

STRATHERRICK & FOYERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 26TH MARCH 2024

AT THE WILDSIDE CENTRE, WHITEBRIDGE

WITH OPTION OF VIDEO LINK

1. Present

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

Public attending

Cllr David Fraser, Cllr Chris Ballance, Catriona Fraser, Kyra Motley, Keith Readdy, Susan Reed (and partner), Anna Low, Phil Lowe, Alan Donald, Gary Fentiman, Ken Sinclair, Gary Livingston and Sharon Ferguson (Admin)

Apologies

None

2. SSEN – Proposed Foyers substation extension

An overview of proposed Foyers Substation Works was given by Maren Ebeling, Community Liaison Manager for SSEN;

Replacement of existing transformers at the Foyers pumped storage hydroelectric power station substation.

Replacement of the existing underground cable connection between the power station substation and the existing Foyers switching station with a new underground cable.

To accommodate this upgrade, the Foyers switching station requires an extension. The works are to enable continued export of renewable electricity generation from the Power Station to the National grid Transmission network.

The project is being driven by operational requirements and current asset condition of the existing electricity transformers serving the Foyers pumped storage hydroelectric power station.

The two existing transformers serving the power station require to be replaced due to their condition and age. The deterioration of the transformers' condition poses a risk of failure, meaning the power station would no longer be able to generate renewable energy risking reliability of supply to customers.

The Foyers Power Station substation transformers are proposed to be replaced on a 'like-for-like' basis within the existing substation boundary.

The Underground Cable will be laid under the existing tarmac access track that links the Power Station / substation with the switching station. This tarmac access track runs parallel with the B852 public road.

The proposed switching station extension will extend the existing switching station platform to the east, to house new additional electrical infrastructure, similar to what already exists at the switching station.

Temporary construction compounds and laydown areas will be required and likely to be located in the vicinity to support the construction phase. Additional temporary construction compound and laydown areas may be required.

Construction Start date would be sometime in 2026 and will last for an expected 18mths MH pointed out that neither Foyers pump storage or the proposed Loch Kemp pump storage is classed as renewable energy and that terminology should be amended.

There was a lot of concern from residents close to the substation as it is being increased in size and will then be closer to houses. As part of this plan, there will also be a loss of trees due to felling which will increase the visual impact. The trees coming down are pine trees which are older and due to come down and there will be a planting programme of native trees after the works are complete.

There was also widespread concern about transport management, the fact the works will coincide with Loch Na Cathrach works at Dores, effect on local businesses along with noise and dust from the works.

As the project manager was unable to attend this meeting, Maren had to take many questions away and will reply with the answers by 12th April. Project manager to attend a future meeting and there is to be a separate meeting to be arranged with residents living close to the substation.

A community consultation on the plans will take place on **Thursday 25th April, 2-7pm @ the Stratherrick Public Hall, Gorthleck.**

3. SSEN – Proposed Loch Kemp Pumped Hydro Scheme Grid Connection

An overview of proposed Loch Kemp Pumped Hydro Scheme Connection was given by project manager Michael O'Donnell;

The proposed Loch Kemp pumped storage hydro scheme is located between Fort Augustus and Foyers on the banks of Loch Ness.

SSEN Transmission have an obligation to provide its customers with the most efficient route to connect into the existing grid infrastructure.

In most cases an Overhead Line would be the preferred option however in the case of Loch Kemp, The Developer has requested an underground cable connection to reduce any wider impacts on the local area.

Our connection project is currently in the "Routing" phase. This is where we assess potential routes from an environmental impact and engineering constructability. A wide preferred area has been noted with contact being made with landowners.

These route as then graded and the highest performing is taken into the alignment phase.

The developer Staterra have requested a connection to generate 600mw of pumped storage.

The cable channel will be circa 1m wide by 1m deep with tiles laid on top of a 2.75kv cable. It may be ducted at some points. This work will be done by a large excavator.

MH asked where the substation would be on the Loch Kemp site as it was not in the planning application; Michael replied that the developer will construct the platform then SSE will purchase it and install their own equipment. Michael stated that it was unusual for the substation not to be part of the application, which it should be.

There will also be community consultation for this alongside the 2nd consultation for the substation works. This will take place near the end of June.

To note, this plan comes under permitted development under The Town and Country Planning (General Permitted Development) (Scotland) Order 1992 and does not require planning permission. Any associated infrastructure, predominately temporary stone access track, to facilitate the installation of the UGC will be subject to planning permission as set out in the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.

4. Adoption of minutes – 27th February 2024

Minutes of the CC meeting on 27/02/2024 were adopted as a true record of the meeting.
Proposed by HG, seconded by OG

5. Matters arising

Joint liaison meetings – admin to discuss this idea with neighbouring community councils.

Aviation light on turbine at Corriegarth Windfarm – admin still not heard back from owners and has now reported to the planning enforcement officer.

Corriegarth 2 community benefit – discussion to be had at April's CC meeting.

Loch Kemp planning application – objection was submitted to the ECU on 14th March ahead of the extension given of 15th March. MH has still not had any positive news on the confidential documents but will be adding further comment in light of the information from SSEN tonight regarding the substation on the site.

Fireworks – no update from the Environmental health officer but there has been a complaint received about large fireworks used at an Airbnb in Whitebridge. This had been reported to the police due to the noise and people not knowing what was causing it; Cllr Fraser was able to update the CC that the report had been taken up by the environmental officer and the property now has a no fireworks policy.

Meeting with head of planning – CJ asked if we could request a meeting with David Mudie, head of planning for HC; Cllr Fraser suggested that an agenda for any such meeting was put together then this could be looked at. CJ to write a proposed agenda and share with CC members.

6. Micro Grant Applications

None received

7. Reports

Treasurer

Main account - £13,822.26

Project/Micro grant account - £5,536.20

There has still been issues getting the bank statements to the address of the new treasurer, Janet Hobson. Admin went into the bank again on 25th March and was shown that it was finally changed on 14th March. There has also been issues with getting the new signatories online access; this is being followed up by the bank.

The annual accounts will be ready for the next meeting, following the end of the financial year later this week.

Boleskine Community Care

Care at Home - We are currently providing care to 9 service users within the community. This accounts for 99 hours of care per week including travel. Staffing continues to be an issue. Sunflower Home Care would like to stress how flexible a position with them can be. Shifts can fit around school hours, and you can commit to as little as one shift a week.

Staff at BCC - Olivia and Jo have been very busy down at the Hub. We are hoping to gain funding to extend their hours to full time. This will give them the opportunity to expand what we offer at the hub and allow them to get out into the community more. As our current Community Transport Coordinator would like to step down, Olivia and Jo will also need extra hours to take on this task. We are meeting with SFCT on Tuesday to discuss the possibility of extra funding.

Events - We have an Easter Funday taking place at the Hub on Sunday the 31st of March. We are running this event in collaboration with Morag's Crafty Bothy. We hope that this will attract families down to the Hub as we want the space to be used by all generations.

We have also set a date for our Summer Open Day to celebrate BCCs 10th birthday. This will take place on Saturday the 29th of June. This will be another family event with face painting, a bouncy castle and stalls. We are also hoping to bring back Stratherrick and Foyers Got Talent in the winter months so keep your eyes peeled for more information on this!

Building usage - We have made the Hub available to students on a Monday and Friday as a study space for the fast-approaching SQA exams. We have faster fibre WIFI at the Hub which we feel may benefit students as the internet speed can vary throughout the Strath.

Garden - We are delighted to have found 2 volunteer gardeners! They have started work by clearing leaves in a carpark. They will be repairing the raised beds in the garden as these had become rotten. We are very grateful to Fettes Sawmill who have given us a 10% discount on the wood we need for this project.

SFCC admin added that she had dropped off a de-fib to the hub and was working with BCC to get it connected to the exterior wall.

Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust

CL explained that the Trust has now moved to bi-monthly meetings and as such, haven't met since the last CC meeting so nothing to report.

Riverside field – Community liaison group

The CC had received an email from the River Foyers residents group who were looking for help and advice on the Riverside field project. Cllr Balance and the chair of the CC had been looking at the issues and potential resolutions and have suggested a way forward to the Trust.

8. Toilets

The toilets are now 1 year old!!! Meeting is being arranged with the Contractor, Architect and QS to complete the making good certificate and release the final retention fee. As agreed at the last meeting, a DD is now set up with MacGregors Industrial Supplies. Car park meeting took place but it was those involved with the charging for car parks that came out. Awaiting a written reply to the many queries that were brought up.

9. Planning

24/00892/LBC | Formation of doorway | Baile Os-Ceann Foyers Inverness IV2 6XT - The Boleskine Watch House is situated in the Old Boleskine Parish Church Burial Ground. The remains of the Old Church, the Burial Ground and the Watch House, hold a Listed Building Grade B status, LB1847. The South Loch Ness Heritage Group, have in recent months secured funding to carry out essential works to ensure the ongoing survival of the Watch House. These works are to include, repointing of the exterior stonework with appropriate lime based mortars. Assessment and repair or replacement of roof elements and states as required. If access to the interior of the building is possible minor works to support the internal platform and stair to prevent collapse maybe carried out – *No comment*

10. Renewables

- Aberarder (SSE) – going ahead with original plans for 12 turbines at 130m. SSE bought from RES – **Await info on liaison group. Admin to contact for update**
- Cloiche (SSE) – **Consented Dec 23**
- 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.**
- Bhlaraidh – at Glenmoriston. Extension plans passed but three turbines less
- Loch Liath – same as above for location. **Planning submitted**
- Loch Na Cathrach (previously known as Red John) – Pump storage at Dores, approved at public inquiry. **Admin attended the event in the Town House that the CC were invited to about the newly named Loch Na Cathrach PSH above Dores (formerly Red John) There was a lot about contractors and services required but did get to speak to the Project Manager, Donald Weir.**

To note – The Essich road will close to public use but awaiting confirmation of how long for. It is likely to close late 2026/2027 but also pressing for confirmation of that. Also awaiting confirmation that the high school bus route on the B862 won't be affected. With many of the large items arriving by boat, this will have an impact on the roads when they are moving them to the top site up the Dores hill as well as all the traffic coming from the A9 via Farr and going to all sites. There is nothing to come in via Dores and they are claiming that the Foyers to Dores road won't be affected but given the tight space between the road and the Loch and as above, all the loads arriving by boat, I am awaiting confirmation on how this will be managed. They are looking for any ideas from the community on how traffic management can be eased for those living here. One option being considered is using the Essich road from the town end to bring in the daily busses with workers, of which there will be many. There will be a park and ride for this service at the Caledonian Thistle Football stadium. Statkraft announced it will provide support to the UHI in gaining insight into the education and skills requirements for training a local workforce to help build the pumped storage hydro project as they are looking to try to keep the workforce from this country. They are looking potentially at building houses that could be used to house workers then gifted as affordable housing after the completion of the scheme.

- Loch Kemp (Statera) - proposed hydro pump storage at Dell Estate. **Objection submitted**
- Culachy Wind Farm (Fred. Olsen Renewables) – invite to meet. On an estate in Fort Augustus, at pre-scoping stage.

11. Roads

CL had raised about the lack of the replacement bus shelter at Aberchalder; admin explained that the developer of the micro distillery are to do some road improvements as part of their planning application but they only have to be done before the end of construction, not before it starts and HC are waiting on those works to take place. A temporary bus shelter was suggested and admin to ask HC about that.

Road closure at the Glebe arranged for 11th and 12th April for the final re-surfacing works.

Admin to chase up 'not suitable for caravan' signs for the pass road.

MH raised about old signs being left up; Cllr Fraser suggested contacting the company but if that doesn't work, report to the planning enforcement officer.

OG raised about the condition on the Vennel road as BCC carers are damaging their cars using it to attend a house along that road; as it is a private road, it cannot be reported to HC. Previously there was some local community effort to make improvements and this could be looked into again. The cattle grid at Aberchalder was also raised but would have to be the estate that fixed that.

12. Correspondence

CI had contacted BCC as a member of the CC about recent tree felling at the hub;

13. Upcoming events

SSEN community consultation on proposed extension for Foyers power station – 25th April 2-7pm @ the Stratherrick Public Hall Gorthleck

Etape; cycle event – 28th April. Looking for volunteers to help marshall in the area. £30 donation paid to local group or charity of your choice. Contact - peterjohnfaye@btinternet.com or volunteers@etapelochness.com

Ultra X; running event - 4th-5th May

14. AOCB

None

15. Next meeting

Next meeting – 30th April 2024