

**Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)**  
**Meeting held by Zoom at 7pm**  
**Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024**

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Steve Schnabel (Treasurer), Alpin Stewart, Tom Forrest, Colin Stevenson, Maud McIntyre,  
7 members of the public.

- 1. Apologies** – Sue Whiting (Secretary), Councillor Chris Birt.
- 2. Minutes of the inaugural meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023**  
Approved.
- 3. Minutes of the subsequent meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November 2023**
- 4. Matters arising from subsequent meeting on 15<sup>th</sup> November**

*Blocked drains in Fasaig* - TF said he had called Andrew Bone several times but the drain is still blocked. He will keep chasing. *Action: TF*

*Scottish Forum of Community Councils* – TKCC has now joined the forum.

*Local Place Plan* – The steering group for the Community Development Plan has started work on this and would like to discuss with Shieldaig CC the possibility of including Shieldaig in the plan. TKCC members agreed this would make sense, they also felt it would help foster close ties with Shieldaig CC which they are in favour of.

*Kinlochewe street lighting* – TF contacted the resident but was unable to ascertain how many other people would like changes to the street lighting. To date no-one in Kinlochewe has come forward in response to the note we put in the minutes.

*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* – After consideration and discussion amongst TKCC members, TKCC withdrew its objection. MM reported that the applicant had subsequently written in a supporting statement that TKCC supported the application. It was agreed this was incorrect and we should write to HC planning to point this out.

*Action: CH*

**5. Treasurer's report**

£147 spent since the last report - donation to Shieldaig fire residents £100, room hire for an SCDC development plan meeting £12, ICO annual renewal fee £35. SS agreed to investigate whether we actually need to pay the ICO fee in the future.

*Action: SS*

Current bank account balance is £1,987.65.

**6. Future of Kinlochewe Primary School – HC consultation**

HC is beginning the process of reviewing the status of Kinlochewe Primary (mothballed since the summer of 2022) and has asked for TKCC's views on its long-term future.

One possibility is that HC brings forward a proposal to permanently close the school. That would be subject to the same process as was applied to Torridon Primary, which provides opportunities for parents and other members of the public to put forward their views. If a closure proposal is made, HC would be in touch again with details. If the school was then closed, HC would need to decide how to rezone the catchment area of Kinlochewe Primary (to Gairloch or Shieldaig), and again would be interested in TKCC's views. School transport would be provided to whichever school the Kinlochewe catchment was merged with.

Present at the meeting were 3 parents of primary and pre-primary school age children. Views expressed by them and TKCC members included the following:

- A school is a vital part of a community, without a school it is very difficult to attract young people to live there
- Consultation is happening because over the last few years parents have taken their children out of Kinlochewe Primary and sent them to school elsewhere
- If we fight hard and succeed in keeping Kinlochewe Primary open, this would involve asking parents to bring their children back, which they may not want to do
- School rolls fluctuate, there may be more children in Kinlochewe in the future
- Equally, there may be fewer children in Shieldaig in a few years' time. In which case, it would be good to increase its catchment area, to make it more resilient.
- It is not right that children should have to travel large distances to school, therefore it would be disastrous for many communities if Shieldaig Primary was not available for any reason
- No decisions on Kinlochewe Primary should be made for a while
- The condition of the buildings at Kinlochewe Primary is very poor, without significant expenditure they are unlikely to last long in their mothballed state
- There are currently around 12-13 children, toddlers and babies in Kinlochewe. The parents of school age children are being consulted. Parents of pre-school children, and those thinking of having children should be too
- Re-zoning is a contentious issue and will affect whether the village leans more towards Gairloch or Shieldaig, therefore the consultation should be widened to include the whole community
- If parents are allowed to choose which school their children go to, there is a danger the village becomes divided
- Gairloch Primary needs to be consulted (Shieldaig already is being consulted)
- The type of transport that will be available is important, for example 4 year olds travelling on a bus with teenager may not always be appropriate

TKCC members agreed that we welcome HC having this conversation at an early stage and allowing the community to comment. A draft response to HC will be circulated to members for approval.

*Action: AS/CH*

#### **7. Future of Wester Ross Mobile Library – John West, HighLife Highland (HLH)**

John explained that responsibility for the library is split between HC which provides the vehicles, and HLH which provides the library service. There are 7 vehicles, 1 of which is off the road. Only 1 of the vehicles is within its service life, meaning 6 of them need renewing. HC has previously agreed to renew these vehicles, however other priorities mean doing this has been pushed back.

John is a chartered librarian, he said he cares passionately about the service. The service makes 640 community stops on 70 routes, and he realises its importance to many people, including in schools, care homes and the wider community. He and HLH have therefore been working with HC on how to ensure the service continues.

At the request of HC, HLH has reviewed the routings and come up with a plan to improve logistics, thereby reducing costs. At the same time HC has been looking at a better way of providing the vehicles, for example through a leasing option. This should reduce maintenance costs and ensure replacement vehicles are available when necessary. They are also looking at slightly smaller vehicles which would be cheaper.

John was asked whether the above would mean a reduced service. He said the aim was no, the vehicles should still be able to make their current number of stops, and whilst the scheduled frequency might reduce from say every 3 to 4 weeks, if fewer vehicles are off the road, this would make little difference in practice.

With the review now complete, the decision on whether to continue the service now lies with HC. HC has a statutory obligation to provide a library, therefore if a significant change is proposed, there would need to be community consultation.

John hopes a decision to continue will be made quickly. He is aware of MPs and MSPs asking about it and he encouraged people who value the service both to use the service and to write to Highland Councillors about it.

CH reiterated how important the service is to people in our community. It was agreed that TKCC would write to Ward Councillors to say we are encouraged by the work the HLH team has been doing, and ask that HC does whatever is necessary to keep it going.

*Action: CH*

## **8. Shared Rural Network update**

*NTS meeting* – 50-60 local residents attended the public meeting held by NTS in December. NTS are objecting strongly to many SRN masts all over the country and were able to give a lot of background to the programme. Everyone at the meeting supported the government's priority of improving rural connectivity. Their concern was that in setting a 95% geographical (not population) target, there is a significant risk that hundreds of masts will be installed in places where nobody lives, waste up to £500 million of taxpayers' money, and at the same time have a significant negative impact on many areas of outstanding natural beauty.

*Coire Mhic Nobhuil* – The planning application for a mast in Coire Mhic Nobhuil attracted over 90 objections, including some from people outwith our area. TKCC also objected as agreed. Following these, the developers withdrew the application, however we have already heard they intend to re-submit.

*Meall Ghiuthais* – TKCC has received a new pre-planning notification for an SRN mast on Druim Grudaigh ridge by Meall a Ghiuthais. The site is on the Beinn Eighe Nature Reserve on NatureScot land.

*Letter to UK minister* – On 4 January, TKCC and others (see below) wrote to the UK minister responsible for the SRN program, Rt. Hon. Julia Lopez MP, and we await a response. The letter emphasised our support for the idea of improving connectivity for rural communities and businesses and asked for the following.:

- a proper dialogue with communities to establish the needs of residents and businesses before the masts are instigated. This must include an analysis of what each mast is for and who (if anyone) will benefit

- a thorough cost benefit analysis for every mast proposed, including assessment of the damage to the environment and tourism in line with normal good practice
- to allow HC to be able properly to exercise its oversight responsibilities, an extension in the timelines for completion of the SRN project

Signatories to the letter were: TKCC, TDCA, COW Trust, Shieldaig CC, Lochcarron CC, Gairloch CC, Wester Loch Ewe CC, Lochbroom CC, NTS, John Muir Trust, Mountaineering Scotland, Ramblers Scotland, Munro Society, Scottish Wild Land Group, Celtman Triathlon, Scottish Rainforest Education Centre, Cameron McNeish, Rob Macfarlane, Stephen Venables.

*Media coverage* – The above letter led to articles in the Herald and Ross-shire Journal, with BBC Alba also doing a piece for tv and radio.

*Highland Council* – Following lobbying by people in our area and elsewhere, last week HC voted by a large majority to support community groups and conservation/outdoor organisations by writing to the Scottish and UK Governments to ask that ministers work together to review the SRN programme and improve it by:

- consulting with rural communities across Highland to establish their digital connectivity needs first
- avoiding construction of new access tracks unless no other method is possible
- adequately resourcing Local Planning Authorities
- avoiding the Highland's designated and other environmentally sensitive wild areas
- insisting that mobile operators share mast infrastructure, rather than building adjacent masts

*Scottish Government planning guidance* – New planning guidance on digital telecoms has recently been published. Amongst other things, this emphasises the importance of consultation, it also contains sections that could be useful for people wishing to object to planning objections.

Section 3.1 states "Many parties have a part to play – and collective interest – in the delivery of digital connectivity infrastructure. Recognising this can allow greater stakeholder input and constructive collaboration. It can also encourage trust between parties and promote open and positive working relationships. Early engagement and collaboration between relevant parties will better inform decisions on land use and is key to achieving best practice in the delivery of such infrastructure." <https://www.gov.scot/publications/scottish-government-planning-guidance-digital-telecommunications/>

*SRN mast action group* – The local action group is encouraging people to express their views by writing to Highland Councillors, MPs and MSPs etc. It has also been responsible for generating a lot of the actions above. The group has recently created a Facebook group which is a good source of information - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/srnmastactiongroup>

*MSPs* - Edward Mountain MSP contacted CH before Christmas. He had obviously been talking to one or more landowners, as he gave an example of one estate where it is proposed to replace an existing mast with 2 new SRN ones very close to each other. This clearly doesn't make sense, however apparently the UK Government won't pay for upgrades, they'll only pay for new masts. CH explained the community's concerns that most of the masts won't actually deliver the improved connectivity that communities and businesses need. He said he would ask the developers to meet with him in the new year, and report back.

TKCC is aware of a number of people who have written to our constituency MSP, Maree Todd . So far they have all had the same response, namely that she will look into it. She is holding a regular surgery on 3 April in Torridon Community Centre which could be a good time to meet with her.

*NatureScot* – NatureScot say the SRN is taking up a huge amount of their time, including commenting on pre-planning notifications, but unfortunately the developers are not taking much notice of their comments before submitting planning applications.

CH feels that TKCC should ask NatureScot to follow HC in asking for more community consultation. She will circulate a draft letter for TKCC members' approval in due course.

*Action: CH*

TKCC members all agreed it was TKCC's role to represent the views of those living in the Torridon and Kinlochewe area. It was noted that the considerable number of local people who attended the NTS meeting and/ or submitted Coire Mhic Nobhuil planning objections had given us a very good indication of their views.

CH emphasised that what TKCC and other community councils were pushing for was for our whole communities to be consulted by the developers before mast sites are chosen and further planning applications submitted.

Mat Webster thanked TKCC and the mast action group for everything they have done so far in highlighting the issues and seeking to get community voices heard by decision-makers.

## **9. Correspondence received**

- Wester Ross Biosphere (WRB) – National Park nomination process  
A number of community groups, including TKCC, replied to WRB's email in November saying they would be interested in learning more about the nomination process for a potential new national park in Wester Ross and Lochalsh.

Since then, WRB has been working with Lateral North, who have been appointed by the Scottish Government to provide information, FAQ's, engagement opportunities and other support/resources. You can access all the information that has been collated so far via WRB's website - <https://www.wrb.scot/resources/national-park-consultation-2023>.

WRB are holding public drop in sessions to explain what it would mean to be a national park, and how the nomination process works. MM said she planned to attend the session in Gairloch on 20 January and would report back.

*Action: MM*

- Anna Black – HLH Culture & Learning  
Anna is the new youth development officer for Gairloch. She is currently trying to map and understand current youth provision and engagement across the area and any identified needs. She has seen from the T&K community development plan that access to school holiday activities has been identified as an area of need, and would be interested in TKCC's views on other youth engagement issues/needs as well.

TKCC members felt we would be unlikely to be much help in this regard. We will therefore respond accordingly and suggest she contacts parents and school groups.

*Action: CH*

- **Consultant re Kinlochewe Stores**  
A consultant working with COW Trust and the Kinlochewe Community Alliance (KCA) has contacted TKCC to ask for a letter of support for the potential community purchase of the Kinlochewe shop. We have said in principle there should be no problem with this, and have asked for more information.

MM clarified that KCA is the group working on the project and COW is acting as the funding vehicle. KCA has achieved stage 1 funding, and is now putting together a business plan. The group is open to anyone to join and next steps will include discussing the plan with the community.

TF asked when KCA was formed as he hadn't heard of it. MM said it was formed 6-8 months ago.

- **Angus Macdonald – Highland Lib Dems**  
Angus is a Highland Councillor in Fort William. He has written to introduce himself as he is standing to be our MP at the next general election. CH reported that Angus spoke at the recent HC meeting in favour of the motion regarding SRN masts, see above.
- **Wester Alligin bridge**  
A local resident had reported that the parapet repair to the bridge at Wester Alligin has collapsed. TF immediately contacted Andrew Bone and the bridge inspector at HC, and asked again for Armco barriers to be fitted. He emphasised how dangerous the bridge now is, the roads team say they will come over again to look.

## **10. Planning applications**

None.

## **11. Any other business**

CH reported that gritting on the Diabaig road has been very poor, with the gritter appearing to run out of grit by the time it gets to the village. TF has complained about this to HC, he has also asked for the piles of grit to be reinstated and replenished all along the road from Torridon.

Future Meeting Dates: On the TKCC website.