

STRATHERRICK & FOYERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL
MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 24TH SEPTEMBER 2024
AT THE WILDSIDE CENTRE, WHITEBRIDGE
INCLUDING VIDEO LINK

1. Present

Mark Hindley (MH) – chair, Olivia Grant (OG), Janet Hobson (JH), Craig Lightbody and Mike Slater (MS) – via video link Helen Grainger (HG), Chris Joyce (CJ), Cllr Chris Balance (CB).

Public attending

Rob Mullen (RM), Anna & Phil Low (AL & PL).

Apologies

Cllr David Fraser (DF), Sharon Ferguson (Admin, SF), Gary MacGowan (GM).

2. Conflicts of Interest

MH asked attendees if there were any conflicts of interest to declare prior to commencing meeting. None were declared.

3. Adoption of minutes – 27th August 2024

Minutes of the CC meeting on 27/08/2024 were adopted as a true record of the meeting, proposed by OG, seconded by HG.

4. Matter arising not on the agenda

Buses – MH stated that SF had written to Highland Council regards change to bus service and lack of notification to the high school service. It's believed that SF has not yet received a reply to her email.

Dumnaglass wind turbine blades – HG stated that she had spoken to SF regards the debacle of the movement of two turbine blades to Dumnaglass. MH stated that he had actually wrote to SSE regarding this subject pointing out a) the lack of notice and b) the fact that the community had not been notified until two days prior to the move. MH also stated that SF had contacted SSE to tell them that it was the wrong time to carry out the move (Flichity Bridge closed) and the wrong route. This message was also passed to SSE by Catriona Fraser (SFCT Chair). Both of these messages were dismissed by SSE as 'it will be fine.' MH emailed the relevant company (copied in the Chief Executive) stating that the transport had closed the Dores hill all afternoon, he has received no reply yet. MH also stated that he had added remarks in his email regards the chewing-up of the verge at the junction of the B851/862 and that the company should liaise with the Highland Council (cc to Colin Ross) for the reinstatement of the verge.

5. Micro Grant Applications

None received.

Previous Micro Grant held over – Regarding the placing of a Defibrillator on a private property in Errogie (Hugh Nicoll). MH stated that he had looked at a map of the area post the last SFCC meeting, and he felt that Errogie community would be better served if the

defibrillator was more centrally located i.e. on the church. And as the church is a public building, there would not be any chance of it being sold unlike a private residence. JH also raised the point of possibly using the phone box on Errogie corner. It was noted that a number of defunct phone boxes had already be repurposed for housing a defibrillator in other areas. MH will request SF to contact Hugh Nicoll to discuss further prior to SFCC next meeting. SFCC would like to thank Hugh for his very generous initial offer. Rob Mullen stated that although he has a personal defibrillator in his work vehicle, which he has made available for local use, there is no such item located on a public building within Inverfarigaig. Possible locations were mentioned, notably one of the new SFCT houses or what will be the forest school building.

SFCC / SFCT Liaison Director – CL stated that he had an action from the last SFCT meeting regarding the role of the Liaison Director and his requirement to meet with both SSE and SFCC regarding his role. MH suggested that he, CL and Catriona Fraser meet to discuss the Liaison Director role as he believes that the level of confidentiality sought by the current SFCT CEO, is not legally necessary. MH also believes that for the community as a whole, this level of confidentiality is positively harmful. CL stated that he felt a role agreed between the SFCC Chair, SFCT Chair and the Liaison Director would serve better. CL believes it should not be a full director's role as it should be seen as a connection between both the SFCC and SFCT. JH asked if the position could not be classed as an observer. CL stated that as a co-opted director you can be asked to join the board using specific skills and his specific skills are the communication between SFCC and SFCT. MH stated that, originally SFCC had sole ownership of the Trust, but when the SFCT was created, with its own directors and members, it was felt at the time that there was a requirement for SFCC to have some form of influence over the SFCT with a form of formal communication between the two councils. MH feels at present that the SFCC does not have any real influence over the SFCT and in his experience, the SFCT has done what the SFCT wants irrespective of what the SFCC has communicated. MH requested that CL contact Catriona Fraser so as to set up a meeting for all three to discuss a way ahead for the Liaison Director role.

6. Reports

Treasurer

Main account - £24,322.22

Micro grant account - £5,091.37

Foyers Toilets online payments – £175.47

Foyers Toilets cash to bank - £482.24

MH stated that he has now added HG as a user to the online banking. MH asked JH if she had completed her signature on the required forms. JH stated that this would be done on return of SF from her holiday.

CL raised a point regards possible investment into a turbine from one of the windfarms. MH stated that this has been raised previously and it his understanding this is not practically possible at this time. However, it does fit in with various items coming from Highland Council regards them trying to work out getting better value community benefits in the future. CL stated that this was an action placed on him from the SFCT.

Boleskine Community Care

OG stated there was no report for this month. The Hub has been closed following the dreadful news of Kit Camerons passing. Kathrine Grant has taking over as interim chair until the AGM scheduled for 27 Sept 2024 at 1700.

MH stated that speaking for everybody here and within the community to express our deep sorrow at Kit's sudden passing and our condolences to her family. 'On a personal note, Kit was my neighbour and both she and Ian have been the best neighbours one could wish for. It's a very sad loss for BCC and all of our community. Kit did an awful lot for BCC and for everybody in our community, we will miss her.'

MH raised the point regarding BCC's possible takeover of Foyers Stores. MH has emailed Billy MacKenzie stating SFCC were very much in support for the acquisition of the store. MH believes that unfortunately Billy MacKenzie was not getting similar support from the SFCT. MH intends to speak again with Willie to see if the SFCC can help further with this item. Billy has requested an SFCC member to attend a possible future steering group, alongside BCC and SFCT to look at a feasibility study with regards BCC taking over the store. CL stated he would initially be happy to represent the SFCC.

Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust

CL stated that there has not been a SFCT meeting since the last SFCC meet, as such there is nothing to report until after the next SFCT meeting scheduled for 02 Oct 2024.

MH raised the point regards the search for a new SFCT CEO. Talking as a paid member of the trust, MH stated that other than two emails relating to the current CEO leaving and the SFCT engaging a recruitment agency, he has not been provided, nor has any other member of the trust, any form of input into what they think a new CEO should be and their role. Rob Mullen stated that he would prefer the new CEO role to be more as a manager, who is not remote living (should live in the area), who should be a people manager who directs people to complete tasks within the community. MH stated that although maybe not initially living in the area, a future CEO/Manager of the SFCT should be willing to relocate to within the SFCC area. CL enquired if there had been any communication at all from SFCT regards the employment of a new CEO. MH answered that there was a single email stating that there were only 7 days left until the closing date for applications, what that implies is that there is no one in our community who can do this job therefore we must look somewhere else. MH then asked CL how this was discussed at the last SFCT meeting. CL stated that two directors put there hands up to say that they would sit down with the SFCT Chair to discuss the CEO role, to redefine the role and make it more manager based along with writing a new job description. CL believed that this would then be emailed to all members of the SFCT for their information. MH stated that he has not received any further information, and nothing has been included in the weekly Wednesday morning update email issued by the SFCT. OG had a quick check on Facebook and stated that there was a job description on there. MH reiterated that, as not all SFCT members are on Facebook or actually have access to a computer the SFCT should use other means of communication in order to ensure everyone has access to the relevant information. MH requested CL to bring this issue to the notice of SFCT Chair during their next meeting on 02 Oct 2024. HG voiced an opinion that should there not be some members of the community involved in the selection/interview process for a new SFCT CEO/Manager. MH stated that there had not been any request from the SFCT regards

members of the SFCC being involved and that one of the reasons the community in the broadest sense, don't feel that the trust is operating on their behalf or with their best interest in mind. Phil Low stated that unlike to SFCC, there is a disconnect, a distance, a lack of detail from the SFCT provided to the community. A new CEO should find some way of bridging the gap through open days, Q&A sessions, make the community aware of issues and what the SFCT do. RM stated from what he is aware the trust is working quite hard in a community minded way, but that message is not getting out to the wider community. Anna Low stated she would like to add that the gentleman (Nick Wright) who conducted the interviews for the local place plan was extremely engaged and also organised a morning with business owners. AL also stated she feels that small business owners are completely excluded from anything to do with the SFCT. Having reached out a number of times to the current CEO, regards possible work with the SFCT over apprenticeships etc, there has been no communication at all.

RM raised the point regarding small grants to local wellness/wellbeing groups being turned down by SFCT. This has been a big blow to those groups and individuals who were able to get out locally and attend groups for health and mental wellbeing. CL confirmed that these types of grants had been quashed due to SSE as they (grants) are not there to be used for subsidising small businesses.

OG raised the point regards her request to SFCT for an education grant. Although she had applied for the grant in the third week of August, she was informed that she had missed the deadline for the SFCT October meeting, and she would now have to wait until the December meeting for a decision. MH believes this may be a consequence of the current SFCT CEO pushing for the trust going to bi-monthly meetings. MH asked if CL could take this issue up with the SFCT during the 02 Oct 2024 meeting.

RM stated that being involved with current works around Inverfarigaig (corkscrew) he has noticed that dealing with the SFCT is 'incredibly slow' in the past 3 months they have gotten nowhere. Waiting a further 2 months for architect drawings to come back and they are wrong, it sucks your enthusiasm and momentum.

MH stated that when the bi-monthly meetings were introduced by the SFCT over one year ago, the SFCC expressed that this was not the right thing to do.

Riverside Field – Community Liaison Group

MH received an email today from Catriona Fraser stating that this project had stalled, as Highland Council have yet to agree to sell the play park and won't do so without a clear agreement. CL added, the green part belongs to Scotland Government Assets and not Highland Council Housing. If that land is to be sold, it should have all community groups agreement first and then agreement with Highland Council. CL (speaking as a member of RFRG) also raised a point regarding SFCT Chair stating there would be no further meeting of the RFRG as the project was at an impasse and until an agreement can be reached between Highland Council departments, SFCT and Riverside group, there is little point in arranging further meetings. CL had replied to Catriona Fraser's email, listing a number of key reasons why a meeting should be held, in particular with regards to the section 42 application. MH stated that this issue should be covered later in the meeting once Cllr Chris Balance had joined online. CL requested to be noted in the minutes that as the SFCT are not complying

with their own terms of reference, the SFCC should consider contacting Highland Council planning to say that this is a non-compliance in terms of the planning consent.

7. Foyers Public Toilets

No reports.

8. Planning applications lodged since last SFCC meeting.

No new planning applications since last meeting.

MH noted that the red navigation light at Corriegarth windfarm was once again showing at night. This will once again be chased up with the relevant contact.

9. Energy Schemes

Foyers Sub-Station – still some confusion over the proposal made at the April meeting (consider using Torness sub-station). Following the last SFCC meeting, MH stated he had followed up with Michael O'Donnell (SSE), who said he would provide the SFCC with a breakdown of all the options and how they have been considered within SSE. As of yet, MH has not received any information from Michael O'Donnell MH contacted Michael O'Donnell last week to remind him of his commitment, but he stated he had no recollection of saying he would provide further information. MH reminded him, however still no information forthcoming. MH will continue to chase SSE regards this issue. Following an email from Kyra and other Boleskine groups, MH followed up with FLS regards their South Loch Ness 10-year felling plan, presented at a January 2024 meeting. The presenter took away a number of questions which he would report back on but has failed to do so. MH has contacted the individual to remind him to do so. Kyra has noted a shifting of blame between FLS and SSE, with SSE stating they must fell a certain area (make safe) as FLS are planning to fell the next-door department. Kyra has noticed that it appears FLS are felling an area of trees in order to provide clear land for SSE's substation. As such, it appears unclear how FLS and SSE are cooperating over this issue.

AL stated that she had attended a meeting (on site) hosted Michael O'Donnell, along with Cllr Fraser and Cllr Balance and other residents. It appeared unclear as to why some trees had to be felled as they were considered as 'dangerous', whilst others appear safe. SSE were not aware that they actually owned some of the land and as the area had not been properly managed for x number of years, all the trees would need to come down. AL raised a further point, that this appears to be a very large amount of work (area size, number of trees felled) for a project that has not yet been approved.

MH stated that despite contacting both FLS and SSE requesting clarification of this issue, he is still yet to receive a reply. He also stated that Kyra had made a valid point, that if the trees were felled then there would not be a need for an additional pylon and therefore, the cable could go underground.

Loch Kemp – MH stated that both Nature Scotland and SEPA have objected to this, and although they would not say, it appears Highland Council will do the same. This issue may be coming up at the next proposed Highland Council Planning meeting in October, but it's not clear if it is on the agenda (papers only posted one week in advance). MH raised the point regards rumours around changes to Loch Dochfour weir, in order to help provide additional water for the large number of proposed pump storage schemes within the area. MH was

made aware of this issue via the Ness District Salmon Fisheries Board who in turn, heard it from Scottish Canals. It is believed that Scottish Canals have entered into a confidentiality agreement with Statera, MH has submitted a Freedom of Information request to Scottish Canal ('couple of days ago'), to which they have 20 business days to provide a formal reply. MH wrote to David Moody, at Head of Planning at Highland Council highlighting this issue and the need for possible changes to Loch Dochfour weir to be included in the original planning application for Loch Kemp. David Moody has agreed with this point and as such, he will be writing to Scottish Ministers and take it up with the Scottish Government. MH noted that this is a much better way of getting points raised, as he still has had not replies to any of the correspondence, he has sent to either the ECU or the Scottish Government on behalf of SFCC.

AL asked a question regards Cllr Crawford's motion regarding energy scheme planning applications and when would it be raised again at a Highland Council meeting. MH stated that it is the first motion on the agenda for the meeting to be held on Monday 30 September 2024.

Glen Earrach Pumped Storage Hydro

PL raised that point that following attendance at a meeting regards Glen Earrach, that Foyer's residence would not formerly receive notice of any work as they would be outside to statutory distance requirement. MH reiterated that, following a meeting last week, SFCC had notified to contactors the need to engage directly with the residence and businesses within Foyers as they are geographically closer to the work than any other settlement. PL said he had received verbal confirmation that is what will now happen moving forward.

Aberarder (Dunmaglass)

MH replied to SSE regards Aberarder Community Fund that they are proposing, for which he is still awaiting a reply. It's not clear when any funds would be paid, as it relates to construction, would the funds be paid during that period or after. MH has liaised with Cllr Balance and Cllr Fraser regarding the new Highland Council Renewable Charter which was adopted at the end of June 2024 by the Highland Council. This was quoted back to SEE in MH's correspondence to make them aware. MH then raised the point of what SFCC would like to do with the fund when received, not just to hand the money directly to the SFCT. A number of possibilities were raised, HG mentioned the possibility of using it to support small grants, MH proposed that the SFCC website could include a notification that money is available to spend within the community and any ideas would be gladly received by the SFCC on what to use it for.

AL raised the point that maybe some money could be spent on employing a local person who has responsibility for keeping the area, clean and tidy, grass cutting, planting etc. CL stated that Fort August had such a person in their employment, for which they receive a subsidy from Highland Council. OG stated that BCC had also received requests regards a similar person who could take on handyperson type work (changing light bulbs, bringing in cole/firewood etc.)

AL stated that following MP Angus McDonald maiden speech in the commons regarding all the current proposed renewable projects taken place and the perceived benefits for the local communities, it may be time for SFCC to contact him with their concerns. MH noted that the

current projects being dealt with are covered by either, Highland Council or Scottish Government, however maybe we should contact the MP in the future.

10. Roads

Following last month's meeting attended by Colin Ross from Highland Council, there was an action to compile a list of road issue priorities that require attention and for inclusion in the roads department 25/26 planning. CL stated that unfortunately due to work commitments he has been unable to supply a priority list to Cllr Fraser or Colin Ross but does intend to do so soonest. CL did state that the major road issues have already been raised with and noted by Highland Council roads department. MH reiterated the need to make the roads department aware and emphasising what priority roadworks are required in the area. MH also requested that CL inform the roads department regards the need to erect HGV / Not suitable for large vehicles / Caravan on relevant roads (Inverfaragaig Pass, Corkscrew etc.) within the area. RM stated that he had a meeting with Nature Scotland last week and made them aware of the damage caused to the corkscrew verge. He also met up with the Highland Ranger who was in the process of cleaning up all the human waste left in the vicinity. Also, a Forestry employee has now erected a notice at the top of the Corkscrew stating – No Overnight Camping / No Fires. A number of other issues (wall down, undermined section) were raised regards the corkscrew road, MH asked CL to include the details in his list to Highland Council roads department. MH also requested CL contact Colin Ross regards having the digital speed indicators changed (from 40 to 30) following the recent speed limit changes throughout the area.

Opening ceremony Flichity Bridge will be attended by SF and OG representing SFCC.

11. Correspondences

CL stated that he had received an email from a local resident regarding the sound of gunfire outside her house. It has happened on a number of occasions in the forest opposite her house at 2am and she has also confronted one of the persons who was completely dressed in camouflage from head to foot. When confronted and asked what he was doing, the gunman would only reply that he had a shoot licence and was entitled to be there. The resident contacted FLS to discuss this issue but was informed that 'FLS do issue the licenses, but we don't tell them when they can shoot.' The resident had approached CL requesting if the SFCC could help in this matter. MH welcomed Cllr Chris Balance to the meeting. Cllr Balance recommended contacting FLS and requesting that notices be placed indicating when shooting will take place within area. MH stated that SFCC would contact FLS regarding this issue and get a suitable answer for the resident. CL will contact resident with an update.

MH raised the point regarding the Riverside Liaison Group with Cllr Balance, and that the SFCT Chair had emailed CL to state that there would be no further meetings of the group until some progress had been made, despite CL believing to the contrary. Cllr Balance stated that the Liaison Group is owned by the SFCT, and he is only responsible for chairing meetings, as such he has not dictated when/if meeting should take place. MH raised his surprise at the SFCT Chair's comments regards a section 42 being refused. Cllr Balance confirmed he was also surprised as nothing had been presented to any Highland Councillors, as usually a planning rejection would be presented to a councillor for comment. MH stated that he would contact SFCT Chair to seek clarification regards the section 42 issue.

12. Up and coming events

Loch Ness Marathon – 29 Sept 2024.
BCC AGM – 03 Oct 2024 @ 1700.

13. AOCB

CL raised the issue regards local bottle banks. MH confirmed via Cllr Fraser that, bottle banks are subcontracted to Biffa who have had difficulty in sourcing new vehicles. The indication is, that new vehicles will be here during October.

14. Next meeting

Tuesday 29 October 2024