

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)
Meeting held in person at Torridon Community Centre at 7pm
Wednesday 17th April 2024

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Sue Whiting (Secretary), Alpin Stewart, Colin Stevenson, Maud McIntyre, Steve Schnabel (Treasurer), Councillor Chris Birt.
4 members of the public.

Apologies – Tom Forrest.

1. Minutes of meeting on 20th March 2024

Approved.

2. Matters arising from meeting on 20th March 2024

Possible Ward 5 Roads meeting – Still no news on whether there will be a meeting, however SW reported there has been progress on the priorities in our area:

- The huge potholes and degraded edges have been repaired on the road down to the cemetery and primary school area at Incheril
- The large area of reoccurring potholes down the hill on the A896 between Annat and Balgy have been scheduled for repair/resurfacing.
- Resurfacing work is currently taking place on the road to Wester Alligin and on the C1083 Fasaig to Diabiag road, including the Coire Mhic Nobuil bridge.

HC roads team says the blocked, silted up drains on both sides of the C1083 in Fasaig is also on their list. Update still pending regarding the repair to the damaged parapet on the bridge near Wester Alligin. Mat Webster who was present referred to the huge holes and broken road on the A896 near the trees close to the Fasaig junction. SW agreed to chase this as well.

CH extended huge thanks to SW and TF for all their work in getting HC roads team to do this.

Action: SW

Torridon village sign - SW thanked Cllr Birt for helping to track down who to ask for a replacement - as it is a brown sign, this is Visit Scotland. She will send a request.

Action: SW

Scottish Ambulance Service – see meeting with Maree Todd MSP below.

Shared Rural Network (SRN) – Still no response from the UK minister, Julia Lopez, to either of our letters. She has however sent a patronising response to Maree Todd who has expressed concerns, telling her the Highlands are not just a place to visit, people also need to live and work here. CH said her response totally misses the point, no-one is saying we don't want improved connectivity, our concern is that what the government is proposing will not deliver this and there must be proper community consultation to establish what our needs are before they waste a huge amount of taxpayers' money putting up masts that benefit virtually no-one and risk causing significant damage.

Following our meeting with WHP Telecoms/Virgin Media O2 (VMO2), Digital Mobile Spectrum, the SRN joint venture owned by the mobile operators, got in touch to arrange another meeting, this time with Building Digital UK, the government agency tasked with delivering the SRN and VMO2. Also present were representatives of EE, Three and Vodafone who did not speak.

CH and Chris Johnson attended, together with Topher Dawson (TD), Chair of Lochbroom CC (LBCC) which shares a long boundary with TKCC in the Fisherfield area where we understand a number of masts are planned.

- Bryn Jones (BJ), Programme Director of Digital Mobile Spectrum (DMSL) gave a presentation:
 - the SRN programme is focussing on geographic rather than population coverage because 99% of properties in the UK already have 4G coverage.
 - when the programme is complete, there will still be 7,000 properties without 4G coverage.
 - the UK Government is able to fund the TNS masts because they have no commercial value to the mobile operators (MNOs), therefore State Aid rules don't apply.
 - DMSL is currently planning 265 TNS masts, although they think they may be able to manage with fewer.
 - current planned mast locations are now on the SRN website – www.srn.org.uk/about/srn-tns-site-locations NB. This is currently too large scale to read properly, TD asked for a zoom function to be added.
- BJ said the TNS masts in the TKCC/LBCC areas were not about connectivity for properties. He described their benefits as being for agriculture, leisure, safety, monitoring livestock, tracking animals and the environment.
- TD said these 'benefits' demonstrated a total lack of understanding of what the countryside is like here - it is nothing like the rolling green hills of southern England.
- CH/CJ agreed, saying they had even seen an SRN brochure that said TNS masts would be used to enable drone deliveries. This is completely fanciful.
- TD/CH/CJ reiterated the points made above in relation to Julia Lopez' letter to Maree Todd.
- BJ said the programme was for the public good. However, he acknowledged the environment is a consideration in evaluating public good and said they don't want to trash it.
- TD said the programme should concentrate on roads. Roads are where houses and businesses are and there are still significant stretches of road in the Highlands without adequate signal. To illustrate this, he produced a map from www.cellmapper.net, a crowd-sourced coverage site. Also, since fibre exists along most roads, there would be no problem with backhaul.
- TD said one of the masts proposed for the LBCC area is near a road and this would be useful. Two strings of masts that have been proposed for Fisherfield would not.
- CH agreed and said in the TKCC area the proposed mast on the Glen Torridon road would be useful, although she did not understand why they did not share the ESN mast that has been proposed for the same site.
- CH also said she thought it was important to define public good. She said for large numbers of people an essential component of public good would be not to scar beautiful wilderness areas such as Fisherfield and elsewhere.
- Hiren Demara (HD) of BDUK said they did not want to create disbenefits, and he thought BDUK was getting closer to deciding whether the programme was delivering on its original intentions.
- HD asked BJ how DMSL was going to ensure the proposed masts deliver the maximum benefit. BJ said they were consulting with local stakeholders.
- CH/CJ asked who these local stakeholders are since we are not aware of any communities who have been consulted. BJ and LM were unable to name any stakeholders except John Muir Trust (JMT) who they said they are working with to decide which masts are more acceptable than others. They referred to a "coalition" who JMT is representing but, despite our asking them repeatedly, were unable to say who this coalition comprised.

- CH/CJ said that while we had met with JMT, neither TKCC nor any communities in the TKCC area were part of any consultation process. CH emphasised that communities must be consulted.
- BJ said they wanted to work with us and the next step was to start engagement. The following was agreed:
 - DMSL/MNOs will share with TKCC/LBCC all the mast sites proposed for our areas, together with related coverage maps.
 - we will then meet with DMSL/MNOs to determine which masts we feel may be useful and which are not.
 - this would be with a view to DMSL/MNOs taking our views into account and establishing some principles that could be used in other areas.

TKCC members and members of the public were pleased with the above and thanked the mast team for all they are doing.

Charlie Burrow of GALE who was present asked if TKCC was in touch with local landowners whose estates have masts planned on them. CH confirmed that we are.

Wester Ross Biosphere Area Place Plan (APP) – MM has consulted former colleagues and contacts in planning and cannot find reference to APPs in any statutory framework. Unlike a Local Place Plan which HC is required by law to take into account when producing its local development plan, she does not believe an APP would carry statutory weight.

It was agreed therefore that we would wait to hear more from WRB before doing anything in relation to their proposed APP.

Bealach Mor cycle race parking – MM has asked around in Kinlochewe and the general feeling seems to be that parking in Kinlochewe is not a problem, especially since the race occurs on only one day in the year.

3. Treasurer's report

The accounts for the year ended 31 March 2023 have now been prepared and will be sent for independent review in the next few days. Once this has been completed, the accounts will be presented at a future TKCC meeting and then submitted to HC as a pre-requisite for the release of this year's grant.

Since the start of the new financial year, we have paid for the renewal of our annual Zoom subscription (£155.88) and received 50% of this back from TDCA as a shared resource. We have also paid a subscription fee of £60 (£50 + VAT) to Parish Online for the mapping software as agreed at last month's meeting.

The current bank account balance is £1,569.86.

4. Guest speaker – Jess Carnegie, NTS

Jess is the new Community Engagement Officer for NTS working on their Torridon properties. The project is funded by National Lottery Heritage Fund and her role is to find ways that NTS can engage with local and wider communities. The Torridon post which runs until January 2025 is one of 4 pilot sites across Scotland.

Jess is looking at the potential needs of the community in the Torridon area and how NTS can help with that. Our Community Development Plan has been very informative. She will be consulting with

local groups and organising events to find out what NTS can do. Findings will go into a report for NTS to decide how they move forward for the future. Engagement is at community level, rather than focussing on tourists, and the project is aimed at being people led and how they are interested or involved with NTS property. The focus will be on what can be done to create mutually beneficial ways of working and living in this area.

Rather than NTS conduct another full survey, it was agreed that collaboration with community members, groups and our new Community Development Officer would be the best way for Jess to gather information for her report.

TKCC members welcomed the opportunity to further our connection with NTS, which is very important to our area.

Jess is happy for anyone to contact her with any questions on email jcarnegie@nts.org.uk. Rory, NTS Ranger, offered help with regard to any matters relating to the estate land – ie paths/land management.

5. Meetings with Maree Todd MSP

CH attended the constituency surgery held by Maree Todd at Torridon Community Centre on 3rd April. Ward 5 Councillor Liz Kraft was also present. CH raised the issue of the SRN programme and said the response to MT from the Scottish minister was disappointing. MT said there is nothing the Scottish government can do because it is not a devolved matter and the programme is led from UK Government in Westminster.

CH had a more productive conversation regarding the lack of first responders in this area. She said there are plenty of people willing to train as first responders but there does not appear to be sufficient infrastructure to enable the scheme to happen. MT said she would find out what is happening and get back to us.

CH also asked about ambulance response times from Gairloch following concerns raised by a paramedic. MT said she had met with Michael Dixon, CEO of the Scottish Ambulance Service. He told her the rules about where paramedics live changed some time ago and the data shows that response times from Gairloch have not changed. MT agreed to forward us a copy of a letter she had received confirming this.

SW met MT and asked her, as our area representative MSP, if she would support us in trying to get community consultation on the SRN programme. MT replied similarly as above to CH.

SW asked about the ongoing maintenance for roads and Liz Kraft said Highland Councillors have been pushing for further roads funding for Ward 5. LK is very proactive regarding help with resolving pothole issues. She said resources are still limited but progress is being made.

6. Correspondence received

- Aquaculture Stewardship Council (ASC) audit announcement - Sgeir Dughal
Acoura Marine t/a LRQA is an accredited independent, third party, certification body that specialises in the certification of aquaculture, fisheries and seafood. They are about to conduct an audit of Bakka Frost's Sgeir Dughal farm outside Diabaig and would like to hear from stakeholders, including from local communities. Community consultation/involvement is a vital component of the ASC assessment process, therefore community concerns about the operation of the farm could provide a valuable contribution to the overall assessment.

To submit any comments or evidence to the audit team please follow this link

Up to date ASC species standards are on the ASC website: <https://www.asc-aqua.org/what-we-do/our-standards/farm-standards/>. The relevant standard for the above farm is Salmon 1.4.

It was agreed that TKCC should make a submission. Jane Dick has offered to assist and a draft will be circulated to TKCC members for approval.

Action: CH/SW

- Forestry and Land Scotland – Slattadale car park

Update on the car park charging that was discussed at the TKCC meeting in Spring 2023:

- The 'Ringo' signage with full instructions for payment was finally installed in October 2023.
- So far income has been disappointing. Since August 2023, 99 people have paid a total of £299 – FLS hope this was because the instructions weren't clear before the signs went in.
- FLS are hoping for an improvement for 2024, however unfortunately, without any HC seasonal rangers this year, there will be no-one onsite regularly to encourage payment.
- FLS are committed to continuing the car park charging to help fund the toilet provision and other maintenance costs.

FLS have asked TKCC to confirm whether we would like to keep the 'nearest toilets' info at the entrance to the car park – is it still useful? CS agreed to take a look and report back.

Action: CS

- Gairloch CC – GALE's acquisition of The Shieling

GCC sent us a copy for information of a statement it released sharing concerns of a large number of businesses and individuals in their community regarding GALE's purchase of The Shieling restaurant. These concerns have subsequently appeared in the press and social media. They centre on the potential unfair competition with local businesses that the acquisition has created and that public funding (HIE and SLF) should not have been used to do this.

7. Planning application

24/01113/PNO | Prior Notification for Farm-related Building Works - Roof material changed from slate to corrugated steel | Agricultural Building Taagan Croft Kinlochewe. No comments.

8. Any other business

None.

Date of next meeting: Wednesday 15th May on Zoom at 7.00pm