

ARDGAY & DISTRICT COMMUNITY COUNCIL



Minutes of meeting held on Monday, 9th March 2015 in Ardgay Public Hall at 7.00pm

Present: Elected & co-opted members: David Hannah, Chair (DH), Marion Turner, Vice Chair (MT), Alan Lawrence, Treasurer, (AL), Teresa Langley, Secretary, (TL), Phil Olson (PO), Betty Wright (BW), Bob Sendall (BS), Silvia Muras (SM)

Apologies: Highland Councillor George Farlow (GF)

Invited guest: Peter Marshall, (PM) Muirhall Energy, with Sean MacDougall

Police Scotland: No representative; report with apologies submitted post-meeting

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder (MG)

Also present: Anne Henderson, Steve Buskie, Claire Newman, Keith Williams, David Rankin, Fiona Vestey, Craig Ross, Robert Howden, Vicky Whittock, Colin Gilmour

Items 1/2/3/4. Welcome/Apologies (as above)/Present/Presentation by Peter Marshall, Muirhall Energy.

Chair David Hannah welcomed the good turnout to the meeting with representatives present from Ardgay, Culrain, Linside, Culrain, Strathoykel, Strathkyle, Inchnadamph and Benmore Assynt who had all come to hear and question Peter Marshall of Muirhall Energy regarding the proposed windfarm development at Caplich. PM gave a background statement regarding the company and its previous windfarm developments in South Lanarkshire. He highlighted the company's views with regard to siting of this development, concerns for the River Oykel and the importance of discussions with local residents and businesses. The site is on land approved for such development by the Scottish Government although it is agreed that it borders 'wild land' boundaries. It is situated between the two forestry plantations of Benmore and Clashmore. The land is currently farmed with cattle by a resident farmer, is drained, grazed and stocked for deer. The company seeks to work with the community and to this end has set up various possible community schemes. The CC is invited to buy into a shared ownership scheme, either itself or through a nominated organisation such as KoSDT. Community benefit payments will be made at £5,000 per installed megawatt and a Recreational Enhancement Fund will be established and used to improve walks, bothies, equestrian pursuits, signs and general promotion of the windfarm area for outdoor activities. This REF has been used in windfarms in the south of Scotland. A fuel poverty assistance scheme has also been established locally for those who qualify.

Chair DH then opened the meeting to the public to put questions to PM. These covered a wide range of issues including some regarding the financial viability of the company and its ability to meet the promises it is making regarding community benefits, the ruination of the unique landscape, damage to the environment, visibility of access roads when the forests are cleared, damage to the infrastructure by heavy transports, contamination of the River Oykel and subsequent serious implications for the fishing industry, adverse effects on tourism and loss of related business. PM answered as many points as possible but it was not possible to address any of the issues in detail due to the lack of time available. He was encouraged to arrange a separate public meeting, in Rosehall, in the near future to deal with these and any other points more fully. The feeling of the majority present tonight was clearly against this development with a very small minority in favour however the CC made clear its position of neutrality as it is aware that this issue splits the community. As a statutory consultee it has a duty to reflect public opinion and convey that to the authorities. Every individual resident has the opportunity through the planning consultation to make their views known. Decisions are in the hands of The Highland Council and the Scottish Government. Should the development be approved the CC would be the vehicle for the management of community benefit payments. PM agreed to arrange a public meeting and details will be circulated as soon as they are available.

(Post CC meeting – the Caplich public meeting has been arranged for Wednesday 1st April 2015, 5pm – 7pm in Rosehall Village Hall.)

Item 5. Representation by residents of Culrain re flooding and pylon issues. Anne Henderson and Steve Buskie presented concerns from residents of Culrain that the proposed upgrading of the pylon route will be directly through Culrain. Those who attended the recent roadshow consultation by SSE found it to be seriously lacking in accurate information, appallingly unclear maps with no details available from the companies representatives who appeared sadly lacking in local knowledge. Landowners, over whose property the pylon route will go (and the existing line does go) have had no direct contact from SSE and therefore no discussions about changes or siting of pylons. It appears that SSE has opted for its 'central route' taking no regard to local concerns or wishes. The CC has already made submission stating

Minutes approved 11 May 2015

its preference for the 'green central route' to the west of the existing line which is expected to be taken down once the new route is in place. MT will liaise with Culrain residents and will send a further submission noting the concerns of local residents. European subsidies are dependent on the land being available for agriculture at all times but it will be out of commission when the pylon work is in progress. SSE appears to have taken no notice of this issue. Expected timeframe for this work is 2019/2020 but all details must be clearly established before then. **MT Action.**

Flooding. Recent comments regarding the lack of flooding at the Culrain junction have aroused local outrage. The almost constant flood water causes serious impact on the road, nearby fields and the access to them and the car park at the village hall. A local resident has taken matters in hand and put in drainage which has cleared the road to some extent but subsequently has made the flooding in the field worse. The landowner has put in rubble drains but these are inadequate to deal with the amount of water. THC must take on the responsibility to put a culvert through the field to the nearby lochan. The landowner is happy for this to be done but THC has shown no interest in carrying out the work. One elderly local resident is often confined to her home when the flooding makes it impossible for her to get out without wading along the edge of the roadway.

Damage to bridge in Culrain. The parapet of the bridge over the railway has been damaged on several occasions leaving a dangerous situation with a significant drop to the railway line below. Cattle are regularly moved across this bridge and could easily be lost over the edge. This is a health and safety issue for people and livestock alike. Secretary will write to THC on this issue. **TL Action.**

Further points raised regarding Culrain covered the footpath fence at the railway footbridge which is now collapsing and also all the walking routes in the Carbisdale woods which are blocked by storm damage. The Culrain representatives were encouraged to consider attending the next CC meeting on 11th May which will be held in Culrain Hall and also to try to find at least one resident who would join the CC. Culrain has been without direct representation for some years.

Item 6. Minutes of February meeting. The Minutes of the February meeting were approved as a true and accurate record; proposed: Phil Olson, seconded: Betty Wright.

Item 7. Matters arising. (a) Invershin Cycle ramp. Recent difficulties with unexpected extra costs have been dealt with as Sustrans had money to cover these. It is therefore understood that no further obstacles stand in the way of the ramp being installed. Update at next meeting. **Agenda item. TL Action.**

(b) Village Flower Tubs – discussed under Item 11, Treasurer's report. (c) 20mph sign. Mr and Mrs Langley still await contact from Hugh Logan, THC Senior Engineer. All relevant information has been sent to Cllrs Munro and Farlow and the Health & Safety Officer for Schools in support of the Primary School's PTA attempts to have the signs placed in the appropriate positions. The Head Teacher must drive this issue forward; a full risk assessment on all routes to the school should be carried out and submitted with copies to THC Safe Routes to School personnel and THC Councillors. Car parking issues should be included with the suggestion that the neighbouring field could be used as a car park. **TL Action.**

Item 8. Police report. The Police report by PC Dave Thompson had been submitted, with apologies for non-attendance, by email but was not accessed until after the meeting. A total of thirteen calls in the Ardgay area were logged between 1st February and 1st March. These were made up of eight road traffic related matters, one suspicious vehicle/person, 1 false call of good intent, and three miscellaneous.

Item 9. Newsletter. (SM) The next edition will be ready next week and given out to CCs for delivery. One hundred entries have been received in the children's' art competition. The Ardgay Public Hall has been booked for the morning of 28th March with prizes/eggs arranged. Application will be made to the Rock by Sea Fund to cover costs. Posters will be displayed locally. DH volunteered to help on the day. Good results from the distribution survey but not yet studied in detail.

Item 10. Secretary's report. (TL) Scotways subscription due – passed to Treasurer. MT has completed the THC Service Point consultation after approval by CC members. It was made clear that the lack of statistics given by THC was notable. Service Points also act as local tourist information points and as such perform a very valuable service to the tourism industry locally. Friends of the Far North Line Seminar: recently attended by PO and MT, this highlighted the lack of investment in the line over the last fifty years. The funds in place for Dounreay decommissioning could be utilised for improvements on the line which is used for that project's transportation. At the very least, more passing points could be installed on the single track working areas.

Item 11. Treasurer's report. (AL) Treasurer's account cleared balance stands at £1568.97 with outstanding cheques to the value of £129.30. Projects account stands at £7534.65 with outstanding cheques amounting to £479.40. The Toilets account balance is £11.65. AL and MT have worked to establish the need to amalgamate the three accounts into one in

Minutes approved 11 May 2015

order to simplify the accounting to meet THC accounting requirements at the end of the financial year. This move was unanimously approved. This year the CC has reduced the number of meetings held in order to reduce costs but figures still show that the CC will operate at a loss as costs outstrip the grant from THC. An application to BTWF for £2,000 for local amenity improvements in 2015 was proposed and approved. An honorarium of £100 was agreed to cover the work and summer watering for the village floral displays. AL and MT were commended for their work on the financial situation.

Item 12. Highland Councillor's report. Nothing in GF's absence.

Item 13. Windfarms. Nothing relevant other than the Caplich discussions at the start of the meeting.

Item 14. Any other competent business. THC was congratulated on siting the new dog waste bag dispenser at the Oakwood walks. Ardgay Hill THC marked footpath. A padlock is in place on the gate. Matt Dent will be asked about this once again.

Sutherland Public Transport Consultation, submissions due by March 31st. Everyone was encouraged to complete the Survey Monkey online questionnaire. Litter pick suggested for this spring – discuss at next meeting. **Agenda item. TL**

Action.

Village flower tubs. SSE Community Volunteers Team will be coming to help change over the soil and plants to the new tubs on Thursday 19th March from 10.00am. Starting at Ardgay Public Hall, all help welcome.

Item 15. Date, time and place of next meeting. The next meeting will be held on 11th May at 7pm in Culrain Village Hall.

Meeting closed at 9.25pm.