

GARVE & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL MINUTES

Meeting Held on the 6 December 2005

Achnasheen Village Hall

Present: Helen Grainge, Marian Taylor, Donald Northwood, Jim Ruggles-Brise, Kenneth MacLean, Pat Campbell, Sheree Grant, Lady Eliza Leslie Melville, Cllr Ewen Mackinnon and 27 members of the public.

Apologies: Alex Mackenzie, Ian Dickinson, Uisdean Menzies

Approval of the minutes of the previous meeting was proposed by Marian Taylor and seconded by Lady Eliza Leslie Melville.

Harry Goudie a member of the public asked for the minutes of the last meeting to be read out, this was duly done by the Chairman. The chairman at this point said that the order of the meeting would be changed as he had invited two different people along to discuss matters that affected the community.

- 1) The Chairman introduced Dye Alexander from the Highlands Small Communities Housing Trust, who had been invited to explain their role and the relationship with the past Chairman (Doug Winship). Mr Alexander described how the trust provides information and advice on affordable housing and identifies housing needs in small communities. They participate in acquiring affordable land and plots that is then used in conjunction with grants to provide building schemes for individuals and families for whom building and buying a home would otherwise prove difficult.

The trust is registered as a limited company and as such has a board of directors; these are drawn from a number of areas including Community Councils. He explained the trust had sent a nomination form to the Community Council in September 2005 that was duly completed and returned by the past Chairman and seconded by the past Secretary Mrs E Winship and in good faith excepted the nomination and put his name forward to the board; he was subsequently elected to the board as a director.

It was suggested by Donald Northwood that while there was no objection to the past Chairman's current position with the trust the nomination had been completed and submitted at a time when the Garve & District Community Council was up for re-election following its dissolution in August 2005 so technically the submission was incorrect and that Doug Winship did not represent the Community Council in September 2005 or now as he was not a serving member of the Community Council.

Mr Alexander was made aware that Mr Winship as a Director of his organisation did not represent the Community Council or their views and he assured the meeting that he would make the board fully aware of this situation

and the irregularity of the appointment. The chairman then thanked him for attending and he left.

- 2) Donald Northwood reported that there had been only two planning applications submitted since the last meeting one for an agricultural shed at Forest Hill Lochluichart. The members agreed there was no objection and gave the public the opportunity to comment, it is to be recorded no one voiced an objection to the plan. The second was the Lochluichart wind farm proposal and it was agreed that a further discussion would take place after the presentation that was to take place during the meeting.
- 3) Kenneth MacLean reported on NHS 24 stating that the service claims to have improved in the past few months helped by the move from Aberdeen to Inverness. They are now located in the same building as the Ambulance service and has increased response times.
- 4) Donald Northwood reported on the Easter Ross Carers forum he had attended and gave out a number of useful leaflets about the forum and where people in the community could get help and support.
- 5) The Chairman then introduced Karl Cradick from Savills the agent representing the Lochluichart wind farm project to do a presentation on the proposed development. At this point Lady Eliza Lesley Melville left the room to avoid any conflict of interest with the estate and the community.

Mr Cradick begun his talk by explaining the need for renewable forms of energy and that wind farms are only part of the solution to counter global warming and the shortage the UK will have with the decline in other energy producing methods. He then went on to explain that while there had always been opposition to wind farms, when communities have them developed they find them non-obtrusive and pleasant to live with. Cradick then proceeded with a power point slide show of the development highlighting a number of features, benefits and well know organisation who had participated in building the case for the development.

On the issue of noise Mr Cradick said that these new state of the art turbines generated little or no noise and had a very slow turning motion that reduced the impact on the eye. He further reinforced that they would be 125 metres to maximise the generator and that in high winds the blades feathered to prevent damage.

During the slide show a number of question where raised from the floor, these included; why the maps shown were out of date and not compatible with the Highland Councils maps, the data figures being out of date and two years old, how would the power from the farm be transported? There was no satisfactory answer to the first two questions and on the issue of transporting power they had no answer they could give the meeting. When asked was the developer expecting the development of a new system of giant pylons to carry the power he would not confirm or deny and left the impression that they had no answer

to the key question of transporting power, but indicated that under ground was to expensive and that existing pylons if used would have to be strengthened.

Another part of the presentation showed an artist impression of the turbines in relationship to the landscape and visual impact they would have; it became clear that the visual impact would be far greater then had been first thought and a number of the public voiced their concerns regarding these issues. One member of the public asked why all the photos and super imposed impression were from points below the normal level of the road system, i.e. down the bottom of an incline. This was answered, that these where done in accordance with the guild lines and recommendation of the Highland Council.

Concerns were raised with the issue of tourist who visit the area to hill walk and climb the Mountains found in the area, as the wind farm would be visible from a very wide area. Mr Cradick said that in their experience there had been little impact on tourist in areas where wind farms were found and laid claim that in some areas the farm had its self become a tourist attraction. He then went on to explain the one turbine in Swaffham Norfolk had an observation tower built in; he further explained that this project planed to incorporate a forest walk and observation platform for tourist. Another point raised with regard tourist was the rumour that the developer had or was about to purchase the Aultguish Hotel. Mr Cradick said he had no direct knowledge of this but it would make financial senses.

Questions were asked on the sizes of each section and what method used to bring each section to the site; it was explained that they would possibly be made in Campbell Town and shipped to Invergordon then transported by road. When asked about the transportation survey that they would have carried out the Community Council where assured that there would be no problems on the current road structure. Donald Northwood did suggest that their survey may be incorrect as a more recent one identified that the roads would need upgrading due to grounding of each unit, Mr Cradick said he was confident that their survey was correct.

One member of the public asked about the danger from low flying aircraft as this area is designated a low fly zone by the MOD, this was answered with the MOD are happy for this development and Savills have it in writing that the MOD view this as just another obstacle to be flag for their aircraft. When this point was press based on the height of the mast, i.e. 125 metres and the height of the ground above sea level Cradick re stated that they had it in writing so was not an issue for the developer. Jimmy Ruggles-Brise ask that because of the height would every turbine display a red light that would be clearly visible at night; the agent reply that no not every turbine only those on the boundary area.

Further criticism was made on the timing of the planning application, giving local people little opportunity to gain a balance view of the project, the location of the planning details, i.e. in post offices that are barely open, the lack of consultation with the community, the cost of the documentation for the public to read and the lack of proper information on the true impact of the

environment and wild life in this area. A further comment was made by a member of the Community Council that it was very poor judgement to compare Swaffham in Norfolk that has one turbine and the proposed building of 43 turbines on this site; it was further asked that could the developer reconsider the number and the height of the turbines so that the visual impact would be reduced. Mr Cradick claimed this would not be a practical option. It was suggested that an extension to the planning application be asked for and Mr Cradick said that would be acceptable, but not for any great length of time.

The presentation was then ended and the Chairman thanked Mr Cradick and his colleague for attending and asked them to leave, at which point a small break was taken before the subject was opened to the public for their comments and question to the Community Council.

Overall the public felt that the information they had been given was what the developer thought we wanted to hear, that no up to date facts had been included, that the agent had pushed the planning application in quickly following a presentation by another company; that there was as many unanswered question at the end as there was at the start of the meeting. There was even greater concern about the fact that the developer had no plans about moving the generated power and that the surveys they had conducted were grossly misleading to the true facts about the environment, wild life and habitat. The public and members of the Community Council made the observation that the agent gave the impression of being intransigent toward any suggestion and that areas such as the observation platform, forest walk and possible use of the Aultguish Hotel were add on items to appease the community at large rather than well planned ideas. There was even greater concern that there had been little consultation or documentation prior to the planning application and that the house to house survey the developers carried out had been very misleading with questions designed to give favourable outcomes for development.

The Community Council was asked what they planned next, based on the feelings and views of the community. The chairman told them that the Community Council planned to send a well balanced survey to every house hold covered by the Community Council asking them to express their opinions. Donald Northwood said that it was the decision of the community to decide what they wanted and while the Community Councillors held personal views they represented the community and would asked the public what they wanted the members to do. Kenneth MacLean asked the public if they would vote on three points, who was in favour of wind farms? Who was against wind farms? And who had no opinion? After a show of hands no one voted for the wind farm 96% were against and 4% had no opinion and clarified this by stating that they did not have sufficient evidence to make a judgement.

Kenneth MacLean then put the same questions to the members of the Community Council who voted fully against the proposal; the Community Council then agreed to write a letter to the Scottish Executive asking for an extension to the planning application to give the community the opportunity to study the documents and reply in a constructive manner and lodge a formal

objection to the planning application based on the information received and the outcome of the vote taken.

- 6) Correspondence received since the last meeting were presented to the meeting theses included:
- a) Newsletter from Health in Later life Regional Interest Group North of Scotland
 - b) Letter from John Urquhart re concerns on the wind farm
 - c) Two E-mails from Harry Goudie re concerns over wind farm
 - d) Information sheet and return form from NHS 24 (Health Voice)
 - e) Letter and update information form from the WRVS

All correspondence given to the Secretary for completion and replies as needed.

- 7) On matters arising Jimmy Ruggles-Brise reported no change on the issue of the Achnasheen pond and that the bridges referred to by Mr H Goudie had been inspected did appear unsafe and in need of repair and that there had been as yet no information from Cllr Mackinnon. Donald Northwood reported that he had yet to contact BT regarding broadband as he had spent most of the time from the 3 November to the 3 December 2005 trying to get answers as to why the fault from the exchange to the Achanalt area had not been mended and leaving approximately 30 homes without a basic telephone service, including his own; Kenneth MacLean reported that he had been forced to sign up with BT broadband when his current supplier wrote to say they could no longer support the system as it was incompatible with BT.

Sheree Grant reported that the arrangements were all in place for the Christmas Party, the bus would start collecting people from the Garve area at 16:30 and return from the Ledgowan Hotel at approximately 21:00.

- 8) Sue Tarr thanked the Community Council for their nomination for the Ross & Cromarty Community Award and said that the presentation had been a really enjoyable evening

- 9) There was no other business

Date for the next meeting – Tuesday 7 February 2006 at the Garve Village Hall.
The Public meeting to start at 07:30