

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)
Meeting held in person Kinlochewe Village Hall 7pm
Wednesday 18th September 2024

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Sue Whiting (Secretary), Steve Schnabel (Treasurer), Colin Stevenson, Tom Forrest, Councillor Chris Birt.

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Katie Anderson, 1 member of the public.

Apologies: Maud McIntyre, Jackie Todd, Alpin Stewart.

1. Minutes of meeting on 24th July 2024

Approved.

2. Matters arising from meeting on 24th July 2024

Roads – SW wrote to thank HC for the work on the Diabaig and Inveralligin roads. She also sent an updated list of priority items, including photos, to HC roads team and Cllr Liz Kraft. This included the road above Glen Docherty, sinking road near Cromasaig croft, pot holes and broken edges along the A896. She reminded them about the bridge near Wester Alligin and the drains in Fasaig.

TF reported that part of the road near Cromasaig is now so bad that the automatic cut out on some camper vans is triggered when they hit it. He spoke to Andrew Bone who gave the usual response that HC is continuing to do as much they can, will endeavour to put things into the capital budget next year, and if the team has the opportunity with the resources they have, they will try and fix the worst sections.

SW said photos were vital in order to get the roads team to do things.

Scottish Fire & Rescue – SW has received the fire safety leaflets, these mainly focus on campervans. It was agreed we will circulate these at the start of the tourist season next year.

Shared Rural Network (SRN) – SW, CH and Chris Johnson of TDCA met Cathy Fenning, one of the senior leaders at Building Digital UK, the government agency responsible for the SRN programme. She seemed unaware that broadband coverage is currently provided in the TKCC area through a combination of fibre, 4G masts, satellite and community broadband.

We outlined the concerns that we have reiterated many times before, and provided her with a map of the eleven 4G masts that currently serve the TKCC area, before overlaying this with a map of the eleven further proposed SRN masts, all of which are in remote and uninhabited areas. We explained that the existing 4G masts already provide coverage for all the roads and buildings. It would therefore be much cheaper and simpler to address any shortfalls in coverage by adapting existing infrastructure, rather than by building new masts.

Cathy Fenning encouraged us – and any other concerned organisations and individuals - to write to the new ministers, Peter Kyle (Secretary of State at DSIT) and Sir Chris Bryant (Minister of State at DSIT). TKCC and TDCA subsequently sent such a letter asking for an urgent review of priorities. A polite email response was received from Sir Chris Bryant acknowledging that our engagement with directors of the programme is very helpful and should be continued, and urging us to ensure community engagement with the planning process. He stated that he will continue to discuss the programme with officials to ensure the intended benefit for Scotland is delivered. TKCC members agreed it wasn't clear what this meant.

John Muir Trust letter – A total of 46 community councils, community organisations, landowners and conservation bodies, including TKCC, signed the letter to the new ministers calling for a pause and review of priorities in the Total Not Spot part of the SRN programme. We have not heard whether there has been a response.

The above coincided with some significant press coverage around community concerns, including in the Sunday Times, Independent, Scottish Sun and Daily Telegraph. The Daily Telegraph article stated that some of the mobile operators were also asking the government to review the programme.

West Ross Deer Management Group – TF attended the group's AGM. The main focus was on deer numbers, and whether estates were meeting their targets. Beinn Eighe (NatureScot) appears to be culling the most. Discussions also included the Shared Rural Network, in relation to which estates agreed that whilst some of the proposed new masts may be useful, most would not be.

HC Local Living tool consultation - MM submitted a response on behalf of TKCC. Update to be provided at the next TKCC meeting. *Action: MM*

HC Ecology strategy consultation – JT completed the consultation on behalf of TKCC. Update to be provided at the next TKCC meeting. *Action: JT*

HC Land Management Plan – Cllr Birt had no information about this, he will provide it at the next TKCC meeting. *Action: CB*

Scotland's International Development Alliance survey - MM completed the survey on behalf of TKCC. Update to be provided at the next TKCC meeting. *Action: MM*

Bin store in Fasaig – SW is working on this with Katie Anderson. A grant may be available to meet the cost from North Highland Initiative under their community infrastructure support programme. TKCC members agreed we should apply. *Action: SW/KA*

24/02266/FUL - Land 220M NE Of Heights Cottage Incheril Kinlochewe. Installation of a 20m high lattice tower and ancillary development. CH submitted a lengthy objection on behalf of TKCC to this proposed SRN mast.

3. Group Captain Sohail Khan - Regional Commandant, Scotland & Northern Ireland Region HQ, RAF Air Cadets

Group Captain Khan gave a presentation by video link to give an outline of what the Air Cadets do, and ask for volunteers to help get the Gairloch unit up and running again. The new purpose-built drill hall was built in Gairloch in 2017 and provides an excellent facility. However, the unit depends on volunteers and after Covid, existing volunteers moved away and the unit has struggled to re-start. The unit is now the only remaining unit in Wester Ross but deemed to be the best out of 110 Air Cadet units in Scotland.

Air Cadets are a uniformed youth group focused on Air, Space and Cyberspace. Their purpose is to grow young people's potential while fostering an interest in the RAF. This gives young people a chance to meet others, learn and gain experience in a structured environment. Focussed activities and experiences are offered in a supportive format, including through Duke of Edinburgh Awards, First Aid, target training, computer coding, also experience in flying and gliding. Academic help is given for BTECs in Aerospace and Space Studies.

The Gairloch unit is ready to go and needs 3-4 volunteers to be viable. A military background is not required as full training and support is given. Benefits for volunteers include the opportunity to learn new skills and develop leadership qualities, gain qualifications in mountain leadership, first aid, weapons training, and the sense of achievement helping young people realise their potential. Progression to commissions can be made starting as Civilian Instructor, and consideration is given to the amount of time that someone can give. Minimum age is 20 years and volunteers must have lived in the UK for 3 years. Upper age limit to commence training is around 60 years, with commissions above 65 years requiring further fitness checks.

An open day at Gairloch school will be held in October. TKCC members thanked Group Captain Khan for his very informative presentation and suggested it would be useful for the organisation to contact the Shieldaig community as residents there are generally younger than in the TKCC area, and children attend Gairloch High.

A link to the presentation will be put on the TKCC website.

Action SW

4. TKCC constitution, standing orders, code of conduct

While putting together the documents for the NHI grant application, it has emerged that we do not have a signed copy of TKCC's constitution on file. This is in a standard form, however for the sake of good order, CH proposed that at the next meeting we would take a formal vote on it and on the standing orders. We will also take the opportunity for TKCC members each to confirm that they agree to abide by the standard code of conduct. SW will circulate the documents for TKCC members to read in advance.

Action: SW/All

5. Treasurer's report

No payments/receipts since last month, current bank account balance remains £1,569.86. HC has not yet paid TKCC our annual grant of c.£447 but has promised to pay it soon.

It was agreed we should buy poppies for Armistice Day as usual this year.

Action: SS

6. Local Place Plan

The final plan was approved unanimously by TKCC members. This will now be submitted to HC.

CH explained that the final plan incorporated comments and suggestions received at the community feedback sessions. Also input from HC planning department which is overseeing the LPP process. The latter had been painful, with HC initially responding promptly with a list of things that needed to be incorporated in order for them to validate it, only for them then to take weeks to respond with another long list of new points once their initial points had been included in a new draft.

CH also felt that the LPP process needed to be reviewed. Overall, it had taken a huge amount of work to produce the plan, and TKCC could not have done it without the help of SCDC. Rather than being a simple document outlining local views, it appeared that what HC wanted was a detailed planning style document, in which precise paragraphs of relevant planning frameworks and the HC development plan and so on were referenced. CH felt this made it impossible for CCs to complete without specialist help and it was not right that some CCs had had to engage planning consultants to write their LPP for them.

7. Royal Mail deliveries

For the period 5th-9th September, there was no Royal Mail delivery in the TKCC area. This was because no temporary cover was provided by Royal Mail while both our regular postmen were away. Royal Mail did not issue any warning or information regarding the suspension of deliveries and members of the community were reliant on word of mouth and social media to find out. Royal Mail responded to a complaint email sent by SW, apologising for the inconvenience and saying due to staff shortages the deliveries were not carried out.

TKCC members agreed we should contact Royal Mail management in Dingwall to request that if there are staff shortages for a prolonged period in the future, Royal Mail must warn us ahead of time. They should also take steps to recruit temporary cover.

Action: CH

8. Correspondence received

- *Garve CC Local Place Plan* – Garve CC sent TKCC a draft of its LPP, as it is statutorily required to do. TKCC members had no comments.
- *Kirkhill & Bunchrew CC* – HC was due to debate a motion the following day that has been brought by Cllr Helen Crawford in relation to the proposed major new electricity pylons, substations and storage facilities that are currently or likely to be proposed for the Highlands. K&B CC has asked TKCC to join it and (now 54) other CCs in supporting the motion. In summary, the motion:
 - Acknowledges that, without prejudice to future determinations, such developments are very likely to have significant scheme specific and cumulative environmental and socio-economic impacts upon communities and landscapes.
 - Recognises that it is desirable that communities are fully engaged in the consultation and planning process and are suitably empowered to respond on an equal basis given the resources deployed by developers, SSEN and statutory consultees.
 - Notes that currently development applications are not considered in a Highland wide context, rather they are lodged individually in a piecemeal, fragmented fashion.

The motion also calls for HC to do the following:

- Produce a real time map, publicly available online, showing all the major renewable energy related developments within HC's knowledge, thereby providing a holistic overview of applications that are currently in the pipeline
- The leader to continue dialogue with Scottish Government to ensure the full cumulative aspect of developments is considered.
- Take urgent action to better equip communities regarding the planning process and how to present their case, by providing planning training to Community Councils.
- Engage with communities regarding the anticipated impacts and review what actions the Council can take to further ensure that local community views are considered in the planning process.

Cllr Liz Kraft had written to say that HC was already doing the actions called for. However, CH said this does not appear to be the case. TKCC members have never been offered training in how to respond to planning applications, and the map that exists only covers windfarms.

TKCC members agreed we should support the motion and ask Ward 5 Councillors to vote in favour. Whilst TKCC is not aware of any new pylon routes or substations proposed for our area,

a real time map would give us warning. TKCC members also felt strongly that we should be given planning training and that many of the principles included in the motion could equally apply to other infrastructure developments, such as the Shared Rural Network.

Cllr Birt said HC had agreed to the map and the training but he did not know when this would be done or given. He also said HC was going to propose some amendments to the motion, he did not know what they were, and they would not be sent to CCs for their views. TKCC members said they thought this was unfair.

- *Gairloch CC – First Responders.* Bob Widdows at Gairloch CC is trying to get the First Responders scheme started in their area, and TKCC members agreed it would be good to work together on this. CH will ask JT if she would be willing to contact Bob to see what we can do. *Action: CH*

- *HC camper van scheme and motorhome tourism leaflet* - Cllr Liz Kraft sent details. The campervan scheme was a voluntary arrangement whereby drivers could pay £40 per year and obtain access to the already in use Volunteer to pay car parks and Highlife Highland facilities. The scheme was aimed at those many vans who opt not to stay at designated sites and was an attempt to encourage more responsible campervan tourism as well as generate some income. Cllr Birt said it was a complete flop, HC was now looking at whether it would be possible to impose a mandatory charge, but that the mechanics of doing this may be too difficult. TKCC members suggested a number plate recognition scheme similar to that used for congestion charging in cities, and on motorways on the continent.

The motorhome tourism leaflet contains information and guidance on the access code, safe driving, overnight parking and waste disposal. It aims to help camper van users enjoy the Highlands responsibly, protecting the environment and keeping it clean, tidy and safe for visitors and residents. The leaflet is currently only available online, TKCC members agreed this was a pity and asked Cllr Birt to feedback that paper copies were needed so these can be given to drivers.

Action: CB

- *Forestry & Land Scotland* - Felling operations are due to start on FLS ground at Slattadale later in 2024 to remove conifers from the area around the lochside carpark. This is part of FLS' ongoing landscape-scale restoration of native woodlands, with objectives including the removal of disease threats and preservation of ancient Caledonian pinewoods. This upcoming felling is intended to support the extensive invasive non-native removal carried out in the Slattadale forest block.

During the felling works, the Slattadale carpark will be closed and alternative access to the Tollie path will be available from the Forest Road 1km north of the usual Slattadale entrance road, where a small parking area will be opened. Victoria Falls carpark and paths will not be affected.

- *Garve CC - level crossing closures.* Heavy maintenance is due to take place that will result in the Garve level crossing being closed as follows:

Mon, 30 September: 2100-0400 closed to everything except emergency vehicles
Tues, 1 Oct for 3 nights: 2100-0400 half closures, traffic management in place

Sat, 19 October: 2100-0400 closed to everything except emergency vehicles
Sun, 20 October: 0600-2100 half closures, traffic management in place
Sun, 20 October: 2100-0600 closed to everything except emergency vehicles
Mon, 21 Oct for 2 nights: 2100-0400 half closures, traffic management in place

- *Scottish Health Research Register & Biobank (SHARE)*. The NHS needs healthy people and people with health conditions to join this research project. Health research is important so the NHS can prevent people from getting unwell and try to improve treatments if they do become ill. People who join SHARE may be sent information about research projects, these might involve taking part in online surveys, sharing your views on your healthcare or taking part in a study researching a new medication for an illness you may have. For more information, call 01382 383471 go to www.registerforshare.org or email enquiries@registerforshare.org
- *Private water supply research* - A researcher at Stirling University is conducting a survey on private water supply quality in Scotland to find out how users of private water supplies perceive the quality of their water and how effective the current support is for improving private supplies. Anyone who currently has (or has previously had) a private water supply is invited to complete it, with survey respondents able to enter a prize draw to win £25 supermarket vouchers. See following link: <https://forms.office.com/e/4LvZqeU64J>.

9. Planning Applications

24/03651/PNO Proposed peatland restoration scheme - Phase 2 on Coulin Estate.

TKCC members agreed this was a well proposed scheme. No other comments.

10. Any other business

Chemical waste disposal road signs – HC has provided mock ups of proposed signage to direct motorists to the chemical waste disposal point at the new toilets in Kinlochewe. These will be at the entrances to the village and opposite the toilet site itself. They said COW Trust are keen to see the signage installed, and TKCC members agreed to support it as well.

Action: CH

HC mobile library – Minutes from a recent Gairloch CC meeting stated that the business case for renewing the mobile library fleet has been approved by HC fleet department. Whilst the delivery schedule for the vehicles is not yet known (it is believed they will be leased), this means the service will be continuing. Cllr Birt confirmed this was true and TKCC members agreed it is very good news.

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 23rd October – 7.00pm

By Zoom