

Ardgay & District Community Council

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Minutes of meeting held on Monday 13th November 2017 in Ardgay Hall at 7.00pm

Minutes approved 11/12/2017

Present: Betty Wright, Chair (BW), Silvia Muras, Vice Chair (SM), Marion Turner, Secretary/Treasurer (MT), Andy Wright (AW), Rob Pope (RP), Buster Crabb (BC)

Invited guests: Angus Elder (AE) and John Moisey (JM), of Muirden Energy

Also present: Phil Olson, Lucy Norval, Alan Lawrence, Carol Gilmour, David Mackay, Tracey Smith, Robert Sawyer

Police Scotland: PC Dave Thompson (DT)

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder

Apologies: Highland Councillor Linda Munro (LM), Leslie Pope (LP)

Items 1/2. Welcome/Apologies (as above) Chair Betty Wright welcomed everyone, especially those attending with regard to the presentation from Muirden Energy. She invited the representatives to address the meeting.

Item 3. Presentation by Muirden Energy. Angus Elder introduced himself and John Moisey on behalf of the company and indicated that they would be the contacts for anyone wishing to liaise with Muirden Energy regarding the proposed windfarm development at Meall Buidhe on the Croick Estate. He displayed a map which showed the boundary of the estate and the intended area for use during construction and siting of the windfarm. The company will work with the estate which is seeking to diversify and to sustain the estate. AE gave a brief history of the company (information is available on their website: www.meallbuidhewindfarm.co.uk) The site was identified as having many positive attributes for wind energy such as high average wind speeds, landform screening, separation from residential properties, no onsite ecological designation, existing access from Strathoykel utilising forestry tracks whenever possible. Twenty-one turbines are proposed with a 3MW generating capacity. Tower heights between 69-78m, blade circumference 82m. The Wild Land restrictions on the south west of the site has required the siting of the development on the north east of the ridge line. The nearest designated Wild Land on the other side is to the north east beyond Rosehall. Although the overall area of the site is much larger than the area for the proposed siting of the turbines, this is to allow for establishing the most suitable access for the various stages of the development not for extending the windfarm at a later date. Access will be via Ardgay avoiding public road use as much as possible. Issues were raised from the public regarding the condition of a stretch of the public road and the unmade tracks proposed for use, which are already much damaged by the timber operations in the area. AE stressed that the company would be liable for all repair/reinstatement of roadways, legally bound to meet obligations and conditions laid down by THC. All roadways should be improved before access is required for the development and retained afterwards. The timeline indicated by AE showed the start of assessments for the EIA in September 2016, Scoping report to Scottish Government June 2017, public consultations in autumn 2017 and spring 2018 after which the findings of the EIA and feedback will be incorporated prior to submitting application to Scottish Government in autumn 2018. The first of the public consultations will take place in Ardgay on 22nd November between 1.30 and 6.30pm with another in Rosehall on the 23rd November 2.30 – 7.30pm. These sessions will be advertised locally. The EIA covers the various impacts such as visual, ecological, ornithological, noise, hydrology, peat and geology, archaeological and cultural heritage, transport and access, shadow flicker and aviation. A map showing various viewpoints was shown, 12 -14 viewpoints indicated; the company will add more viewpoints if asked. Photo montage should show realistic impressions and without screening by trees. It was pointed out that on the map there was no indication of the Achany and Rosehall windfarms nor the recently approved Braemore development. Also there was no mention of the proposals for Caplich and Braelangwell. AE stated the map and EIA will be updated to show these. JM advised that the machines to be used will be of the latest technological design and will be the quietest available although from the floor it was noted that the noise issues come from the wind passing over the top of the turbines and through the blades rather than the machinery inside the turbines. Latest blades are designed with serrated edges which effects a major noise reduction. This would pose an added danger to bird life in the opinion of some present. The siting of this development between two very important designated areas of special scientific interest was questioned with AE stating

that all possible precautions will be taken. Asked about the connection to the grid AE said the company is in discussion with SSE on all aspects for this but was unable to elaborate at this stage. When pressed he stated that Invershin Power Station would be the connection point with cabling to it underground whenever possible. The cables would presumably have to cross the river prior to reaching the substation. The high levels of fuel poverty in the area were mentioned and in response AE indicated that Muirden Energy is keen to utilise the latest technology, looking at energy storage and ways for distribution options to benefit local fuel prices. Transportation of turbines and blades on the narrow single-track roads and tracks and over the various bridges is a major concern to the public. JM stated the company will be bound by THC decisions on which roads can/cannot be used. Asked if local materials will be used to create the concrete bases on site, AE said that surveys to establish local borrow pits are being done along with peat surveys. Shared ownership schemes will be offered to both individuals and local trusts wishing to invest in the windfarm. Details can be had from the company and will be available at the public consultation sessions. After a short break for the Police Report (see Item 6), the impacts on tourism and businesses operating in this sphere were raised. The company was urged to use up to date surveys as older ones, such as the Moffat survey in the 1990s, are no longer relevant. AE said that several surveys would be studied, some currently being produced. Other concerns raised by the public included the disproportionate number of windfarms surrounding the local area which will have a major knock-on effect on tourism businesses, the 'ring' of turbines interrupting many flight paths of the indigenous wild bird populations, effects on the many water courses through the developed areas, and the actual working time of the turbines, as witnessed by the many occasions when the existing turbines are not turning. AE stated that individual agreements with the National Grid are now very different from when those windfarms were established which should lead to maximum usage of the turbines on Meall Buidhe. The case for the positive impacts locally of the windfarms was made with AW reminded the meeting of the many local projects currently running thanks to community benefit, the jobs created, issues already addressed and pressed the company to take all such possibilities into account when dealing with the local communities. Chair expressed thanks to AE and JM for their presentation and willingness to engage in open discussion with the community. In reply AE encouraged feedback to the company directly, through the CC or by attending the upcoming public consultation sessions. This item concluded at 8.15pm.

Item 4. Minutes of last meeting. Following a short break the meeting reconvened at 8.25pm. The minutes of the September meeting were approved as a true and accurate record, proposed: Silvia Muras; seconded: Marion Turner.

Item 5. Matters arising. (1) Seats on Ardgay/Bonar straight. Cllr Munro has raised the formal request to change the speed limit. Two letters to THC from CC have as yet gone unanswered. Further letter will be sent to Graham MacKenzie, Head of Roads Dept. **MT Action.** It is understood that staff at The Hub have started a petition and the CC will gather examples of other villages with long speed restricted stretches on their outskirts. Older residents remember seats in place along the straight. RP reported the lights in the 30mph signs at the approach to Ardgay from Bonar and approaching Bonar from Lairg are not working. **MT Action.** (2) Poling station review. THC will accept comments until the end of January 2018. Discuss at next meeting. **Agenda item/BW Action.** (3) CC Insurance via THC. Colin MacKenzie THC has advised there will be little change. THC will still deduct the premium before paying the annual grant, but the documents will be sent direct to the CC. (4) Culrain station. LM to be asked if City Region Deal can be accessed to provide the essential electronic signage at Culrain and Ardgay stations. **BW/LM Action.** Another letter will be sent to Scottish Government Transport Directive and Customer Relations at Scot Rail. **MT Action.** (5) Defibrillators. Grant application was successful. SM will invite Rick Laird, Scottish Ambulance and Jason Gardner, Fire Service to December meeting. **Agenda item. SM/BW Action.** (6 /7) Barbed wire at path at Culrain/Kincardine Hill road. No update on either item.

Item 6. Police report. PC Dave Thomson had arrived at 7.50. His report noted thirty-two incidents, 75% of the thirteen traffic issues were of speeding, five alarm calls, eight assistance calls, three animal related, one suspicious person, one weather related. BW stated that there had been an attempted break-in at the Gearrhoille Community Wood storage container. BW noted that she had reported this last item but was dissatisfied with the response from the 101 call centre in Inverness. DT advised all callers to 101 to get a reference number for the call as this will ensure call is logged and follow up occurs. DT left at 7.55pm.

Item 7. Chairperson's report. (1) Leslie Pope has recently stood down as Secretary and was warmly thanked for work over the last year and a half. MT will carry on with Secretarial work meantime and was also thanked for adding this to her workload as Treasurer. (2) An increase in the remuneration for the Minutes Secretary was approved in line with the rate paid by both Creich and Lairg CCs. Proposed: BW; seconded MT. MG was thanked for her continued work with the CC. Consideration will be given to applying to Beinn Tharsuinn Fund for a contribution to the CC's administration costs. (3) Plant tubs. Jean Richardson, Cherry Alexander. Jenny Betts and the Growing Group have provided excellent floral displays without incurring large costs. There may be money left in the Regeneration Project which could be accessed to

update all the tubs and displays in the newly created Drivers Square. Discuss in the spring. **Agenda item for March/April.** Coastal defence works. No implications for the community. Reply with no comment. **MT Action.**

Item 8. Secretary's report. All relevant email correspondence has been circulated including the Weekly Planning Lists. No action required.

Item 9. Treasurer's report. (MT) The 27 October 2017 balance at the bank is £20,079.89 of which £19,326.31 are restricted funds. The Admin/General Fund has £ 753.58 available to carry out the business of the CC. The balances of the restricted funds are: Toilet Caretaking - £329.76, BTWF - Community Projects - £2,145.15, Newsletter - £3,2728.80, BNO - £12,452.20, EON Path - £670.40. The toilets will be closed at the end of the month with the water turned off. THC funding of the facility is to be reviewed next year.

Item 10. Matters raised by local residents. SM had circulated comments received via Facebook. MSP advised CC that the Scottish Education Bill is open for comments till January 2018. Secretary will continue to circulate press releases from Scottish Government.

Item 11. Christmas tree and lights. AW advised that all the lights are working bar two. Meeting to be held on 14th November with The Hub, KoSDT and GCWA. 'Santa's Magical Woodland' is proposed again following the success last year. Once again AW will acquire a tree for the centre of the village, but this should fall to someone else next year. Discussion with Robbie Gunn, THC Lighting, could result in Christmas lights remaining on 24/7 during the season.

Item 12. Sutherland Community Partnership. MT attended the last session. As this is a 'meeting held in public' and not a 'public meeting there is little opportunity for public comment or involvement. Christine Ross, VG-ES, is the only Sutherland resident on the panel. Most of those attending are doing so in work time and therefore paid to be there whereas all others must do so at their own expense. This does little to actually involve communities. Discuss with LM at next meeting. **LM Action.**

Item 10. Regular updates:

(1) **Planning.** Nothing relevant this month.

(2) **Newsletter.** (SM) Thursday 23rd November is copy date for all contributions, adverts and letters to the Editor. The aim is to distribute the hard copies during week commencing 11th December.

(3) **Ardgay Regeneration.** Project proceeding very well. An Open Day is arranged for 27/28th November.

(4) **Broadband.** Nil of note.

(5) **Windfarms.** (1) Braemore windfarm has received Scottish Government consent. Were Community Benefit discussions were held when the development was first proposed? MT/BW to contact Creich and Lairg CC to ascertain current position. BW will circulate to CCs relevant documents. **BW Action.** (2) Sallachy. MT/BW attended discussions regarding community ownership. Developers are keen to progress this as it may help with Planning Applications. Also for possible discussion with Lairg and Creich CCs. **BW Action.**

(6) **Kyle of Sutherland Development Trust.** Nothing relevant.

Item 11. Highland Council. Nothing in LM's absence.

Item 12. Any other competent business. (1) None raised.

Item 13. Date and time of next meeting. The meeting will be held on Monday 11th December at 7pm in **Ardgay Public Hall.**

Private Session. Beinn Tharsuinn/Beinn nan Oighrean Community Benefit awards.

Application by the Ardgay Public Hall received an award of £1,750 from BTWF and also £250 from BnO towards the refurbishment and decorating of the gents' toilet. Invershin Hall Committee received £146.47 from BnO towards balance bike sessions.

Meeting closed 10.06pm.