

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)
Meeting held by Zoom at 7.15pm
Wednesday 15th November 2023

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

- 1. Apologies** – none.
- 2. Minutes of the meeting on 4th October 2023**
Approved.
- 3. Matters arising from meeting on 4th October**

HC mobile library – Cllr Birt reported that Steve Walsh of Highlife Highland has offered to attend a TKCC meeting to discuss the future of the service. It was agreed we should invite him.

Action: CB/SW

GALE – CH contacted GALE and obtained a copy of their Community Action Plan. The plan was circulated to TKCC members, it includes some actions for Kinlochewe.

Torridon School – CH reported that the Scottish Government has decided not call in HC's decision, therefore unfortunately the school will be closed.

Blocked drains in Fasaig - TF confirmed the drain is still blocked and will keep chasing Andrew Bone.

Action: TF

Kishorn Port – SW has not yet asked how many people work at KPL and how many are living locally but will do so.

Action: SW

Scottish Forum of Community Councils –SW investigated further. It is open to all Community Councils, there is no joining fee and the forum's aims are to:

- Share knowledge and experience on subjects of common interest.
- To represent the interests of CCs in dialog with the Scottish Government, COSLA and other public bodies.
- To provide services and facilities to CCs to assist them in their role.
- To strengthen the role, capacity and influence of CCs via legislation or other means.
- To encourage the establishment of Associations and Federations or Joint Forums of Community Councils in each Scottish Local Authority area.

Members agreed that this would be a very useful forum to join and SW will send in the application on behalf of TKCC to join it.

Action:SW

23/03654/FUL – CH wrote to HC as agreed.

WHP Telecoms/ Shared Rural Network – CH responded as agreed. See further discussion below.

Action: CH

4. Treasurer's report

Deferred until the next meeting since SS had only just been elected as Treasurer.

5. Local Place Plan (LPP)

CH outlined the background that Local Place Plans, introduced by the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019, are a formal way for communities to think about how to make their place better, to agree priorities and to take action (often working with others) to make change happen. Community groups can express their aspirations and priorities for the future of their place through the submission of ideas and proposals for the development or use of land or buildings.

The Community Development Plan which covers place and services has already identified many aspects of the community's aspirations for the area. An LPP would focus on use of land and buildings only. It would be relevant for example to the plans for the future use of Torridon School, and land use in the area for affordable housing.

The benefit of an LPP is that Highland Council have a statutory obligation to take account of the submissions made within it when they are making plans for the local area.

TKCC has already registered its intention to submit a Local Place Plan, though with no obligation to proceed if that is what is decided. The timescale for submission is a year, however CH suggested it would be better to do it sooner rather than later while the results from the Development Plan survey are current and relevant, and duplication of further surveys /work can be minimal.

TKCC members asked who would prepare the LPP, CH suggested that ideally it would be those who are on the steering group for the Community Development Plan as they have already worked on many of these aspects. A draft would then be put to TKCC and the community for agreement before it is submitted to Highland Council.

Laura Macdonald at SCDC is available up to March 2024 and has agreed to provide help and guidance. MM also asked to be part of the group that works on the LPP.

On the basis of the above, TKCC members agreed that we should proceed.

Action CH

6. Shared Rural Network (SRN) mobile phone masts

In October, Natasha Hutchison and Louise Pearson of Wester Ross Biosphere (WRB) and CH met with the following people involved with delivering the SRN project:

Louise McIntyre (LM) - Digital Mobile Spectrum Ltd, a joint venture vehicle of the mobile operators
Antony Morgan (AM) – strategic lead at Digital UK, an executive agency of UK Government Dept for Science, Innovation and Technology (DSIT)

Leah Richardson – total not spot lead at Digital UK

Sarah Mossman – Building Digital UK, also part of DSIT

Pezo Benjamin – local stakeholder engagement manager, Building Digital UK

Miriam – a new starter in Leah's team

LM explained the SRN programme is being driven by the UK Government/ Ofcom which has instructed the mobile operators that 95% of the geography (not population) of the UK must have 4G mobile coverage by 2025. If they do not meet this target they will be fined.

This means eliminating Total Not Spots (TNS) and Partial Not Spots (PNS). TNS are areas where there is currently no 4G signal (eg. Coire Mhic Nobuil), PNS are areas where there is signal but coverage is only provided by one operator. As the TNS are not commercially viable for operators, the UK Government is paying for masts in these areas. The operators are paying for the rest.

There is no requirement for operators to share masts, so in theory each of Virgin O2, EE, Three and Vodafone could put up their own, and the UK Government could then add more. CH reported she told the meeting this was ridiculous, we could end up with more masts than people!

CH and WRB made it clear that no-one was against better connectivity for communities (far from it). But they expressed huge concern that mast sites were being chosen without any consultation. CH questioned why SRN did not come and have a grown-up conversation with communities first, explain why the masts were needed, who would benefit etc rather than pushing on with proposals that appeared to bring no additional coverage to communities and businesses, therefore were bound to result in opposition. Wasting a huge amount of everyone's time and money. She complained that we had been trying to get this information out of WHP but to no avail.

LM, AM and the others said there was nothing they could do about it other than to pass on our concerns to the operators. They encouraged communities to oppose proposals through the planning process if necessary. They also said they would like only to deal with consensual landowners, ie if landowners opposed, they would be unwilling to go down the compulsory purchase route.

In relation to Glen Torridon, CH is in touch with NTS, NatureScot, Woodland Trust, Coulin and Ben Damp Estate. This is with a view to sharing information about locations of masts, planning applications etc.

An action group of local residents (including some TKCC members) has formed. In relation to other areas of the UK affected by SRN masts, they have contacted groups in Knoydart and the Lake District, for example, who are arguing that the public benefit is minimal (if any) and does not outweigh the harm to the landscape and environment. In the Lake District, they have so far successfully resisted applications for 12 SRN masts on this basis.

The action group is preparing an open letter to be sent to the UK Minister in charge, John Whittingdale. Amongst other things, this calls for a proper dialogue with communities before the masts are instigated, to include full information on why the masts are needed, a full cost benefit analysis, and a slowdown in the programme to give the Highland Council and others time to evaluate proposals properly. They would like TKCC and other organisations to sign, and a draft will be circulated in due course for TKCC members to consider.

A full planning application has now been submitted for a mast in Coire Mhic Nobuil (see Planning Applications Item 8 below). The deadline for comments was very short, therefore SW, MM and CH put out a notice on Visit Torridon to tell people that if they had any comments they needed to submit them to HC Planning by 23 November. TF was very angry that this had gone out on Tuesday under the TKCC logo since TKCC had not been re-formed at that date. SW, MM and CH apologised and said that was not the intention. Chris Davies who runs Visit Torridon and who was present said it was her fault, and she agreed to publish an apology.

TKCC members agreed that there are parts of our area that need better connectivity. However, most also agreed that the SRN programme risks bringing connectivity to the wrong places and causing significant environmental harm in the process. TF commented that in his personal opinion he continued to believe the SRN masts would bring benefits to some areas, although he agreed the

necessary information had not been provided. He had traced a line between proposed sites and confirmed they joined up with each other. CS felt in his personal opinion the operators would not be participating in the programme without a commercial imperative. It was agreed that full consultation between the operators, government agencies/departments and the community is required to establish the facts.

7. Correspondence received

- GALE re meeting

CH received an invitation from GALE to a “collaborative gathering” of Chairs of community councils. CH told them that TKCC had not been re-formed yet, therefore we did not know who the Chair would be. Also, the date was very close to our re-form date and would not give much notice. She understands other CCs responded in a similar way. GALE then said they would arrange a new date in the new year after Wester Loch Ewe CC has held its election (because more than the maximum number of people put their names forward for membership).

- Kinlochewe resident re Celtman

A resident was interested in obtaining a breakdown of the £54k that Celtman say they have invested in local projects and organisations. SW sent contact details for the event organisers and suggested she contacted them directly. As it happened, Celtman also circulated a flyer with this information shortly afterwards.

- Diabaig and area film location enquiry

A film location scout had been in touch about a possible 4-6 week shoot in Diabaig and/or elsewhere in the Torridon area in around April 2024. CH spoke to the scout, and explained that a similar shoot last year had benefited some (eg. if their property had been used) but not everyone. She asked, and the scout agreed, for the whole community to be compensated for the disruption if this new shoot goes ahead. CH told TKCC members this was standard practice in the film and television industry, and all agreed communities should ask for location fees in the future.

- Kinlochewe resident re street lighting

A resident says he and a number of other residents would like the street lights in Kinlochewe to be switched off from say, 11pm to 5am (times to be agreed). He would like TKCC’s help with this. TF agreed to contact him and find out more.

Action: TF

*** Post meeting note – If you live in Kinlochewe and are in favour of changes to the street lighting, please contact a TKCC member. This will help us decide on next steps.

8. Planning applications

23/04138/FUL: 25.0m lattice tower, 3no. antenna, 2no. 0.6m dishes, 3no. external equipment cabinets, 1no. generator on new base, and all other ancillary development thereto, contained within a 1.8m high deer proof post and rail fenced compound. Land North of Abhainn Coire Mhic Nobuil, Torridon IV22 2HA. E189995 N859729 (HC Planning Application Portal now describes it as Land 2000M NE Of Stables Cottage Torridon.)

This the first planning application for an SRN mast in our area, previous notifications have been pre-planning notices to TKCC. A draft objection from TKCC will be circulated to members for comments.

Action: SW/MM/CH

The site is on NTS land and NTS have told TKCC that they intend to object very strongly. They are holding a community meeting on 4 December to discuss the SRN scheme at a national level, more locally within the Wester Ross/Torridon area, and specifically the Coire Mhic Nobhuil proposal.

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

In order to obtain an extension of time, a holding objection was put in on 14 November as this was the deadline for comments. Now that TKCC has been re-formed, members agreed to discuss separately. TKCC will then withdraw/replace the objection as appropriate.

Action: All

23/04760/FUL: Erection of sauna building. Land 130M NW Of Gate Lodge Coulin, Kinlochewe
No comments.

9. Any other business

CH reported that South West Ross Community Car Scheme has just been awarded the Kings Award for Volunteering. TKCC members were very pleased and sent hearty congratulations.

Councillor Birt asked that some thought be given to future discussion on HC's Climate Change Committee request for community views on key issues such as power generation, food production and home heating. CH suggested these could be suitable subjects for the Local Place Plan.

Future Meeting Dates: To be advised.