

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)
Meeting held by Zoom at 7pm
Wednesday 21st February 2024

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Sue Whiting (Secretary), Alpin Stewart, Tom Forrest, Colin Stevenson, Maud McIntyre,
3 members of the public.

Before the meeting started, CH expressed TKCC's great sadness at the recent and untimely death of Julie Wileman at HC. TKCC members always found Julie extremely helpful and a pleasure to deal with, she will be much missed. Our deep condolences are sent to her family and colleagues.

Apologies – Steve Schnabel (Treasurer), Councillor Chris Birt.

1. Minutes of meeting on 17th January 2024

Approved.

2. Matters arising from meeting on 17th January 2024

Blocked drains in Fasaig – HC has unblocked the drain reported in Darroch Park. However, AS stated that all drains from Darroch Park to the shop are now blocked. TF and SW will contact HC

Action: TF/SW

Kinlochewe street lighting – TKCC members confirmed that no-one further has contacted us to say they would like changes to the street lighting.

23/05037/FUL: Erection of house and garage, formation of access and installation of ground source heat pump. Land 570M NE Of Heights Cottage Incheril, Kinlochewe – CH wrote to HC as agreed.

Kinlochewe Primary School – TKCC responded to HC summarising the points that were made by TKCC members and others at our 17th January meeting. In his reply, Ian Jackson confirmed:

- In contacting parents before Christmas, HC sought to identify parents with primary school-age children as well as those with children in pre-school nurseries. HC may not have identified all parents with children in the 0-3 age group but would be happy to hear from them. Their views would certainly need to be taken into account.
- The consultation needs to include the whole of the Kinlochewe catchment, from Loch Maree to Achnasheen.
- HC received a suggestion of postponing the review for another 6 months, on the basis that there were houses for sale in the area, that might lead to more families coming in. HC is happy to agree and will revisit this issue in late summer.
- HC understands the building is likely to deteriorate as it lies empty. IJ would like to avoid the situation HC got into with Torridon PS, where the school was mothballed for 11 years before being closed. He agrees the decision on the future of the school should be made sooner rather than later, allowing for proper consultation in the event a closure proposal is made.

Future of Wester Ross Mobile Library - CH wrote as agreed to Ward Councillors to reiterate how important the service is, and to ask them to support the community by doing whatever it takes to ensure the service continues on the basis outlined by John West of Highlife Highland, ie. with the service making the same number of stops as it does now, and with a scheduled frequency of at least every 4 weeks.

Shared Rural Network – NatureScot (NS) - CH wrote as agreed to ask NS to follow HC in asking for more community consultation. NatureScot have responded saying:

- NS supports the Scottish and UK governments' ambition to increase 4G connectivity, but agrees the current process is causing difficulty for all involved.
- NS absolutely supports the intent of TKCC and other community groups/ recreational organisations to engender a more consultative process. It is engaged with both governments to encourage them to improve the approach being taken.
- As a statutory consultee in the planning system, NS does not engage in lobbying activity.
- NS is trying to improve the quality of individual planning applications and encourage early consideration of protected areas and wild land areas in the site selection process. They have asked applicants to consult with them at the pre-application stage. At the application stage, they provide advice to planning authorities on the implications of mast proposals for protected areas and wild land areas.
- If NS thinks any impacts will be so significant that the legislative or policy tests associated with these areas won't be met, they may object, and have done so for several applications which have not provided adequate information or assessment of issues.

*** Not covered in the meeting ***

We have also been contacted by Ian Blackford MP and Maree Todd MSP:

- Maree Todd has written to the UK and Scottish Governments outlining the concerns we have raised. She is holding a surgery on 3rd April in Torridon Community Centre and would be happy to discuss the issues further then.
- Ian Blackford has been contacted by a number of constituents and community representatives. He agrees that businesses and individuals in rural parts of Scotland should not be held back due to lack of connectivity, but infrastructure must be built in a way that is sensitive to our unspoilt landscapes with minimal environmental impact and in a meaningful way that will improve the lives of people in remote communities.
- He believes there must be a discernible benefit from new infrastructure development and with many of the areas chosen to build masts being remote and unpopulated hills and glens, there would no benefit.
- Ian has offered his support to people and communities who are concerned about the blanket geographical rollout. He has written to Lucy Frazer KC MP Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport, also to the SRN Network.

Wester Ross Biosphere (WRB) – National Park nomination process – MM attended a drop in session and TKCC subsequently circulated details of how to vote on whether Wester Ross and Lochalsh should explore the possibility of becoming a National Park.

MM reported that following the survey, with over 55% of people saying no, WRB had concluded there was not enough support to proceed further. TKCC members agreed the timeframe had been extremely short and potentially there had not been enough time for people to understand all the pros and cons.

Anna Black – HLH Culture & Learning – CH wrote as agreed.

3. Treasurer's report

Current bank account balance is £1,723.80. This follows a payment since the last report of £97.20 for our annual insurance renewal.

The following amounts were paid out of the SCDC development plan grant: i) £112.50 for TDCA's annual subscription to Development Trusts Association Scotland, and ii) a £54.15 contribution to a "Living Wage Employer" sign for TDCA. No further grant money remains.

4. Local Place Plan (LPP) update

The Steering Group has been working on the first draft. This is currently rather Torridon centred but MM's involvement will bring more input from the Kinlochewe area, for example some of the community action plan ideas for Kinlochewe can be incorporated into the next draft.

MM is attending a workshop on the process of Area Place Planning to be run by University of Highlands & Islands and Edinburgh University. She will update TKCC at the next meeting.

CH said the first draft of the LPP was sent to Shieldaig CC to see if they would like to work with us on a joint LPP. They gave some useful feedback on the draft but have decided they would prefer to do their own. They have also confirmed they are happy to collaborate on local issues, particularly regarding any marine or coastal environmental issues for Loch Torridon.

When the next draft is ready it will be presented to all local stakeholders for approval before putting it to the community. Deadline is end of September.

Action MM

5. Possible Ward 5 roads meeting

SW contacted the HC Ward Office to ask if the usual joint Ward 5 CC roads meeting with ward councillors and senior roads team managers that is held every year in March would be going ahead. TKCC members agreed a meeting would be useful as, despite the roads team's best efforts with resources, several issues have arisen over the last year.

SW felt that last year's Ward 5 roads meeting was more focused due to questions being submitted in advance for the roads team to consider, and most items were resolved. It was agreed we must be sympathetic to the lack of resources but still need to ask for pressing items to be addressed.

Following the meeting, TKCC members agreed that SW should send the following list of priority items to HC for attention by the roads team, with a request for a joint roads meeting:

- Newly repaired parapet to the bridge over the river Alligin near Wester Alligin on the C1083 from Torridon to Diabaig has been damaged again this winter. Request revised repair with metal crash barrier.
- Rutted and deteriorating road surface over the Coire Mhic Nobuil bridge adjacent to the NTS carpark on the C1083 from Torridon to Diabaig.
- Many blocked, silted up drains on both sides of the C1083 road in Fasaig from the Community Centre, past Fuaran and down to the village shop.
- Highly dangerous, large area of reoccurring potholes radiating across centre of road down the hill on the A896 between Annat and Balgy.
- Huge potholes, degraded edges at Incheril, Kinlochewe on road down to the cemetery and primary school area.

Action: SW

6. Correspondence received

- Fasaig resident – Torridon village sign

The brown village sign on the road from Annat to Fasaig has been broken for some time. It was agreed we should ask HC to fix it. SW will contact Eric Morrison.

Action: SW

- Joint Ward 5 CC meeting re mobile library
Kenny Maclean of Garve and District CC is organising a joint CC meeting to hear from John West about the mobile library. Roads, Fire Scotland and AOB have since been added to the agenda. It was agreed that TKCC had heard from John at our last meeting, and we would prefer to talk about roads at an HC Ward 5 roads meeting. Therefore it is unlikely that anyone from TKCC will attend, however we will make a decision nearer the time.

It was noted from the letter that Fire Scotland would like to make contact with all CCs. We therefore agreed to email them. *Action: SW*

- Kishorn Port Liaison Group update
TKCC members agreed we would only report on matters by exception.
- Highland Council budget deficit consultation
HC is facing a £113 million budget deficit over the next 3 years. At the end of last year, they consulted the public about the services that are important to them, where they think HC could be more efficient, how much they would be prepared to pay for services etc.

HC would now like further input from communities and are asking people to tell them more about which suggestions are most important – see <https://engagehighland.co.uk/budget-engagement>

- Angus MacDonald open meeting – 7th March Torridon Community Centre
Angus MacDonald, LibDem candidate at the next Westminster election, is touring Wester Ross over the next few weeks and has asked to meet with people in Torridon on 7th March. TKCC has invited Ruraidh Stewart (Conservative) and Drew Hendry MP (SNP) to attend as well:

11am – 12.30pm, Thursday, 7th March 2024, Torridon Community Centre

*** Post meeting note: Ruraidh Stewart has accepted the invitation. This is therefore a great opportunity to talk to two of our candidates about issues affecting our community. Drew Hendry has sent his apologies but says he will suggest a suitable date to come when his diary is firmed up for the next parliamentary recess period.

- Ambulance response times from Gairloch
Copy of email from Gairloch Ambulance team member to Maree Todd and Douglas Ross MSPs to highlight severe problems with ambulance response times within our area. This is due to staffing location challenges with no station existing in Gairloch. Ambulance staff are now required to work from home and drive to collect a colleague when responding to an emergency call.

Assuming an ambulance is in Gairloch when a call is made, response times have increased from 5-8 minutes to 30-33 minutes for people in Gairloch, and from 30 minutes to now 55 minutes for those in Kinlochewe. TKCC members were very concerned about this.

Mat Webster who was present noted that we used to have first responders in the area to support the ambulance teams. However, despite a waiting list of people wanting to join the team, there are currently no resources for training first responders.

Cllr Liz Kraft and Maree Todd wrote to Scottish Ambulance Services and a copy of the response was circulated. SAS failed to address the issues that had been raised and said they were not intending to change anything within the current service.

It was agreed that TKCC should write to SAS in support of the Gairloch Ambulance Team, and also to Maree Todd and Liz Kraft requesting they take the matter up further with SAS.

Action CH

- **Save Our Rural Schools campaign**
Parent councils from Farr, Gairloch, Kinlochbervie and Ullapool High Schools are asking for signatures on an open letter they are sending to Jenny Gilruth MSP and Cllr Raymond Bremner. This is to ask HC and the Scottish Government to work together to provide:
 - An exemption from the staffing formula for small schools, and funding to increase staffing capacity to provide a guaranteed and agreed core curriculum for all pupils.
 - Funding based on individual need for all pupils who require additional learning support.
 - Permanent teaching positions and stability of teaching provision for staff and pupils.
 - More attractive 'relocation' packages and affordable accommodation for teachers considering a move to the remote Highlands and incentives for supply teachers.
 - Investment in strategically planned, quality, reliable, consistent distance learning courses and in person support staff to offer a wider subject choice and enable pupils to study their chosen subjects.

To sign the letter, go to <https://saveourruralschools.com>. It was agreed TKCC would consider signing the letter if parents in our area request us to.

- **Scottish Rainforest conservation – research project**
A student at SRUC and Edinburgh University is completing a BSc (Hons) in Environmental Management. As part of his honours project, he is investigating how the Scottish population's understanding and perception of Scottish rainforest impacts the conservation of this special habitat. As such he is reaching out to people from every region of Scotland and asking them to complete a short anonymous survey - https://sruc.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/public_survey

7. Planning applications

None.

8. Any other business

TF highlighted that GP Out of Hour (OOH) services are being reduced in the Highlands and that increased tourist numbers in the busy seasons are stretching both GP and ambulance services. He suggested that other CCs should be made aware of this and to report on any further information.

Currently Torridon has nurse practitioner OOH services and there are no perceived problems. However, it was agreed we should keep an eye on the situation and report where necessary.

Action TF

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 20th March 2024 – in person

7pm, Torridon Community Centre, AV room on the first floor