

STRATHERRICK & FOYERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 30TH JANUARY 2024

AT THE WILDSIDE CENTRE, WHITEBRIDGE

WITH OPTION OF VIDEO LINK

1. Present

Mark Hindley (MH) - chair, Craig Lightbody (CL), Janet Hobson (JH) and Chris Joyce (CJ), Gary MacGowan (GM), Helen Grainger (HG), Olivia Grant (OG) and Mike Slater (MS)

Public attending

Cllr David Fraser, Cllr Chris Balance, Sarah Bryne, Barbara Savill, Catriona Fraser, Mary Speight, Kyra Motley, Mark Pole, Dianne Fraser, Zoe Iliffe, Peter Faye, Ian Bateman, Anna Low, Phil Crowe, Margie Elgar, Julie Harvey, Neil Spence, Phil Mackintosh, Maria Cockburn and Sharon Ferguson (Admin)

Apologies

None

2. Discussion on felling plans – James Reid, Forestry Land Scotland (FLS)

James Reid explained to the meeting where FLS were with the new felling plan; due to the windfall at Fort Augustus from the storm, they are behind with putting the plan together but individuals and the CC can still make comment at this stage. Once the plan is in draft form, James will present this to the CC and they will be able to make further comment, as will any member of the community. Request was made to see a map that shows all the FLS owned areas in the community; admin to obtain this and share.

Discussion had about the removal of the Beech trees on the Inverfarigaig to Dores roadside; the Beech had been removed along the Dores road, partly as a safety precaution as the trees behind them had been felled. This leaves them vulnerable to wind blow and thus increases the risk of the trees blowing onto the road. The areas along this road which are classified as PAWs (Plantation on ancient woodland sites); it is national policy to restore as much of these areas to native species once the non-native species have been felled. Beech is designated as a non-native tree in Scotland as it cannot be confirmed that it arrived naturally in Scotland since the last Ice Age therefore must be removed to allow the regeneration of native species in these areas. These areas will be restocked with native trees such as Scots pine, birch, rowan and oak.

Request made that FLS control the number of deer in the area ahead of any re-planting and if any fences were put up, that proper public access was maintained.

A member of the community had got in touch with the CC ahead of the meeting and had asked whether all the windblown trees could be made available to local residents; James will look into whether the FLS could sell any of this to the community as there is no longer scavenger licences and only fully certified and insured chainsaw operators are allowed to operate on FLS land. James to also find out if it would be allowed for the community to pay for a contractor to get the wood.

Discussion had about the state that felled sites are left in; James said that contractors were briefed to leave sites in the best aesthetical condition but it was felt that this could be much better.

3. Proposed Loch Kemp Pump Storage Scheme

Discussion had on the proposed pump storage scheme at Dell estate, Whitebridge with many members of the community and neighbouring community councils attending the meeting raising their concerns about the plans. MH asked if there was anyone attending that was in favour of the scheme as all views welcome but all in attendance opposed it.

Concern raised that none of the planning documents were available to view on HC's planning portal; Cllr Fraser confirmed that they were in the process of being uploaded and the CC and member of the Community could make comment to both the Energy Consents Unit (closing date 23rd Feb) and on HC's planning portal (closing date 1st March).

The concerns raised were; the short timeline for replies given the number of documents, the fact that the community drop in ran by the developer was for a 300MW scheme but the submitted plans are for double that size at 600MW with higher dam walls, the increase in traffic on a road infrastructure not fit to cope with it, the vehicle numbers are based on finding the majority of aggregate on site, a vast amount of environmental and ecological concerns, the damage of and loss of trees in a designated SAC (Special area of Conservation), the effect on the levels of Loch Ness and the aquiculture with other consented, operational and planned schemes, loss of amenity land, visual impact, cumulative effect/over development around Loch Ness with energy schemes and some documents unavailable online schemes (MH has submitted a freedom of information request for these documents).

As a wider planning issue, there was strong objections that energy schemes and their respective connections to the grid are not considered at the same time under the one planning application; admin to seek advice on raising this at national level.

SFCC to write a positioning statement, request an extension of the deadline for comment with the ECU, raise that further community consultation is required given the increase in the size of the proposed scheme, request sight of the documents that are currently unavailable and a further meeting to be held on Tuesday 13th Feb specifically to discuss this planning application.

4. Co-option of new members

The CC has space for four co-opted members and Gary MacGowan, Helen Grainger, Olivia Grant and Mike Slater have all come forward to be considered. The four elected members all voted unanimously to co-opting all four and thanks to them all for joining the CC.

5. Adoption of minutes – 7th November 2024

Minutes of the CC meeting on 28/11/2023 were adopted as a true record of the meeting.
Proposed by CL seconded by CJ

6. Matters arising

The street with the new houses on at Inverfarigaig has now officially been named at Dodds Park

7. Micro Grant Applications

None received

8. Reports

Treasurer

Main account - £15,316.13

Still awaiting confirmation that the new signatories, Janet and Chris have been added and the address changed. Bank have all the paperwork. Also awaiting Mark getting online access.

We received a charge of £6.80 from the bank on 28th Dec – awaiting clarification from the bank as have never been charged fees before and not been notified that they are starting.

Project/Micro grant account - £5,536.20

Final £5k towards the micro grant fund from SSE was paid in on 11th Dec 23. Discussions still to be had with SFCT to see if an MOU can be agreed to continue these yearly payments and allow micro grants to continue to be available.

Boleskine Community Care

Services -

Our services remain very popular at the Hub. As Foot care in January had to be rescheduled due to the weather, we now have 3 dates in February. One of those dates is specifically for Care at Home clients to ensure that they all get the opportunity to be seen.

We aim to have another hearing clinic in March. This will include general hearing as well as hearing aid maintenance.

The Shingles Vaccination Clinic has been cancelled as the NHS hadn't managed to get the invitation letters out in time. We are still waiting to hear from them regarding a new date.

The Telford Centre bus took some of our members over to the centre for lunch on the 25th of January. They had a great time celebrating Burns Night and were also given the opportunity to go to the shop in Fort Augustus on their way home. This is something we are now going to run every Fortnight and is open to all community members over the age of 65. The cost for the individual is £5 which they give to the Telford Centre for the lunch.

Care At Home -

We are currently caring for 10 service users, a total of 109 hours a week including travel time. There are also 2 people currently on the waiting list.

Unfortunately Care at Home is again struggling for staff due to internal promotions within the Highland Hospice. They are desperately seeking evening and weekend workers. BCC have been working hard to make everyone aware of the job vacancies, we have put posters on all community noticeboards, in the doctors surgery and the shop as well as posting on social media. We want to highlight to the community the flexibility of the job and how little a commitment it could be. If a person could only commit to one evening or one day a week it would still be a great help.

Activities -

Our activities continue to be well supported at the Hub. We have released our February calendar and are delighted to see some new additions to this.

Our Community Engagement Coordinator has successfully started a Book Club at the Hub. The first meeting was at 7pm on the 25th of January where they discussed how they would like it to be run. We are also hosting a pamper night on the 9th of February. A skincare specialist is coming from Temple Spa to talk everyone through their products and give specific skin care tips.

We hope that our new activities will attract a younger demographic to BCC so that we can meet the needs of the whole community.

Grants

We have been delighted to announce our success in 2 Grant applications recently. We have received £5000 from the Screwfix Foundation to make improvements to the Hub building. We are hoping to use this to remove the garage door from the building and replace it with a set of patio doors. We are currently waiting on SFCT to arrange for an architect to come to create a drawing of this.

We also received £5000 from Age Scotland towards our Befriending and Community Transport Scheme. We were awarded this to tackle loneliness and isolation within our community. We are currently planning how exactly to spend this.

Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust

1st report from Craig Lightbody since he has taken up the position of liaison Director – Minutes - The minutes from the AGM on the 29th of November and from the post AGM of the same date were ratified. I have noticed that they haven't been published onto the Trust's website as yet. All further minutes will be sent to all directors for additions or amendments to be made within a week. Then to be published as draft the week after that. These minutes will then be officially ratified at the next board meeting.

Trust Managers Report – Housing; The Trust had been awarded £227 535 from the Scottish government for two houses for affordable rent at Inverfarigaig and have a 'letter of comfort' from SSE about the drawdown required from the Glendoe fund (short discussion about what a drawdown of the fund means – it is requesting an early payment of the end of a funding period i.e. requesting year 25 or year 24 and 25 depending on the amount required. Admin to confirm the process with SSE) If this goes ahead, it is expected that the houses will be ready by September 24. Wood Cutting at Wildside; Tony outlined the intention to provide training to the Facilities and Buildings Manager for chainsaw use to work on fallen trees at Wildside. Ken mentioned the very high risks involved in this activity. I stated that training to the level required for working on windblown trees would take years and therefore, expensive. The board agreed to hire contractors for this work.

Foyers Shop and BCC; BCC met with the Scottish Land Fund to discuss a feasibility report regarding the purchase of the shop. BCC are to start a steering group, including Trust employees Robbie Burn and Sarah Bryne. Needless to say, someone from the CC should be involved with this. The Trust has agreed to provide logistical support as well as to provide help with finding funding for this project. Nature Restoration Fund; Sarah Byrne has secured £20 000 for a nature restoration grant which will support work at Inverfarigaig, Erroglie and Whitebridge. A Director had asked if some of the money which the Trust had allocated to the forestry school, could go towards refurbishing the old, cast iron Farigaig Forest sign. The board agreed to this. Tony stated that the Forest School asset transfer has been complete. (It was noted at the CC meeting that this didn't mean that the Trust had purchased it yet).

Foyers Bay; Malcolm noted the good turnout for the Steering Group meeting, which I have joined, held on the 9th January. Malcolm has stated that the current design of the slipway would require significantly more finance than the current funding (£70 000 from Highland Council and Scottish Canals). The board discussed using the funds to purchase a tractor or other appropriate machinery to aid in getting peoples boats up and down the current ramp to at least get use of the ramp for the time being. Ground investigations are required because of the site possibly having been used as a waste tip. During clearance works at the end of last year, a digger uncovered possible contaminated waste. The board discussed the possible costs involved in identifying a specialist contractor and

removal of these materials. I have noted that the Steering Group minutes from the 9th of January have still not been published.

Riverside Field.

The plans for the Riverside Field landscaping which was designed by the local community, were discussed. Copies of which have been distributed throughout the community for viewing and comment. The Trust has offered the Highland Council 1p to purchase the land which surrounds the playpark. This is the land that has been earmarked for the installation of four residents parking places and that the local residents do not want. The local authority agreed and said that the playpark can be included in the deal. Tony will ask if the Highland Council will still maintain the playpark. I asked about scaling down the Masterplan so that fewer vehicles would require the use of the field parking. Catriona stated that the plan included everything although not everything in it would have to be undertaken. Withdrawing the masterplan at this stage would mean a lengthy wait for it to go to planning again.

Phase 2, Errogie; the business plan is currently being assessed by Accelerate. The Trust will be applying for a heritage lottery grant when the new phase of this funding comes on line.

Project planning and Trust governance were discussed to be rolled over to the next meeting.

AOCB - Thain Road; a member of the community has made a complaint about the land by the Wildside Centre that the Community Trust purchased from HC last year. This is being dealt with by the community trust.

Distribution of Flyers; Ken requested clarification from the Board re the distribution of flyers from external parties with no link to the Trust. The Board agreed that this should be a matter for the CC to consider and the Trust will take guidance based on their decision. Members of the CC weren't sure what this was regarding and more information to be sought.

The board agreed that a Chair to Chair meeting would be beneficial between the CC and the Trust. The next meeting will be on the 7th of February at the Wildside Centre.

Riverside field

CJ reported that the minutes have not yet been published at the time of this meeting but can be found here - <https://www.stratherrickcommunity.org.uk/projects/Riverside-Field-Foyers/>

9. Toilets

The push button on the new outside tap has broken; awaiting original contractor fixing. The pipe to the flush on the waste point burst in the last cold spell. Arranging getting it fixed and now we have electricity to the waste point, we can get a trace heat fitted or other option is to switch off the flush function in the winter as not all waste points come with a flush function but does keep it cleaner. Discussion needed with sub-committee about who is responsible for the cost of repairing the pipe. Having issues with electricity supplier EDF, still awaiting 1st bill for new build but they have been sending out bills from 2018 and 2019 for very small figures and demands for payments of these. The bills have been going to Jim Cameron who was the treasurer when the old toilets closed and going from the old minutes, he got a small refund when he gave the final reading. I have raised as a complaint now as cannot get through to anyone on the phone and want the letters to Jim to stop along with an explanation of these costs.

Still awaiting a meeting to discuss the Car park issues

10. Planning

23/05964/PNO | Formation of access track | Land 2300M SE of Killin Whitebridge Inverness
Decided – *No comment*

23/06025/S36, Construction of pumped hydro storage (Loch Kemp); dam, raise, and utilise Loch Kemp, as its upper reservoir, and connect by underground waterway systems and tunnels to a powerhouse & tailrace structure on the shores of Loch Ness | Land 1300M SW of Dell Lodge Whitebridge – *See point 2*

23/05806/FUL | Erection of extension | Brereton Gorthleck Inverness IV2 6UJ – *No comment*

23/05729/MSC | Erection of house and garage (matters specified in conditions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5 of 21/05599/PIP) | Land 50M SW of Craigview Gorthleck – *meeting conditions, no comment*

23/05669/PNO | Erection of agricultural building | Bochruben Farm Torness Inverness IV2 6TY
Prior Approval IS *required*

23/05665/PNO, Alterations to existing agricultural building, Bochruben Farm Torness Inverness
Prior Approval IS *required*

Land 330M NE of Purple Lodge Gorthleck 24/00164/S42, S42 application to amend condition 1 (20/02318/FUL) refer only to the micro-distillery. Change private water to mains – *no comment*

23/06064/SCRE, Extension to existing Foyers substation and drainage works, SSE Foyers Power Station - *screening report, admin to invite to a future meeting*

24/00045/PIP, Erection of house, Land 100M North of South Muirnich Cottage Gorthleck
Plan to split croft to make 2nd one – *all agreed good idea to encourage crofting*

Loch Ness Shores Caravan Site non-compliance of planning consents - There are two campervans and one Caravan still on site with the site officially closed. The conditions of planning states that the new staff pitches were to be vacated, along with the rest of the site, and all vehicles taken off site during the closed period. Admin to raise with non-compliance officer.

At one of the original turbines at Corriegarth wind farm, there is an aviation light on a turbine that wasn't within the planning application; admin to contact the owners to find out more.

SSE have offered to come along to a CC meeting to discuss the connection to the Foyers Power station from the proposed Loch Kemp pump storage scheme and/or to hold a public information event, this is not a statutory requirement though; all agreed to both. Admin to get in touch.

11. Renewables

- Aberarder (SSE) – going ahead with original plans for 12 turbines at 130m. SSE bought from RES – **Await info on liaison group.**
- Cloiche (SSE) – Await outcome of planning.
- Glenshero (SIMEC) – Refused at public enquiry, no right to appeal
- Dell (Coriolis) – Scoping application in to alter the original approved plans from 14 turbines to 10, amend height from 130.5m to 200m and to vary the layout – Admin has invited developers to a CC meeting. No reply yet. Admin will chase up again.
- Corriegarth Extension (BayWar.e) – **Permission granted Dec 23. Developers would like to attend the Feb meeting to discuss the community liaison group and give an update on the project**
- Bhlaraidh – at Glenmoriston. Extension plans passed but three turbines less

- Loch Liath – same as above for location. **Planning submitted**
- Red John – Pump storage at Dores, approved at public inquiry. **Purchased by Statkraft Dec 23**
- Loch Kemp (Statera) - proposed hydro pump storage at Dell Estate. **Planning submitted Dec 23**
- Culachy Wind Farm (Fred. Olsen Renewables) – invite to meet. On an estate in Fort Augustus, at pre-scoping stage. Will invite to a future CC meeting.

12. Roads

CL has kindly done another list of road defects, admin has passed onto Highland Council

13. Correspondence

Ultra X; event happening on 4th-5th May

Alister Chisholm; reporting issues with fallen trees @ Boleskine graveyard. Cllr Fraser handling

14. Upcoming events

Energy support & advice presentation from CAB; 12th Feb 11am @ Wildside

Golden Eagles in the Highlands talk; 15th Feb 7pm @ Wildside

15. AOCB

CL suggested that the street lights locally could be dimmed or turned off after a certain time of night; Cllr Fraser said that Milton in Drumnadrochit made this decision. He suggested speaking to the lighting manager and community support would be required.

Issue of flood lights on every night at the Wildside Centre was raised; Catriona Fraser said this was being looked into by the Community Trust.

Winter resilience is to be looked at over the summer months with a plan made and any improvements agreed.

CL asked about the firework free zone idea for the area; admin had found Local authorities should, where possible, have established a local process to give communities the ability to make the case for the designation of a firework control zone, through a "community request". Cllr Fraser to look into this and report back.

OG reported that BCC had contacted by SSE about doing a survey; more info to follow.

16. Next meeting

Next meeting – 13th February 2024 (Loch Kemp only) and 27th February (full CC meeting)