

STRATHERRICK & FOYERS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

MINUTES OF MEETING HELD 28th JANUARY 2025

AT THE WILDSIDE CENTRE, WHITEBRIDGE

WITH VIDEO LINK OPTION

1. Loch Na Cathrach (previously Red John) Pump Storage Hydro – project update and introduction to new manager, Scott Gilbert, Statkraft

Scott introduced himself; been working in renewable energy for 25 years in Europe but was born and brought up in Inverness. Looking to involve and share the value with the community. There will be a skills report that has been done with UHI that will be shared tomorrow. Final development decision will be made next year once government decision made on funding. Project will take 4.5/5 years to construct. Potential realignment of the Essich road in 2026. In response to the comment made by another energy company at a meeting with SFCC in November, Scott clarified that the Loch Na Cathrach project does not have to go back into planning. They are currently working with HC on planning conditions but this is a normal process. MH asked what relationship there was between Statkraft and Statera; Scott stated there was a commercial relationship as Statkraft buy energy off Statera but on a project basis, they are completely separate.

Roads and transport – they are using AECOM as their transport consultant and as plans progress, their input will move from desktop studies to physically driving the roads and will be taking measurements and taking videos etc. Agree that a joint liaison group will be beneficial.

Dochfour Weir – The statement on Dochfour Weir made by Statera has not been made with permission from Statkraft and the Loch Na Cathrach development does not require the weir to be raised.

Tina Jordan asked what benefit there is to Loch Ness; the project will play a part in the reduction of fossil fuels which will benefit everyone. There is no specific benefit for Loch Ness.

SFCC to meet again with Statkraft to discuss further roads and transport management.

2. Present

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

Sharon Ferguson (Admin)

Public attending

Cllr Fraser, Jewels Laing, Anna Low, Ken Sinclair, Kyra Motely, Elly Russell, Chris Russell, Tina Jordan and Keith Oversby

Apologies

Cllr Ballance

Conflicts

No conflicts

3. Adoption of minutes – 26th November 2024

Minutes of the CC meeting on 20/11/2024 with Statera were adopted as a true record of the meeting. Proposed by CL seconded by HG.

Minutes of the CC meeting on 26/11/2024 were adopted as a true record of the meeting. Proposed by LG, seconded by HG.

Although minutes of the Statera meeting are a true record of what was said at the meeting, several points need to be corrected as statements made have turned out to be untrue – As per discussion above, Loch Na Cathrach does not need to go back through planning It was also clarified by HC that no direct contact had been made to Colin Ross in the roads department. All agreed these statements should be corrected and admin to make notes of the minutes to clarify.

4. Matter arising not on the agenda

FLS land by Boleskine House – Kyra and the Boleskine residents group met with FLS to discuss the possibility of community ownership of some forestry land near the substation at Boleskine. If there was an expression of interest put in, it would halt any felling activities for one year. Ken Sinclair raised that if SSEN had a statutory right to take down the trees regardless of who owned it. Residents group meeting again to discuss.

Pylon at Boleskine house – Cllrs have asked that SSEN request Ofgem to get the 1st pylon after the substation removed.

Feedback on SSE – MH reminded CC members to reply re feedback on SSE for Cllr Fraser.

Parking issues at Foyers – vehicle and long trailer taking up most of the parking space by the shop and meaning that busses and campervans as well as the community that can't make it up or down the hill, can't get parked. Admin has been in touch with HC and they are looking to make it a restricted time parking area. Suggestion that letter be sent to the owner.

Parking at Glenlia – several complaints have come in about dangerous and possibly illegal parking on the main road by Glenlia. All agreed to contact some residents to find out the problems, see if there is any solutions and maybe do a leaflet drop before going any further with this complaint.

Grit bin required at car park for Falls of Foyers.

South Loch Ness Trail – Admin has emailed VILN re the missing bridge and poor signage on the SLNT but not received a reply. All agreed to set up a wider meeting with stakeholders and VILN.

Save Loch Ness meeting – Tina Jordan raised her concerns about the lack of protection for Loch Ness. Suggestion was to hold a public meeting and invite MSP's, MPS etc. Biodiversity net gain of 10% stipulation has only come in with NPF4 but something we should be pushing for. Planning Advice Scotland available to us to help support and guide the CC if required.

Dochfour Weir proposal – all CC members to input and admin to send to Statera.

5. Visitor Levy Consultation

Two hotel owners spoke of their major concern over HC's proposed 5% visitor levy and are looking for the CC to support and help take this to Government level. The fact that it is a percentage rate rather than a flat rate and not covering campervans has been set at SG level, not HC. Concerns over the effect on small businesses and the extra bureaucracy and cost this will cause. The CC to encourage all individuals and businesses to take part in the consultation which is open until 31st March 25 and can be found here -

<https://consult.highland.gov.uk/kpse/event/36571DFB-0F00-4D02-B386-F77464ECE61A> The CC to look at the questions and compile a response.

6. Micro Grant Applications

None received but admin has written an MOU that needs to be agreed to continue the Micro grant scheme that is currently administered by SFCC and is available to the community of Stratherrick and Foyers. This scheme was previously funded yearly by the SSE renewables fund. When this fund ended, SSE paid back the sum leftover of £19,311.42 to SFCT in Oct 23.

7. Reports

Treasurer report from Janet Hobson

Main account - £21,981.48

Micro grant account - £2,636.37

TOILETS AT FOYERS RECEIPTS INCLUDED IN MAIN ACCOUNT BALANCE

VIA STRIPE (QR CODE DONATIONS) = £68.65

VIA NAYAX (NEW CARD PAYMENT SYSTEM) = £36.57

CASH RECEIVED = £630.62

Boleskine Community Care

Friends of BCC - We currently have 290 'Friends of BCC'. Becoming a friend has no obligation, all we do is send you a monthly email update on what is happening at the hub. Having this many friends also looks very good on our funding applications as it demonstrates our reach within the community.

Community Transport - We have 68 members of our community transport scheme and 5 dedicated volunteer drivers. In December we served 14 different passengers and covered 353 miles.

Drivers are paid 45p per mile and this is covered by a grant from The Highland Council. We are always seeking new volunteer drivers to sign up to the scheme. There is no expectation of how much driving each volunteer should do, even just adding names to a backup list would be very helpful. During December, our drivers went above and beyond to take community members to essential hospital appointments and shopping trips in some difficult weather conditions. We would like to thank them for this.

Befriending - Olivia and Jo spent 8 hours in January doing home visits within the community. This month they have helped people do online shopping orders, provided bereavement support and general company to those that need it most. We have 2 amazing befriending volunteers that provide a 1 to 1 service with 2 of our community members. We are always looking for new volunteers to support us with this service.

Hub Facilities - We are having new flooring fitted in the garage side of the Hub building in February. This will make our treatment room much more hygienic and easier to clean after services.

We are waiting for SSE to do the electrical work required in the building for us to install our electric car charging points. Once this is completed our electric cars will arrive for the carers to use.

Activities - The Hub building is now being used on a Sunday by a new photography group. We are pleased to see it being used at the weekends. We have also had another new activity added by one of our volunteers every second Wednesday. This is called Mid-week Mingle and is a lovely social occasion. Anyone can drop by to play board games, complete a puzzle or just have some lunch and a chat. Our activities calendar is always pinned at the top of our Facebook page for anyone that wants to check out what's on.

Services - Thanks to the help of the Community Council and Cllr David Fraser, we had our vaccination clinic reinstated at the Hub. We had over 50 people receive vaccinations and they have already booked the Hub for their Spring Vaccination Programme. We have arranged for Hall Opticians from Inverness to do home visits to our housebound community members in February.

Care at Home Stats from Sunflower Home Care - We have four carers plus a coordinator.

Coordinator on a 20 hour contract plus:

Carers On contract: 25hr, 16hr, 20hr and one bank staff.

We have 7 Service Users and possibly another coming on the books

Care hours per week total- 68.5 hours per week.

Takeaway Nights - After the success of our first takeaway evening at the Hub we have arranged a few more to give everyone something to look forward to across the winter months.

Pizza – Auld Smokey Pizza will be returning to the Hub on Saturday the 1st of February and will be ready to serve from 5pm. He will have a second staff member to help him this time so wait times will be much less.

Fish & Chips- The Fish and Chip Van will be at the Hub on Saturday the 22nd of February to serve delicious food from 4.30pm.

Crispy Duck- Highland Crispy Duck will be at the Hub on the 29th of March serving from 5pm.

All takeaways have been asked to donate 10% of their profits to BCC for the use of the Hub.

Summer Event - Our Pizza & Party event is scheduled for the 5th of July. We have booked Auld Smokey Pizza and The Coffee Pod to attend. We are in the early stages of planning but would like everyone to save the date!

Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust – Craig Lightbody liaison Director

Since the community council's last meeting on the 26th Nov 24, the Trust has had an AGM and 2 board meetings, the minutes of which can be read on their website.

Jewels Lang, the new CEO of the Trust introduced herself and gave a presentation on her qualifications, connections with the area and her enthusiasm for getting started.

At the end of the AGM, three directors, Catriona Fraser, Gareth Jones and Ken Sinclair plus both Co-opted directors, Mark Sutherland and I stepped down as is required by the Articles of Association.

Catriona and Gareth did not stand for re-election which meant there was four positions available for election. Stuart MacPherson, Peter Faye and Michael White put forward for election and Ken Sinclair submitted his intention to stand for re-election. Since there were no other candidates, these four were accepted as being elected to serve as directors for the Stratherrick and Foyers Community Trust for the year 2024/25.

At the post AGM Mark Sutherland and I stood for reinstatement as co-opted directors for the year 2024/25. As there were not enough voting members at the meeting it was decided to postpone acceptance of the two co-opted positions until the next full board meeting. This took place on the 11th of December and Mark and I were duly accepted.

It was agreed that board meetings will take place every month from now on.

In the minutes of 11th Dec. The board discussed the proposal to purchase the Forestry School at Inverfarigaig. It was agreed that the Trust purchase the premises but only after a set of comprehensive surveys are complete and satisfactory. Michael White emphasised that this should be highlighted to the community to show due diligence when purchasing property to be sure we don't come up against any unforeseen problems which could cost the Trust a fortune in the future. This doesn't appear to have been communicated to the community as yet.

The Gathering Place, formerly the Errogie Church, has been closed until further notice. The decision wasn't taken lightly but a lack of safety protocols, inaccurate risk assessments and inappropriate arrangements for welfare on the site forced the closure of the building until these can be rectified.

Michael White has agreed to take the lead director role in this project and will report back as soon as the problems are rectified.

The minutes for the meeting on the 8th of January have not been compiled as yet. I will report on those when they are published.

I have requested a meeting with Jewels, Mark H, Maureen and I to agree a 'job description' for the Community Liaison Director. Hopefully we can agree a date for this soon.

Next SFCT meeting is 5th Feb.

Riverside Field – Community Liaison Group

No meeting

8. Foyers Public Toilets

All going well at the toilets and quiet at the moment.

New signage should be up soon.

The new card payment system for the waste emptying point is now up and running; tap one side to open the waste point which is £5 or tap on the other side to donate £1.

Still awaiting an update on the money that HC have collected from the car park and when we can apply to that. This fund was meant to be ready to apply to in May 24. Cllr Fraser said the meeting to decide on it will be on the 7th Feb

9. Planning applications lodged since last SFCC meeting

24/04985/FUL Erection of annex, Land 15M NE of King Cottage Inverfarigaig; Small annexe with 2 bedrooms & toilet only – No comment

24/04611/FUL Erection of garage and 2no. Short term let holiday cabins; has received some objections from neighbouring properties – CL to look into this and write a comment from the CC
25/00067/PNO Prior Notification for Forestry-related Building Works (Non-residential)

Decided – prior approval not required

10. Energy Schemes

- **Glen Earrach Energy Pump Storage Hydro** –
- **Foyers Substation extension (SSEN)** –
- **Aberarder Windfarm (SSE)** – going ahead with original plans for 12 turbines at 130m. SSE bought from RES. **MH & GM attended the recent CLG meeting; the project is behind due to the weather and they are going to be asking HC if they can now work at weekends which wasn't allowed in the original agreement. It was felt that winter weather is normal and that should have been considered. HGV speed limit laws were pointed out to the developers. Community benefit discussed – still no date for the CB workshop from HC; Cllr Fraser to chase up. MH had a discussion with the chair of Strathnairn CC and contrary to what SSE have been saying, they are also not happy with the agreement and are not pushing that SFCC agree to the current offer. SSE have said that SFCC would need to show lifetime effect as currently the offer doesn't give the SFCC any yearly benefit apart from a small amount for the two years of construction**
- **Cloiche Windfarm (SSE)** – Consented Dec 23 (ext to Stronelaig). Await construction timings
- **Dell Windfarm (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 – Two applications in; one section 42 to extend the current planning that has been awarded and a section 36 to apply for a new version of the plans known as Dell 2. Await them coming to planning committee
- **Corriegarth Windfarm (Greencoat UK Wind)** – **navigation light still on that there isn't planning for - Cllr Fraser to pursue**
- **Corriegarth 2 Windfarm (BayWar.e)** – Permission granted Dec 23. Road mitigation - Colin Ross had previously told the CC that ministers at the ECU had removed the need for developers to pay for road mitigation works
- **Loch Liath Windfarm** – North side of Loch Ness, on Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston land but visual from SFCC area – **HC to object to this application at next planning meeting**

- **Culachy Windfarm (Fred. Olsen Renewables)** – On Fort Augustus and Glenmoriston CC land. Planning refused
- **Loch Na Cathrach Pump Storage Hydro (previously known as Red John)** – Above Dores, approved at public inquiry. New manager in place but no correspondence or update received.
- **Loch Kemp Pump Storage Hydro (Statera Energy) and Ness Weir II** - proposed hydro pump storage at Dell Estate.
- **Carn na Saobhaidh Wind Farm (RES)** – Situated in the Strathnairn and Strathdearn area, the proposal is to access from the A9 using an established road for other windfarms. At scoping.

11. Roads

Recalibration of speed signs still to be done – Cllr Fraser will chase this

Complaints had gone in about the potholes at Compass and HC were out doing drainage works this week but if water coming out of Compass not dealt with, the issue will remain

Other areas reported by Admin – sunken manhole at Errogie, water crossing the road - road to lower foyers, near Calanour junction and Easter Drummond

12. Correspondences

All covered

13. Up and coming events

Community pathways App day 8th Feb @ Wildside

14. AOCB

CL raised that a domestic property is now a rental in Foyers; planning permission not required but a short term lease licence is. Checks to be made with licence department

Simpson home sign has been reported by Admin and they have said they will remove

CL raised about businesses using the bottle banks; they are entitled to use them but only ones that are paying HC to collect their commercial waste

15. Next meeting

Tuesday 25th February 2025 7pm @ the BCC Hub

Thanks to the Community Trust for allowing the CC to use their conferencing facilities, the CC are now able to rotate meetings and the next one will be at the BCC Hub followed by Stratherrick hall in March