

Ardgay & District Community Council

Draft Minutes of meeting held on Monday, 9th April 2012 at 7pm in Ardgay Hall

Present: Elected members: David Hannah, Chair (DH), Peter Armstrong, Secretary (PA), Alan Lawrence, Treasurer (AL), Phil Olson (PO), Marion Turner (MT), Bob Sendall (BS), David Laver (DL)

Also present: Highland Councillors Linda Munro (LM) and George Farlow (GF)

Invited Guests: Natasha Lawrence and Georgina Bloomfield, AES

Members of the public: Robert Howden, Michael Baird, Michael Healy (all of KoSAB), Quan Trinh, Robert Marwick, Gregor Laing (both at 7.30pm)

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder (MG)

Apologies: Betty Wright (BW)

Items 1/2. Welcome/Apologies(see above)/Glenmorrie presentation. Chair David Hannah welcomed everyone and invited the Glenmorrie (AES) representatives to address the meeting.

Natasha Lawrence is the Development Manager for AES, Georgina Bloomfield is the Communications Manager. Wind Energy, 51% owned by AES, is the company which carries out the initial stages of development and administration of new windfarms. Once Planning Permission is granted, AES buys the development and continues with the building and setting up of the project. The remaining percentage of Wind Energy is owned by UK shareholders. The company held two exhibitions locally, the first in 2010 and then in May 2011; 2,500 invitations were issued along with local advertising. The attendance was low but Natasha stated that of those who attended and left comments, 70% were in favour of the development. The proposal has been amended to take into account some of the objections raised including the removal of nine turbines from the eastern end of the windfarm and one borrow pit has been dropped. Large scale pictures of the proposals were passed round. The company feels that viewpoint issues have been addressed by the removal of the nine turbines. An addendum will be submitted to Planning and a 28 day consultation period will begin in early May when comments are invited from all interested local parties. The proposal goes before Highland Council in December and will then pass to the Scottish Government for final decision. Specifically referring to the objections raised by A&DCC, Natasha listed the actions taken: cumulative effect – the reduction of turbines and ensuring that all remaining ones are within the approved area of development; tourism – working with Edderton CC to promote community/heritage/community benefit, e.g. new signposts, plaques, and funds for local projects. AES would work with A&DCC on these and similar plans; rights of way/wild lands – the company has liaised with SNH and their plans are apparently deemed acceptable; aviation lights – these will be infra red and not visible to the naked eye. There will be no other external lighting therefore no light pollution; access track – Natasha stated all the tracks will be at least 50m from any water course. A water management plan will be instituted with independent monitoring in the pre-construction year, during and after construction. Talks have been held with Highland Salmon regarding the Wester Fearn burn and liaison will continue throughout as work progresses. When questioned as to any SEPA involvement, Natasha said there had not been any as yet. A peat management plan will also be implemented. The setting up of a local liaison group was proposed as this has proved most beneficial with regard to the Achany and Rosehall developments. Georgina indicated the company would be happy to do this. Asked how the cumulative impact could be so easily dismissed, Natasha replied that the company would work within the Highland Council designated areas for development as sensitively as possible. On grid connection it appears that no route is yet decided; the company carrying out this work, SHETL (Scottish hydro Electric Ltd, a division of SSE), indicates the earliest connection would be October 2016 but more likely in 2017. The access to the grid would be at the new Alness sub station. Undergrounding the lines may be considered. SHETL also has to go through Planning procedures to gain permission. From the floor, Robert Howden asked about the noise issues. Natasha indicated no problems were anticipated as there are no dwelling houses within the 2km approved distance. At that distance any noise heard is deemed to be 'background'. The Chair thanked the AES representatives who left at 7.20pm. Continuing discussion centred on the access road and water issues as raised at previous meetings with specific regard to the fish farm. With the removal of the turbines at the eastern end, it was suggested that a new road is not required for this development; the existing access for Beinn Tharsuinn would be adequate. Cllr Munro offered to check out information regarding SEPA requirements for water conditions and to liaise with Robert Marwick. Thanking the CC for its support, Mr Marwick and Mr Laing left the meeting at 8.10pm.

As part of this general discussion on windfarms, members of the Kyle of Sutherland Against Braemore group also addressed the meeting, at the invitation of the Chair, between 7.20 and 7.30pm. An amended application for Planning permission has been submitted for Braemore, the only real change being the removal of three turbines. Little consideration has been given to the noise issues which will be immense; 83 dwelling houses are within the recommended 2km distance from the nearest turbine. The trees which are indicated as 'screening' the development will be felled within the lifetime of the windfarm. The cumulative impact will be intolerable. The effect on tourism is disregarded, with no reference made to the 125,000 visitors per year to Shin Falls alone. The KoSAB asked that the CC submit a further objection. It was agreed to take a vote on the proposal to do so at the end of the meeting.

Item 3. Minutes of March meeting. MG listed the amendments made after which the minutes from 12th March were accepted as a true and accurate record; proposed: Marion Turner; seconded: Bob Sendall.

Item 4. Matters arising from March minutes. (1) Station road junction. David Laver indicated that Simon Young, HC Chief Engineer, is supportive of the idea for changes to the roadway but funding has to be found. DL has so far failed to reach any ScotRail representative but will keep trying. He will advise further at next meeting. **DL Action.**

(2) Signatories. Changes are now being processed by Bank of Scotland. **(3) Phone boxes.** Morag Zoska, Amatnatua, has offered to help look after the box at Amat. DH will liaise with her. **DH Action.** **(4) Logo for Minutes.** Peter, Marion and Phil continue to work on this. **PA Action.** **(5) Flower tubs.** Now dealt with; paid for. **(6) Dounreay.**

Cllr Munro has established that no decision has yet been taken regarding transportation of 'exotic fuels'. Sue Mitchell, UKAEA Public Relations Department advised Cllr Munro that should the NDA announce that they will transport exotic fuels by road then CCs should contact the NDA to enquire about community benefit. The contact is strategy@nda.gov.uk **(7) Flag raising.** The reply to the CC's enquiry about the number of expected attendees indicates around five or six from the Ardgay area. If it can be ascertained who would be going, the CC could arrange suitable transport as none is being arranged by the organisers. Secretary to write again to Anne Macrae, Clerk to the Lieutenancy. A suggested donation of £100 to the costs of the event will be made; Marion offered to put up posters locally to test local interest. **PA/AL/MT Action.** **(8) Scottish Community Councils conference.** This event, on April 18th, is now fully booked. DH will attend and report next month. **DH Action.** **(9) Core Paths.** Matt Dent has confirmed that later in the year he will be considering how to use European funding; possibly the path and bridge at Bad Voon could be restored. Matt is also checking out the problem with the gate at Gledfield Estate. **(10) Tuiteam bridge.** BS has not found anyone to admit to owning the bridge. Advised to contact Historic Scotland as it has previously stated the bridge is Highland Council property. DH said that the bridge is now heavily cordoned off to prevent use. **BS Action.**

Item 5. Correspondence. PA listed incoming communications. Reply received re comments on **Coire na Cloiche** planning application. HC advises that as it is joined to Gledfield school, the **school house** can only be rented to a teacher due to child protection legislation. The building requires extensive and expensive repairs which are unlikely to be carried out meantime. If a separate entry with fencing was in place, perhaps the building could be rented to others. Cllr Munro will enquire regarding cyclical checks on the standard and maintenance of the building. **ScotRail** writes that it would be happy for adoption of the railway station with Jeanie Sparling taking on the care and maintenance of flower tubs/beds. No volunteers came forward after the recent appeal; Peter will help Jeanie. A recent incident arose when two passengers missed the early train from Ardgay as they were unaware that it left from the opposite platform than usual. A notice is required to indicate this; one is in place at Lairg. Secretary will request this from ScotRail. **PA Action.** **Data Protection Act.** Paperwork now here to register the CC at a cost of £35. This will be done. **PA/AL Action.** **Ardcronie traffic lights.** Awaiting further update from Highland Council. Damage was caused by a falling tree which resulted in a landslip under the road barrier. Discussions will now also involve the railway maintenance authority. CC will keep a watching brief. **NATO exercise.** Notification received of exercise running between 11th and 26th April. **SSE** has announced that it will operate its own 'in house' community benefit scheme having found SCF management too restrictive. As SCF is a registered charity it is bound by OSCAR regulations which lack flexibility, e.g. it is not allowed to fund business enterprise. The Chair will discuss this with SCF. **DH Action.** A two day course regarding **Social Enterprise** will be held in Lairg on 16/17 April. Information at www.academySSEA.org Information received regarding **Scottish Rights of Way** organisation. Agreed to subscribe as this has proved helpful in the past. Fee £20. **PA/AL Action.**

Item 6. Windfarms update. Glenmorie – see Item 1 above; **Coire na Cloiche** – nothing further meantime;

Rosehall - last meeting of liaison group will be in June; **Glencassley** – nothing further meantime; **Sallachy** - to address CC in due course; **Dalnessie** – nothing further meantime.

Item 7. KOSDT update. Reports will be received every six months. Events calendar is on the website but as not everyone has internet access it will be suggested that posters should also be displayed locally. Members are being sought for the Trust, application forms available from Lynsey Burns at the KCS office in Bonar Bridge. A form was passed round seeking signatures to support a proposal to purchase the former paper shop in Bonar Bridge for use as a community shop/office with the flat above being available for rent to local people. It is understood that the asking price for the building is £35,000, for sale by the Bank of Scotland.

A general discussion covered possibilities of seeking community benefit from sources other than wind farms, for example timber operations. A long term pro-active approach should be adopted perhaps taking ideas to developers rather than waiting to be approached with schemes already well in hand. Several areas have successfully begun operating in this manner; Cllr Munro would be pleased to introduce CC members to those who have. A social enterprise trust is one idea but a business enterprise should also be considered. Engagement with the local community is essential to bring new people into plans for taking the area forward. VG-ES and other groups will be running 'developing volunteers' sessions. An 'Enterprise Day' might be arranged.

Item 8. Treasurer's report. AL passed round the Statement of Account as at 31st March and advised that the auditor will complete his checking of this shortly. The usual charitable donation of £50 to the auditor was approved. Alan was commended for his excellent work as Treasurer. The annual accounts will be approved at the next meeting. The balance in the Treasurer's Account stands at £1,441.86 with one outstanding cheque of £313.20, the Project Account stands at £4,384.68 and the Toilet's Account at £7.65.

Item 9. Any other competent business. Councillors Munro and Farlow thanked the CC for its support during the last five years. This was their last attendance before the Highland Council elections in May. **War Memorial.** The Chair indicated three new plaques awarded for the care and upkeep of the Ardgay War Memorial had been put up in the hall. **Wards.** PO suggested liaising with other CCs with a view to requesting a review by the Boundaries Commission of Council wards. His proposal to write to The First Minister Alex Salmond, John Thurso MP and Bruce Crawford MP was seconded by David Laver, approved by all. Sutherland's identity is being lost, distances involved for officials are immense and transportation costs ever increasing. There is a clear need to revert to relevant District Councils. **PO/PA Action.**

Item 10. Braemore objection. The vote to write a letter of objection to the amended planning application was carried. The Secretary will send the letter. **PA Action.**

Date of next meeting. The next meeting will be held on Monday 14th May 2012 at 7pm in Ardgay Hall.

Meeting closed at 9.10pm.