member.

The Community Council cannot be held responsible for Councillor's behaviour outside of the community council. We will write to the person concerned. We should not have to apologise for an individual's behaviour outside of council business. We do not deal with individual complaints and won't be replying to anymore.

Email received re membership of the Sutherland Resilience Initiative. CC to advise if they wish Cllr Gale to come and speak to them.

ACTION: HB to circulate email to all council members

19. Any other competent business

MB - ward discretionary fund - have in ward 1 sitting at 5525 pounds and a cost-of-living fund just over £k1718.53. - email Liam Clancy if have any relevant projects - send in application form

HB - letter sent to John Robertson

Cllr Crawford motion approved.

Fire service instructed Bridge Hotel to cease operating as an Airbnb.

20. Date, time, and place of next meeting.

November 18th, Rosehall 7pm

Private session:

Rock by Sea awards

Kayleigh Chalmers £300 towards driving lessons.

Joe Polson £300 towards driving lessons and £300 towards specialist work clothes.

Beinn Tharsuinn

Kyle of Sutherland Hub £5,000 for full year activity costs

Retrospective Minute note

In May BBFC were awarded £3,600 however this was not included in the minutes. The CC on 14/10/24 agreed a retrospective note. BBFC have provided a full report on this award and invoices. We acknowledge with thanks the references to the fund throughout the event of the CC funding and congratulate them on putting the event on.

It was agreed to contact other local CCs to see if there is interest in coming together to discuss community windfarm benefits. Contact to be made with Ardgay, Edderton & Lairg.

There was a discussion around any possibility of a revival of the Invercharron games. Land availability is an issue. It was suggested that perhaps we could look into a community funded day to attend another local games. To be looked in to.

KoSDT board membership was discussed again. Of the CC members at the meeting no one was able to commit to this. It was also agreed that there is no obligation for any CC members to take on this role. The obligation sits within the KoSDT Articles of Association not any documentation relating to being a Community Councillor.

