

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC) Meeting held by Zoom on Wednesday, 13 January 2021 at 7pm

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Tom Forrest (Treasurer), Colin Stevenson, Steve Schnabel, Alpin Stewart, Sally Cook (until 7.30pm), Mat Webster,

Clea Warner – General Manager for Highlands and Islands, National Trust for Scotland (NTS),
Firefighter Emily John, 8 members of the public

1. Apologies

Christine Davies (Secretary), Seamus MacNally (NTS) – both with internet problems.

2. Minutes of meeting on 2 December 2020

Approved (AS/TF) subject to an amendment to the final paragraph of item 7 which should read, “CS has been in touch with the Hickman Trust and they were interested in possible representation at one of our meetings.”

Action: CD

3. National Trust for Scotland

Clea Warner provided an overview of the impact of the COVID pandemic on the NTS, which has particularly impacted their revenue streams. As a result the NTS has had to review their portfolio and plans and make some very difficult decisions, including staff redundancies and property closures. Future planning and the re-opening of facilities is difficult until further guidance is provided on the relaxation of current restrictions.

The Torridon estate is an important property for the NTS. There are no plans to sell it. Seamus MacNally is due to retire as ranger in the near future, following which there are plans for a new ranger/property manager for Torridon. It is anticipated that recruitment for Seamus’ replacement will start at the end of February.

As part of the NTS “Vision & Master Plan” for Wester Ross, future plans for the Torridon estate are being developed. This process was put on hold last year when Covid struck but will hopefully be picked back up during the summer, post-Covid. In addition to conservation, the areas being looked at include improvements to the visitor centre and deer museum, upgrading and investing in NTS accommodation, and plans for connecting people to the landscape.

CW would be very keen to hold further discussions with the Community on future NTS plans and how we can support each other once COVID restrictions begin to ease, and will contact us in due course. MW subsequently agreed to become the point person and send contact details.

Action: MW

CW was asked a number of questions about local issues, She apologised that she was unable to answer these as they were Seamus’ responsibility. She promised to send an update on the pending approval for the removal of the cattle grid in Glen Torridon. CW will follow up with Alan Barrow, NTS Estate Surveyor on this.

4. Matters arising

Dropbox – Members now have details of the TKCC dropbox.

Planning Applications – Diabaig Telecoms Mast – We are still waiting for details from Alex MacInnes of the HC case officer responsible.

Action: CH/CD to chase

Roads – No response yet from Mack Sutherland/Ian Moncrieff on our request for traffic counters.

Postal Delivery times – the revised delivery arrangements for December were circulated.

Celtman – SS has contacted the organisers and TF has offered them the use of a field to help ease congestion. Covid restrictions have put this year's event in jeopardy, however assuming the organisers can resolve the issues, SS will invite them to a TKCC meeting.

Community Gardening – requests for ideas have not yet been circulated. It is intended to do this asap.

Action: SC/CD

Shieldaig Community Council – Kalie Wilkinson was welcomed to the meeting as a representative.

Community Asset Transfers – CH has spoken to Pablo Mascarenhas at HC who was very helpful in explaining the process. Dot Ferguson was also on the call and she offered to provide help and advice if we wish proceed with a development plan (see further below).

Coastal Communities Fund – the two proposals were submitted, however both were rejected principally for the same reasons, namely TKCC does not own the assets concerned and did not provide evidence of match funding.

TKCC Code of Conduct – is now on the TKCC website.

Torridon School – at HC's request, an informal meeting between HC and TKCC members took place in December 2020. HC asked for the community's views about what should happen to the school if the decision was taken to close it (any such decision would need to go through a community consultation process in any case). It was discussed and agreed the community needed to know whether this would involve the schoolhouse and playpark as well as the school. HC agreed to send us definitive information on this asap.

5. Treasurer's report

Current funds: TKCC - £1,105.03, HIE Covid/Communities Recovery - £3,010.94.

In light of the new Covid lockdown, it was agreed we should contact HIE to find out if there is any more funding available to support the community.

Action: CH

6. Emergency services report

- Fire callouts - both stations continue to be very quiet, no further callouts.
- Focus continues on safety in the home during the winter period and due to people now having to work from home again. So some reminders:
 - Don't try to cook while drunk!
 - Regularly test home fire and heat alarms
 - Unplug electrical equipment at night
- Due to COVID restrictions, home fire safety visits can only be made to those identified in very high risk categories – smokers over 50 who live on their own or those who have mobility issues or are on medical oxygen. Please let Emily know if there are any residents in the category who may benefit from a visit.
- All on station activities have been suspended.
- First responders – one call out since the last meeting. 6 people are now waiting to undertake the training to join the team. If anyone else wishes to join please do get in touch with Emily

7. Torridon toilets

In December 2020, TKCC members met with members of the TDCA to discuss the problems caused by the lack of public toilets and chemical toilet waste facilities in Torridon. With the campsite toilets closed, and no certainty about whether or when they will re-open, it was agreed that a solution needed to be found, especially since we are likely to experience at least as many tourists this year as we did in 2020.

To build something new would inevitably take a lot of time and money (even assuming a site was available), therefore it was agreed that the simplest, quickest and cheapest solution would be to try and make some existing toilets available.

Following this, CH contacted Highlife Highland to ask if it would be possible to de-couple their toilets from the campsite and open them. This would involve closing the showers and washing facilities and making them toilet only. They said they would consider it, especially if there were people in the area who would be prepared to help with the extra cleaning that would be required because of Covid. A donations box for users could be used to help meet the costs.

Highlife Highland agreed to get back to us on this asap in the new year. If no response is received soon, CH will chase.

Action: CH

8. Development plan

After a lengthy discussion, it was agreed that TKCC should look into the possibility of putting together a community development plan. The purpose of this would be to consult and pull together the priorities of the community for the future development of the area. This in turn could help unlock grant funding opportunities for community initiatives.

It was agreed that before making any decision, more information was required. We should therefore consult with other communities which have development plans and contact relevant organisations. For example:

- would we need to engage an independent consultant to help draw up the plan?
- if so, who would engage the consultant, and how much would they cost?
- how would the cost be paid for?
- would a separate development company be required?

- would we need a recovery/development officer?

Kevin Wood suggested we talk to the Kyle of Sutherland Community Trust, Kalie Wilkinson said the Development Trust Association of Scotland was very helpful.

Action: MW/CH

9. Planning notification

Upgrade works to existing radio base station at 200m uphill from forest road, South East of A896, Kinlochewe, Coulin – no comments.

10. AOB

Mary Peart reported that the COW Trust had been successful in obtaining the necessary grant funding from RTIF to go ahead with its re-development plans for the toilets in Kinlochewe. It is hoped that work will start in Autumn 2021. Everyone present offered their congratulations and thanked the COW Trust for all that they are doing.

Lilah Ford also wished to thank the volunteers on the Community Car scheme for delivering medication and groceries in recent months. TKCC wholeheartedly agreed.

Kalie Wilkinson asked for an update on the proposed telecoms mast on the Diabaig to Craig footpath. CH agreed to contact her about this after the meeting.