

STRATHERRICK & FOYERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 30TH APRIL 2024

AT THE WILDSIDE CENTRE, WHITEBRIDGE

WITH OPTION OF VIDEO LINK

1. Present

Mark Hindley (MH) - chair, Craig Lightbody (CL), Janet Hobson (JH), Helen Grainger (HG), and Mike Slater (MS)

Public attending

Cllr David Fraser, Cllr Chris Ballance, Keith Readdy, Ken Sinclair and Sharon Ferguson (Admin)

Apologies

Olivia Grant, Gary MacGowan and Chris Joyce

2. SSEN – Proposed Foyers substation extension

A detailed discussion was held on the proposed Foyers Substation Works by project manager, Lee Wilson. Maren Ebeling, Community Liaison Manager for SSEN was also in attendance.

Foyers power station is amongst the top three most strategic power stations in the country due to the part it plays in the national grid.

One of the main issues being raised to the CC by local residents is the tree loss; it was explained that it the majority of the trees are pine trees that are due to be felled given their age and height. There is a risk that they could come down on the switching station and if they just took the edge away, it would affect the windfirm of the trees left and make them more susceptible to be windblown. Any native broadleaf trees will be left in situ and it will be replanted with native trees. Other main issue was roads and traffic management. Traffic and road assessment currently being done. Replacement transformer is 180 tonnes and one bridge is being assessed for that weight capacity. They are looking into the possibility of using barges to bring in deliveries where possible and they hope to find most of the aggregate required onsite. They will take advice from the CC on when deliveries by road should be avoided or any other advice.

MH attended the Farigaig and Boleskine Residents Association meeting with SSEN the night before this meeting; the main concerns were tree loss, visual impact, transport, noise and effect on nature and heritage.

MH pointed out that part of the tree loss area is ancient woodland and that doesn't have to mean native trees.

MH raised that there was an area on the map that is for the extension for the proposed Loch Kemp development but developers of Loch Kemp had previously said that no work was required at Foyers for the connection. As this is now being proven to be incorrect and work is required, question was could that works be left at the moment until Loch Kemp gets planning; this would be possible but would mean works happening for all the other parts of the plan and then starting again should Loch Kemp be consented.

Discussion had about the land to the North East and could that not be used for the extension, which would take it further away from the houses locally; SSEN engineers are looking at this at the moment and they will report back at the next community consultation.

CL asked what the fall back would be if plans for a pier at Foyers didn't go ahead; road assessment would have to show this scenario too. Forestry haul route was suggested and this will be looked at. Ken Sinclair asked how the critical fell zones for the trees being suggested that have to be felled has been calculated; SSEN get advice from their own foresters.

Keith Readdy commented that this was the 2nd time SSEN had presented to the CC and still were not able to give all the answers. Felt that this project needs to be presented transparently and not just as repair works.

Admin raised that for the transport assessment, Loch Na Cathrach will also be using barges that will come into piers at Dores and the impact from both schemes will have to be considered on the B852 CL asked if there was a maximum distance for the switching station to the power station; answer from Lee was no, there was no maximum distance. It was then suggested that if this was the case, could the power not go to the substation at Torness; this hadn't been considered as far as Lee was aware but he would look into it.

3. Coriolis Energy – Dell Wind Farm proposed changes

James Mansfield, Richard Wylde, and James Baird of Coriolis attended the meeting. This is the 1st CC meeting that Coriolis have attended since planning a change to the windfarm despite Admin emailing since 2022. The original Dell wind farm plans were consented in 2019 following an appeal but this planning is due to expire in August this year.

There are currently two planning applications in for this development –

A Section 42 application for extending the timescale for starting the project to a further 5 years from the date of any new planning permission given and to extend the operational period of the Development from 25 to 35 years.

And a Section 36 application for Dell 2; a revised design of the original project which consists of 9-turbine design with a max tip height of 200 meters versus the original plans of 14-turbine design Max tip height of 130.5 meters

Developers explained that only one of the plans would be taken forward. The Dell 2 plan was the preferred choice but they are looking to extend the original plans in case Dell 2 was not consented. The Section 42 application is with Highland Council for a decision and it will be re-assessed using the current planning regime. CC to look at what has changed since it was consented in 2019. The traffic assessments are out of date and visual impacts don't include recently consented or applied for energy schemes. No consideration of the Local Place Plan in the documents.

The section 36 application is with the Energy Consents Unit for a decision. This is for what is being called the Dell 2 project which proposes 9 turbines (reduced from the original 14) on the same land as the original consented project. The only public consultation was done in early 2022 and was done online citing Covid as the reason for not being in person but no further consultation since. MH asked why the data from the traffic survey in 2022 is identical to that used in the Loch Kemp application but cited as coming from different sources; developers didn't know but suggested we ask the Loch Kemp developers. There is no visual or traffic impact from the proposed Loch Kemp in the application. The height of the turbines will mean that aviation lights are required.

All agreed to object to both the section 36 and 42.

4. Adoption of minutes – 26th March 2024

Minutes of the CC meeting on 26/03/2024 were adopted as a true record of the meeting.

Proposed by HG, seconded by JH

5. Matters arising

CC roles - Chris Joyce has indicated that he would like to remain a member of the CC but step down as both the vice-chair of the CC and the CC's representative at the Riverside field liaison meetings; MH thanked Chris for all his hard work in both of these roles and asked the other members to consider taking up one of them. To be discussed further at the next CC meeting.

Corriegarth 2 CBN - The developers of Corriegarth 2 have asked the CC what body should receive the community benefit from this development; all agreed that it should go to the community trust as the body set up by the community council to receive and distribute community benefit. Admin to contact developers.

Aviation light - The aviation light on a turbine at Corriegarth Windfarm that wasn't part of planning has now been switched off.

Joint meeting of Chairs - MH told the CC that he attended a meeting with the chair of SFCT and Tony Foster, Manager of the trust; MH was unhappy with the minutes that were written by Tony as they did not accurately cover what was discussed and when amendments were requested, the revised minutes were more inaccurate than the 1st version. As such there are no minutes to share as no consensus has been agreed. One thing that was discussed was SFCT are looking to review the CAP and the progress so far. The Trust would like to hold a joint meeting on 15th May with the CC to discuss the review. Tony has been speaking with energy companies about investment in energy schemes instead of community benefit payments which would see a bigger return for the community. Discussion had about who is responsible for community benefit negotiations as it was historically the CC then a decision was made some years ago that it would be one member of the CC and one nominated person from SFCT. Cllr Fraser raised that the CC in Fort Augustus do the negotiations but have recently decided to pay for a consultant to help with this. Admin to contact FAGCC.

Drawdown of funds from SSE – MH had received an email from Tony Foster, SFCT, asking for a letter of approval from the CC to support SFCT to drawdown funds from SSE to part fund a community housing project in Inverfarigaig. The figure being requested was sent in a further email a few days before the meeting but no other information. The figure being requested is £286,101.25 Whilst everyone was in agreement with the building of community affordable housing, it was a large sum and more information was required as well as informing the community. Letter to be done to SFCT requesting more information and item to be discussed at next meeting.

6. Micro Grant Applications

None received

7. Reports

Treasurer

Accounts will be finished soon by admin and will be circulated. Discussion had about ongoing issues with Virgin money; all agreed to look into other banks

Boleskine Community Care

Care at Home - Current Care at Home stats from the Highland Hospice-

9 service users (+1)

74 hours of care per week (+12)

Travel time - 25 hours per week

Total hours per week - 99 hours

Staff – 1x co-ordinator (20) 7 staff members

2 contracts – 1x25, 1x16, (41 hours)

4 bank

Community Transport - In the month of March our Community Transport Scheme covered 759.60 miles, 37.5 hours and took 36 passengers. This was all done by only 3 volunteers! We are currently recruiting volunteer drivers; all mileage costs are covered by the Highland Council at 45p per mile.

Befriending - Both Olivia and Jo have been awarded a temporary 6-month contract to increase their hours by 5 hours per week. They are using this additional time on the Befriending Service. We have 3 Befriending volunteers booked onto the next training session at the Highland Hospice and currently have 14 referrals to the service. We have become aware that isolation is a very pressing issue within our community, and we hope to use Befriending to tackle this.

New Services - We have added a couple of new services to the Hub calendar- Highland Hears attended the Hub in April to provide ear wax removal, ear examination and hearing tests. This was a very popular service as it is something no longer done at the doctor's surgery. Highland Hears will be returning to the Hub on the 22nd of May. Due to our current hairdresser being fully booked, we realised that we needed a second person to continue to meet the needs of the community. We are delighted to have Jenny, a fully qualified hairdresser and barber attending the Hub every second week. Jenny will be doing appointments on a Wednesday and a Saturday.

Activities - Art Club is also restarting at the Hub every Monday from 2pm to 4pm. The space will be available to all to work on their projects.

10th Anniversary - Our Picnic & Party event will take place at the Hub on the 29th of June to celebrate the 10th anniversary of BCC. We currently have a bouncy slide booked, a Pimms tent and are looking for food vendors.

Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust

From CL - here follows my report from the last meeting of the Trust. Please note that these notes are in draft only and will be ratified at the next meeting of the board. Any amendments will be reported at the next CC meeting.

Tony Foster (TF) went through the actions for the board.

TF will look into Chris Gehrke (CG) queries regarding issues with the housing at Inverfarigaig and get back to the board.

The board discussed the costs of installing wood burning stoves and the costs of maintenance. They acknowledged the installation of stoves is a cost effective way of heating a home. CG suggested there may be a more effective heating system available than what is proposed. TF will check on the current system planned for the houses. Maire Brown (MB) stated that people would generally prefer to burn wood regardless of the installed heating system. I added that the stoves should not have a back boiler due to the implications during a power cut. In general, the board agreed to go forward with the houses. Catriona Fraser (CF) stated that a better breakdown of finances would be helpful to reflect cash flow at certain pinch points. TF noted that the Trust is under budget by about £72k. TF to meet with staff this month to discuss projects for the next financial year.

There were 3 student grants and 1 sporting grant awarded. Recipients are on the Trust's website. One constituted group grant application from Friends of Inverness Royal Academy (FIRA) for £4340 for costs of school trips was awarded. One non-constituted group grant application from Anna Peterkin (Highland dance classes), for £100 for class running costs was awarded.

TF went through Malcolm Stewart's (MMS) report on the Foyers Bay project.

Ken Sinclair (KS) updated the board regarding the plans for dealing with the environmental waste and said quotes will be sought.

TF stated there were 94 responses to the wood survey. Most stated they had means of splitting wood themselves. Delivery requirements were identified from the survey. Another source of firewood for next year has been sourced. A suggestion from the Community suggests the formation of a community wood group to source and distribute firewood. The board supported this. CG stated that processing is required for the wood at Inverfarigaig corkscrew.

Staff - Steven Watson, Community Liaison Officer (CLO) has now retired. Caroline Tuckers contract is to be renewed as it comes to the end of her 3 year term. Robbie Burns, Community Action Plan Officer (CAP officer) has resigned. This role will be advertised shortly. TF highlighted the need for an increase in staffing hours to reflect the need to amalgamate roles to absorb the role of the CLO.

Mark Sutherland (MS) suggested that a new role of BCC liaison officer onto the board would be helpful. The board agreed that this would be a useful role.

KS updated the board on the Pathways Group who are developing an app for the area. The board discussed the merits of producing an app that includes all aspects of information making it a dynamic platform which is easily accessible. The board acknowledged the need for professionals to take this forward.

Tony went through the Clarendon investments report. The board discussed various views on how best to safeguard future finances as well as the need to have a clear plan around drawdown.

The Trust discussed the need for comprehensive planning to help build a picture of the Trust's financial position in the coming years. KS stated the need for robust financial planning that looks forward in order to safeguard future finance.

KS stated that a member of the community had asked what the Forestry School was purchased for. TF said it was an objective in the CAP. Gareth Jones (GJ) added the Forestry School was to be used as a community space but was deemed too small for this purpose. The board agreed the building should be used to support enterprise.

The board commented on the mutual benefit of liaison between the CC and the Trust. A joint CC and CT board meeting was suggested in which members of the community can be invited. The discussion would include the community place plan and would provide an opportunity for people to ask questions in a public forum. A provisional date of 15th May was noted for this.

GJ gave an update on the Errogie project which is now coming back on track. New members of the Steering group has brought extra skills for the project. He mentioned the need to revisit the business case to make it more robust for fundraising. A monthly report will be shared to the board to ensure information is shared

and up to date. In keeping with interests of biodiversity, Gareth stated that the ecologist would like to attract a colony of swifts. The architect will look at the viability of installing nesting boxes for swifts. GJ and TF have been looking at refreshing the CAP and the best way to communicate with the community about what they want to see three years from now. Two aspects to consider: Is a refresh required? Is there a change of direction from a community perspective? The board agreed to postpone this until the next meeting.

CF presented an update on the Riverside Field Project and stated that Chris Balance, has been in touch with planners who may look favourably on a Section 42 which would allow for a reduction of the parking spaces. The Board discussed this and were happy for the Riverside Steering Group to consider action this if appropriate after community consultation on the Masterplan. CF went on to say that the Steering Group will look at all priorities and present these to the community. Emails will be sent out to the community prior to the next liaison group meeting on 17 April. I suggested that the operation of the Trust means that they will encourage maximum use of the facility, and this has resulted in resistance from the Riverside residents. CF highlighted the need to consider each stage of the plans as they arise and stated that discussions will continue at the next Riverside Liaison Group meeting.

The Board noted the circulated proposal to update student grant awards to include courses that are run over a set number of hours. The Board agreed to the proposal.

CF proposed the purchase of a drone to assist the marketing officer to produce more dynamic aerial photographs and videos. The cost is under £1k and licence is £100 per year. The board agreed.

Next meeting 5th June.

CC discussion – concern raised about the lack of financial information and clarification on figures available on the Trust’s accounts. Liaison director to raise.

Riverside field – Community liaison group

Cllr Ballance had suggested to SFCT by email that they could apply for a Section 42 which may allow for a variation in the planning conditions as the parking outside the field is not something the Trust wanted to do and it is something that is causing great consternation with the local residents. Cllr Balance thought that the board had decided not to do a sect 42 but the trust minutes state that this will be for the steering group to decide. The invite to the steering group states that it will be nothing to do with planning; anomaly to be clarified. Discussion had on what the CC can do to help the residents group and any other groups/individuals that approach the CC for help. MH to email chair of SFCT.

8. Toilets

The Final retention with making goods certificate is now due and a site visit was arranged with the contractor, architect and admin visit to look over the project. There was some small issues outstanding that need attended too and the contractor, Compass, will get them all done.

9. Planning

24/01379/PAN | Extension to switching station, platform, plant, infrastructure, ancillary facilities, laydown area(s), access road and landscape works – see item 1

24/01349/LBC | Internal works | Baile Os-Ceann Foyers Inverness IV2 6XT

24/01426/FUL | Erection of house | Land 55M West Of Bein Sgurrach Errogie Inverness

10. Renewables

- Aberarder (SSE) – going ahead with original plans for 12 turbines at 130m. SSE bought from RES – Admin attended initial community liaison meeting at Farr on 23rd April with SSE and

Strathnairn CC. This was just to go over timelines and agree when group would meet etc. Plans to use electronic signs to notify the community of turbine deliveries and also exploring the idea of a WhatsApp group that people can join to be updated. Next meeting planned for 18th June

- 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 – See item 2
- 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. Traffic counters on the Essich road for surveying.
- Loch Kemp (Statera) - proposed hydro pump storage at Dell Estate. Objection submitted. Email received requesting to attend a CC meeting. Date tba.
- Culachy Wind Farm (Fred. Olsen Renewables) – invite to meet. On an estate in Fort Augustus, at pre-scoping stage.

11. Roads

Janet Hobson and Gary MacGowan kindly attended the round table roads summit chaired by MSP Kate Forbes in Farr on 4th April to discuss how the traffic from so many energy schemes in the area was going to be managed with all of them coming onto the B851 from the A9 then the majority, apart from Aberarder windfarm, going onto the B862 at the Calanour junction. Notes as follows – The meeting was chaired by Kate Forbes and managed very well. The two Community Councils were present, as were most of the developers, Police Scotland and Highland Council Highways - around 20 people in the room.

Strathnairn CC were asked to present their concerns and this was undertaken by the CC Chair. I have a copy of their document outlining the issues, but not an electronic version to email to you.

The main issues were:

- Safety of residents
- Volume of traffic
- Duration of traffic
- Road conditions and maintenance
- Driving habits
- Social issues – mental and social impact, noise & impact on house prices.

SFCC were asked to present our concerns, which were generally in support of SCC and included:

- A single liaison group for all developments
- Temporary traffic speeds to a maximum of 40mph on all roads outside the settlements
- Driver training on the use of roads - passing places, cyclists priority etc
- Cameras on all vehicles to record any incidents
- Joint funds for road reparations
- Flexibility on delivery times to help reduce speeds and slow movements on roads.

The meeting concentrated heavily on traffic movements on the B851 and the group had to be reminded that the B862 would be just as heavily impacted and it's condition was even less suitable to HGVs, than the B851.

Police Scotland were keen to emphasise that they would be monitoring both driver behaviour and abnormal loads, the latter being coordinated through their control in Glenrothes.

A 'one-way' route was discussed via the B851 and out through Dores via the B862 and B852. This wasn't popular with the developers as they felt it would increase distance driven and the number of settlements and roads affected.

HC Highways (Colin Ross and Stevie Grant) indicated that the roads in the south Loch Ness area are not suitable for the large increase in HGV traffic and are actually not even of the quality and size to be categorised as 'B' roads. They assured the meeting that they were seeking a Section 96 agreement from each developer for wear and tear reparations to the roads. However, this generally had to be claimed in retrospect and is often challenged by developers – a road bond paid in advance would be an alternative, but this is only usually sought when a developer is financially struggling.

The imminent speed limit changes in the settlements, from 40mph to 30mph was discussed, with any potential to reduce the speed limits further, to 20mph. This was dismissed as the 30mph speeds were deemed suitable. The HC Road Safety Team need to be approached to determine any further speed limit reductions in light of the imminent change in vehicle numbers and movements – the 20mph speed limits in other locations in Highland are actually a temporary traffic order as a trial for 18 months.

HC Highways also indicated that they would be placing traffic counters on all the roads in the near future, to monitor vehicle numbers and the increase over the coming years.

There was no further discussion on the reduction of the speed limits outside the settlements, to 40mph and this should be requested again.

SSE Renewables presented their estimates for vehicle movements on the B851 for all developments, but omitted to include the B862 in the presentation – this work has not been undertaken and they were asked to do so. SSE included Loch Kemp and Loch na Cathrach (Red John) in their list of renewable energy developments. It was pointed out that Pumped Hydro Storage is not classed as renewable energy by Scottish Government and that using this language was 'greenwash'. The room fell silent for a few seconds and the Loch Kemp team then proposed that they are still 'green energy' projects.

The Loch Na Cathrach team were not keen to be part of a joint Community Liaison Group (CLG) as their planning consent stipulated differently. Cllr David Fraser indicated that they should seek a small change to the consent to enable them to join a joint CLG.

At the end of the meeting Kate asked for the following actions to be undertaken:

- A joint CLG to be established beginning with the Aberarder Wind Farm and joined by each developer as their projects come on line.
- Developers to ensure their drivers are trained for the use of the roads and their driving behaviour to be monitored and recorded.
- The roads to be surveyed prior to the increase in vehicle movements to ensure all damage can be recorded and repairs adequately funded.
- A one-way road system to be investigated for developers to exit via Dores on the B852.

- SSE to compile a similar document (to that compiled for the B851) for long term vehicle impacts on the B862.

Kate was keen that further meetings take place to ensure all developers' commitments are met and the local communities are informed and involved throughout.

Inverfarigaig Settlement Improvement Scheme – proposed plans had come in by email via Colin Ross at HC and had been circulated with comments fed back. There will be a community consultation held in Inverfarigaig on this once plans have been amended following initial feedback. Admin had raised with Colin Ross about funding for such projects as the pavement and settlement scheme completion at Gorthleck had been waiting for many years; the housing developer at Inverfarigaig is required, under their planning condition, to deliver some road infrastructure works as part of their required road mitigation. The work at Gorthleck was meant to be getting done when Corriegarth 2 got planning but The Scottish Government Reporters Unit removed the need for Corriegarth 2 Wind Farm to provide road mitigation which had been identified to deliver the remainder of the Gorthleck Scheme. All agreed that this is most disappointing and should be raised further.

12. Correspondence

War memorial – The Royal British Legion run an annual competition called "Best Kept War Memorial Competition" and they contacted Admin as felt that we should enter the Gorthleck War memorial. Admin did suggest that the entry come from the Heritage group but it can only be done by a CC. Entry done and Heritage group have been notified and will be kept updated.

CC survey - Email from HC with survey to establish the most appropriate support & guidance information for Community Councils – all CC members to complete. Admin has circulated.

Inverness CC forum – email with presentation from planning and last minutes. Admin to share. Next meeting is 25th June.

SFCT Riverside field project - Invite from SFCT to Riverside Steering Group. By Teams on Monday 6th May at 7pm.

13. Upcoming events

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

BCC 10th anniversary picnic & party – 29th June

Highland gathering – 20th July

14. AOCB

None

15. Next meeting

Next meeting –

Joint CC and SFCT meeting – Wed 15th May 2024

Full CC meeting 28th May 2024