

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)
Meeting held by Zoom at 7.00pm
Wednesday 4th October 2023

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Sue Whiting (Secretary), Steve Schnabel (Treasurer), Alpin Stewart, Tom Forrest, Mat Webster.

11 members of the public.

1. Apologies – Colin Stevenson, Maud McIntyre, Councillor Chris Birt

2. Minutes of the meeting on 6th September 2023

Approved.

3. Matters arising from meeting on 6th September

Community Council elections - As agreed, SW, MM and others publicised the elections on noticeboards, social media and elsewhere. The closing date for self-nominations was 3 October.

** Post meeting update – On 5 October, HC published the names of 7 people who completed the self-nomination form and are therefore elected unopposed. These are all the current TKCC members except Mat Webster (see further below)

Telecoms masts – Shared Rural Network (SRN) – CH is in touch with Wester Ross Biosphere (WRB) who have serious concerns about the damage the masts could do. They believe a proper community consultation must take place before any decisions are made. WRB have met with the Scottish Government Digital Directorate to emphasise this, and are trying to meet with SRN to do the same.

MM was awaiting confirmation from HC Planning Department on whether the applications will be permitted development. Update deferred until the next meeting. *Action: MM*

HC mobile library – Cllr Birt had agreed to take up with Steve Walsh the request from communities for a proper consultation about the future of the service. Update deferred until the next meeting. *Action: CB*

GALE – CH wrote as agreed to the directors of GALE to express our concerns that again, GALE were proposing changes to their Articles without any consultation with people most affected, namely residents and organisations in Kinlochewe and Slattadale. These changes have now been passed at an EGM.

GALE's previous Articles did not specifically include Kinlochewe or Slattadale in GALE's operating area or area of benefit. Nevertheless, the Chair of GALE responded by saying they have been operating in Kinlochewe and Slattadale since 2001. He did not address the issue of no consultation.

Gairloch CC contacted TKCC to express their concerns about the lack of consultation. They also said that GALE has recently published a Community Action Plan that includes priorities/ actions for Kinlochewe. GALE has not sent the plan to TKCC and no-one at the meeting knew about it. It was agreed we should ask GALE for a copy. *Action: CH*

Highland Council, Torridon School – AS reported that HC has now formally decided to close the school.

Blocked drains in Fasaig - TF has asked Andrew Bone (HC Roads department) about the blocked drain in Fasaig – it hasn't been done yet so he will ask again. *Action: TF*

4. Treasurer's report

Only one change from the last report – a £50 donation received from the Alliance of Scottish Rainforests as a thank you for a meeting with CH and MW.

Current bank account balance - £2,205.65.

5. Bakkafrost Area Manager Skye and Mainland - Douglas Macleod

Douglas had requested to speak at the meeting for the purpose of good neighbour rapport and as a means of addressing any problems or questions.

He said Bakkafrost acquired what used to be Scottish Salmon Company 2 years ago and became Bakkafrost Scotland 6 months ago. They operate 2 farms in Loch Torridon which employ 14 full time employees - one at Sgeir Dughail, near Lower Diabaig, the other in Kenmore Bay. Sgeir Dughail site was granted ASC certification in March 2023..

Both sites have been empty (fallow) since June 2023, they plan to restock in Dec 2023 – Jan 2024.

Treatments for lice/gill disease are made in freshwater on boats and investments have been made in seal pro netting. Further investment is planned long term. Nets are cleaned on site every 10 days. Feed barges are equipped with internet so they can be serviced remotely for feeding if adverse weather. Company policy is to keep sites clean and tidy, and clear up waste on beaches.

Accommodation for staff is difficult – the company have put up 3 modular units in Lochcarron to accommodate staff.

There is a Community Fund available to provide up to 10k for local events/causes. Open to anyone within 20 miles of a site, but some flexibility.

Opened to questions - TKCC members and the public:

Q1: Where does the fresh water come from that is used in the boats?

A: Well boats have desalination plants on them for sea lice or gill treatments and well boats then use the fresh water. They have 2 boats that can treat 200 tons of fish per hour. For lice treatment – can extend treatment time or use a flushing treatment on the boat. Lice that are knocked off are collected within the boat. No chemicals used in 2023 and intend to do that going forward.

Q2: There is regular community swimming in Diabaig bay, and due to the location of the Sgeir Dughail farm, where is the water for the lice treatment discharged?

A: Usually, they discharge and regenerate (replenish) the water out of the loch, from boats past Red Point. Regeneration is better in deeper water because it is cleaner.

Q3: In the channel north of Ardherslaig, concerned about sightings of a well boat discharging. Is this permissible?

A: Boat may have been flushing – taking on salt water from the loch, not discharging.

Q4: Concerned about impact of chemicals used by fish farms on swimmers. Can Bakkafrost inform about types of chemicals used and safety especially for children?

A: Assured no chemicals used this year but happy to supply information about type and quantity of those used. Signage is put on cages to indicate when treatment is in progress.

Q5: How many fish are in the pens and how many wild fish are in the rivers in the locality.?

A: Torridon farms average 40,000 fish per cage, depending on biomass. The company has data on wild fish which DM can provide.

Q6 : Both fish farms have been fallow since June and figures from Scottish Aquaculture are up to June, therefore if no chemicals were used in 2023, does that account for the very high mortality rates at Sgeir Dughail?

A: Mortalities mainly due to gill disease – tried fresh water treatment to clean up gills but didn't give the results they wanted so they harvested 6 months earlier than planned in June.

Q7: Is the policy to not use chemicals but accept high mortality rates?

A: Policy is to reduce the length of time fish are in the sea. The Applecross RAS (Recirculating Aquaculture System) on land facility currently has 300 million fish. They are increasing size of smolts when putting them into the sea to about 90g each – target by 2025 is to put them in at 500g. Aim is to shorten the time in the sea to around 10 to 12 months to allow a longer fallow period over the normal 2 year cycle, and to take out the risk of a second summer period. Found that fish are compromised in summer one by jelly fish/plankton. In summer two they are further compromised by the same issues, so if fish are not in the sea in summer two it should reduce mortality/reduce treatments/reduce handling and give a better chance for the seabed to recover.

Q8: Mowi also operate in Loch Torridon – at the moment Mowi and Bakkafrost are supposed to co-ordinate fallow periods , how will that be done if smolts put in at different sizes at each farm?

A: Mowi already have an RAS on land facility and are putting smolts in at 200g - it takes 1-2 months for fish to grow from 90g to 200g. Intention is to keep fallow period synchronized and to be for 6 months rather than current 3 months.

Q9: A lot of feeding pipes are washed up on the shore in Diabaig and in an area at Red Point, despite requests to all farms to collect it, some has been there for a long time. When will it be removed?

A: DM offered a contact for reporting washed up pipes etc and stated that they will arrange for it to be removed.

MW referred to feedback on the Development Plan that locals are very concerned about the impact on the natural environment of the fish farms – important to a lot of people. He welcomed the meeting with Douglas to encourage local communication.

CH echoed thanks and appreciation and emphasised the importance of keeping the community informed. DM offered a farm visit next year for the community and said anyone could email him with questions directly on Dougie.Macleod@bakkafrost.com

6. Kishorn Port Community Liaison Group update

SW reported on the latest meeting that she attended.

The port says it continues to operate well. Work on Voyager Spirit and Noble Intrepid has been completed and they have left the port. Northern Producer will then come in - it is the largest rig recycling project in Europe –everything on it will be recycled including the cutlery.

Port & Dock have ongoing enquiries for new business into 2024-25 including onshore wind business. The quarry has supplied the stone and concrete for the on-land fish hatchery construction – optimising the reduction in transportation of materials.

Company has 4 new employees –3 are local and living within the area. They have onsite accommodation for 200 contractors for the shorter term, but ongoing problem for employees finding somewhere to rent long term or buy properties to move and live permanently in the area. KPL said they would be happy to support any plans locally for housing.

Apprenticeship places are available in mechanical engineering and warehouse logistics and they are liaising with Gairloch High School with open days.

There have been no neighbourhood issues regarding the new projects – just occasional noise but it is being monitored and managed.

No reported transport issues. SW mentioned the Torriddon Glen road dressing has been completed with white lines. Cllr Liz Kraft who was present stated that Ward 5 received the lion's share of funding for roads this year.

Comments from TKCC members:

MW asked how many people work at KPL and how many are living locally. SW will check with KPL and report back. *Action: SW*

TF - Rhoda Grant MSP has been calling for some time for the A890 to have trunk road status. A petition has been submitted and is under consideration by the Scottish Parliament. If adopted, this could help Kishorn Port traffic and relieve pressure on the Torriddon Glen road.

7. Correspondence received

- NTS – Torriddon and Shieldaig island draft management plan
NTS have completed a draft of their updated management plan for Torriddon and Shieldaig island. This contains their 200 year vision along with a 10 year master plan and an operational plan. It is very detailed and NTS would welcome feedback. MW noted that a physical copy has been available in Torriddon Community Centre for people to comment on.
- West Lothian Joint Forum of CCs – Scottish Forum of Community Councils
CCs in West Lothian intend to form a Scottish Forum of Community Councils. It is hoped that by working together, we can have a greater impact. All CC's have been invited to join and it was agreed that TKCC are interested to find out more about what is involved. *Action: SW*
- Highland Council – Playpark Strategy Consultation
HC is currently developing a Playpark Strategy and would like to find out how children want to play in the future and what they want to see in their local playparks. They are asking for teachers' support to help children complete a questionnaire. In addition, they would like responses from parents, carers and other community groups. The following is a link to the questionnaire: <https://forms.office.com/e/p88FebR0Ky>
- Scottish Parliament – consultation on dualling of A9
The Scottish Parliament want to know what people think about issues related to the dualling of the A9. Since they only contacted TKCC one week before the deadline for responses and the deadline has passed, this item was included for information only.

8. Planning applications

23/03654/FUL - Change of use of outbuilding, alterations, and extension to for a house, installation of private drainage system and formation of hardstanding and section of footpath. Croft 1, Diabaig, Torridon.

CH confirmed that TKCC had already submitted its comments and summarised these as follows. She said they were intended to highlight a number of issues that we feel need to be resolved before the planning authority makes a decision, they were not intended to be an objection:

- The proposal involves creating a new house outside the Settlement Development Area for Diabaig.
- The site is in within an area of known risk of flooding. The Flood Risk Assessment Report (FRA) also does not take account of the polycrub that the applicant is proposing to build.
- All recommendations made within the FRA and drainage details must be adhered to.
- Since the application states the proposal does not impact on habitats, landscape, scenery or air quality, presumably there is a report to back this up? This is particularly important given the site is in precious temperate rainforest.
- If any part of the woodland needs to be felled, details of this must be given. Any trees damaged during the development must be replaced with suitable native species.
- The site lies at the start of two very popular public footpaths and it's clear one of these will need to be re-routed – satisfactory details of this need to be given.
- As per HC's decision in relation to the polycrub, the footpaths need to remain unobstructed, before, during and after development of the site.
- The turning space at the end of the coastal road must not be used to store plant, machinery or building materials.
- The application states that treated foul effluent and surface water will be discharged into the adjacent burn – evidence that SEPA has given its consent to this needs to be provided.
- Given previous indications from SSEN, evidence needs to be provided that they can provide electricity to the site without affecting existing residents and businesses in Diabaig.

A director of the applicant company who was present, Douglas Bartholomew, acknowledged that all comments made by TKCC were valid and that he will comply with everything that HC request. He asked if TKCC could contact HC to make it clear that the comments were not an objection, as they are currently shown as that on the planning portal. TKCC members agreed. *Action: CH*

WHP Telecoms/ Shared Rural Network – pre-application consultation re proposed new telecoms mast at A896 Glen Torridon, Loch Coire Mhic Fhearchair footpath, Torridon (E: 192676 N: 861450)

This is in addition to the mast sites that have previously been notified. It was noted that the site was incorrectly described in the documents as being on Land West of Loch Clair. Instead it is close to the path up to Loch Coire Mhic Fhearchair behind Beinn Eighe.

It was agreed TKCC should respond to WHP Telecoms in the same way as we have before, ie. to say it is essential that a full community consultation takes place and that this needs to include all relevant facts, including a full picture of everything that is proposed, why the masts are required, who is going to benefit, what are the other options that have been considered etc.

Action: CH

9. Any other business

As this was the last meeting before TKCC is dissolved and re-formed, CH thanked all the members for their contributions and hard work. It has come a long way over the last four years and is now an organisation transformed.

Sadly for TKCC, Mat Webster is standing down as a member as he wishes to concentrate on his involvement with TDCA and the extensive work with the development plan. CH highlighted the huge contribution he has made over the years, including helping to get money for the community during Covid, working on the community survey and development plan, sorting bins out and so much more - his input to TKCC will be sorely missed.

Next meeting date: Wednesday 15th November, 7pm on Zoom. This will be the inaugural meeting of the re-formed TKCC.