

**Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)**  
**Meeting held by Zoom at 7.00pm**  
**Wednesday 6<sup>th</sup> September 2023**

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

- 1. Apologies** –Mat Webster.
- 2. Minutes of the meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July 2023**  
Approved.
- 3. Matters arising from meeting on 19<sup>th</sup> July**  
*Bin surround, Torridon* – Still to be done.

*Action: AS/MW*

*HC repair of bridge by Wester Alligin* – SW has tried to contact the roads team via Ward 5 office, no response yet. TF has spoken to the HC bridge inspector, Neil Reid, and suggested a metal Armco safety barrier. He also told him about the bridge at Cromasaig which is collapsing and that there is a section of road nearby where the river is undercutting it. Neil said he would take the suggestions on board.

*Lochcarron (formerly Howard Doris) Centre, Lochcarron* – MM has attended further working group meetings and it is clear that, whilst TKCC residents are welcome to join in other activities, the NHS will no longer be providing day care services at the centre. Members agreed this was a great shame and that we should consider whether there is anything we can do about it.

*Kinlochewe village septic tank* – CS reported that the situation appears to have settled down. Some particles have been found in the river, however SEPA's view is these are not sewage and they are not harmful. It is thought they are the result of furring on the inside of a pipe. SEPA are continuing to monitor and Wester Ross Fisheries Trust and the estate are keeping a close eye on it.

*Gregor Watson – HS Ranger Service* – As agreed, we gave Gregor contact details for the Fire Chief at Kyle. SW also wrote expressing TKCC's support for more information boards. Gregor said this had helped and that he was trying to get more signage. He was also pleased to report that he has obtained magnetic fire risk signs for all Ranger vans to be used at times of high fire risk.

*Mowi Scotland* – Feedback from people who attended the webinar on 31 July was that it was disappointing. It was very short and unfortunately there was no-one from Mowi who could answer questions. Mowi has however agreed to hold a separate meeting with local residents to discuss their sustainability certification activities in Loch Torridon.

*Sustrans cycle roadside repair kits* – As agreed, CH forwarded the information to Torridon Community Centre and Kinlochewe Hall.

**4. Treasurer's report**

Since the last report, we have received our annual grant of £447.27 from HC and paid out costs of £23.10 (£16 meeting room hire and £7.10 for coffees) relating to the community development plan and financed by SCDC; £103.18 for the annual renewal of the tkcc.scot domain name; and £194.40 for a three year renewal of the Wix website licence.

The current bank account balance is £2,155.65.

## **5. Community Council elections**

Every four years, community councils are dissolved and elections held for community councillors. The next dissolution date is 10 October or 27 November 2023 (depending on whether votes need to be held, see below), and anyone wishing to join TKCC, including current members, must nominate themselves on the HC website by 3 October 2023. For further information from HC, click on this link: [guidance note here](#).

New TKCC members would be very welcome. The only requirements are that individuals should be aged 16 or over, have an address in the TKCC area and be on the electoral roll here.

The maximum number of TKCC members is 8. If more than 8 people put their names forward, votes will be held. If there are fewer than 4 people, TKCC will be unable to re-form and will go into abeyance.

Assuming that more than 4 people do nominate themselves, TKCC will be re-formed as soon as possible after 10 October or 27 November (see above), with the precise date depending on when HC representatives can be present.

HC have provided posters and other publicity material. It was agreed we need to put these up on noticeboards and circulate on social media as soon as possible. SW agreed to co-ordinate.

*Action: SW/All*

TKCC members discussed the situation in Shildaig where the CC has been in abeyance for a number of years. It was agreed Shildaig is missing an important community voice, and residents/ businesses are likely to be missing out on opportunities to ask for support, as well as to hear and comment on things happening in the area, including planning applications etc. TKCC members agreed to encourage people we know in Shildaig to put themselves forward, and a parent at Shildaig School who was present said she would alert other parents.

## **6. Proposed mobile phone masts – Shared Rural Network**

WHP Telecoms have contacted TKCC with limited details of pre planning notifications to build a large number of new mobile phone masts in many remote sites within our area. WHP are working on behalf of the Shared Rural Network (SRN) – a £1billion programme supported by a mix of public and private funds involving EE, O2, Three, Vodafone and the UK Government. The stated aim of SRN is to improve mobile broadband coverage in rural communities, thereby boosting productivity and investment in rural areas. It appears they wish to extend 4G geographic coverage to 95% of the UK by 2025.

The first pre planning notification TKCC received was for a 25 meter high lattice tower, along with its concrete base, external structures, fences, generator etc on the Coire Mhic Nobuil footpath between Beinn Alligin, Beinn Dearg and Liathach. The mast would be on NTS owned land and is in the middle of one of the most beautiful parts of the Highland, an SSSI area and within NatureScot's defined area of Wild Land. The existing footpath was proposed to be widened to allow for plant/construction material access for the build and ongoing servicing.

CH called the person at WHP who sent the email to express dismay at the proposal, but they had little knowledge of the specific area or scale of the hills surrounding the location. Following this application, a succession of more applications for new masts arrived, most in similarly stunning and

remote areas, many accessible by only a narrow footpath, some in steep elevated areas. Total new masts proposed so far for the TKCC and immediate surrounding areas is 12:

- Coire Mhic Nobuil, Torridon Forest, Torridon, IV22 2HA E: 189995 N: 859729
- Gleann na Muice, Heights of Kinlochewe, Kinlochewe, IV22 2PA E: 207628 N: 864341
- Heights Of Kinlochewe, Kinlochewe, Highlands, IV22 2PA E: 210419 N: 864976
- Lochan Fada, Gleann Bianasdail, Kinlochewe, IV22 2PD E: 203465 N: 869066.
- Loch na h-Oidhche, Flowerdale Forest, Talladale, IV22 2HL E: 188557 N: 867220.
- Ben Damph, Ben Damph Forest, Ben Damph Estate, IV22 2EU E: 191523 N: 852423
- Glen Torridon, West Of Loch Clair, Torridon, Highland, IV22 2ES, E:197994 N:856351
- Coulin Estate, Torran Coulinn, Highland, IV22 2ES, E:202254 N:856033
- Land at Strathanmore, Kernsary, Letterewe Estate, IV22 2LB E: 194567 N: 876164
- Loch Fannich, Strathban Forest, Achanalt, Highland, IV23 2QD E: 215672 N: 866974
- Loch Fannich, Strathban Forest, Achanalt, Highland, IV23 2QD E:225916 N:864470
- Loch Fannich, Achanalt, Highland, IV23 2QE E:221930 N:866442

TKCC has objected to the proposals in our area, and CH understands that NTS, NatureScot and Wester Ross Biosphere have done too. WRB have produced a map of all the masts that they know about so far. CH has also asked WHP whether any more masts are planned for our area, however has received no response.

Most people at the meeting were extremely concerned, with many expressing horror about the proposals. One TKCC member was in favour. Views expressed at the meeting by TKCC members and members of the public and in emails received by those unable to attend included:

- Mobile phone coverage in parts of our area can be poor and improvements would be welcomed, but it should only be improved if there is a benefit to the communities.
- Many of the new masts appear to be in areas where the signal will not reach communities/business, therefore will have no or only limited benefit to this area.
- Detrimental effect of changing footpaths into tracks to access sites for building the infrastructure and maintenance.
- Need to protect and preserve areas of outstanding natural beauty, but at the same time find a way to improve connectivity. Need to know what each mast is for and why the sites have been chosen.
- Does the cost of installing and maintaining masts in such remote areas outweigh the benefit they will bring.
- Improved connectivity in the very remote areas would help those who get into in difficulty.
- Strong objection to the masts being in this area of outstanding natural beauty, SSSI areas, and Wild Land areas specified by Nature Scot.
- Visitors and climbers come to this very special natural area because it is peaceful and unspoilt and majority know the risks associated with the remote and challenging environment.
- Who is the coverage for? Is it to enable walkers whilst walking in the hills to stream their experience? Whilst mobile signal in the hills is very useful, part of walking is about the wilderness and people should be equipped enough to navigate without phones.
- Huge concern at the negative/damaging environmental impact involved with construction and maintaining 25 metre lattice towers including the surrounding infrastructure of concrete bases, high metal fences and generators on sites a long distance from access to main roads.

- Requirement for a proper environmental assessment of the impact of the work to put up new masts should be made, for consideration in terms of the planning process.
- A cost/benefit analysis to identify which new masts should go ahead or not.
- Need to address who is actually making the decisions for this programme. If they are coming from Westminster, we need to be having conversations at a higher level, not just locally.
- Government edict for this nationwide programme is a one size fits all but does not work for all rural/isolated communities. Would be useful to communicate with other remote communities such as Knoydart to hear their views, and organisations such as the John Muir Trust/Mountaineering Scotland to help form a plan.
- Agreement to support any further action needed.
- Neighbouring Community Councils are concerned about sites of certain masts.

No formal planning applications have been made as yet, and MM is awaiting confirmation from HC Planning Department on whether the applications will be permitted development.

CH thanked everyone for their comments and summarised the discussion by saying everyone agreed better connectivity is in general a good thing, but we are questioning the sites of some of the masts. There must be a full public consultation, and this needs to include all the facts, eg:

- A full picture of all the new masts proposed, as well as existing masts
- Purpose of each individual mast – whether it is for the community, business or hillwalkers, or “not spot” areas
- What are the alternative sites if location is remote and naturally sensitive.
- An environmental impact assessment for new sites where there are no existing masts.
- A cost/benefit analysis because the funding for the programme in Scotland is from public money.

TKCC will co-ordinate a plan for going forward and will keep the community informed.

*Action: CH/others*

## **7. Highland Council mobile library service**

At our last meeting, Cllr Birt informed us that HC were not intending to discontinue the service but were experiencing problems with the existing vehicle breakdown and the replacement bus still being out of service awaiting repairs, but as far as he was aware there was no intention to discontinue the mobile service.

Since then there has been some confusion arising with emails circulating between community councils and HC regarding the questionable future of the mobile library service.

Cllr Birt sought to clarify by saying he had received an email from Steve Walsh (High Life Highland Chief Executive) that stated:

*HLH are working with HC Transport Section to explore a range of options around replacement of the fleet, to establish vehicle costs/spec etc with suppliers looking at cost/benefit and then HLH will consider the most cost effective approach to fund the continuation for the service across the Highlands. The current mobile van service will continue to visit remote locations for mobile library customers.*

*The alternative offering for when the mobile van is off the road for repairs, library customers can order books online and one of the HLH team will arrange to deliver them on the next scheduled visit to the*

area. Or customers can tell HLH staff which type of books they like and HLH staff will choose books on their behalf.

There is not a great uptake of this alternative service because most mobile library customers value the experience of browsing the shelves and choosing a title themselves. Feedback from rural primary schools also indicates it is the experience of class visits to the mobile library and being able to browse books that appeals to pupils rather than going online. In terms of a new operating model of service delivery, this might form part of the Service Delivery Contract Review but it was quite far down the line of priorities at the moment.

SS noted that this was not a specific commitment to either continue or discontinue the service and asked CB to clarify the future of the van. There is a strong feeling within communities about keeping the service and that proper consultation between HLH, HC and communities is required.

CB agreed to further take this up with Steve Walsh.

*Action: CB*

## **8. Proposed change to GALE's operating area/ area of benefit**

TKCC have recently been made aware of the intention of GALE (Gairloch and Lochewe Action Forum), based at Gairloch, to hold an EGM on the 14<sup>th</sup> September to vote on a proposal to change their area of operation and extend their area of benefit as defined in their Articles of Association.

In December last year, GALE proposed to extend their area of benefit to the whole of IV22. The issue was an agenda item on GALE's AGM, although no prior consultation had been made with TKCC or groups including Kinlochewe Village Hall, COW Trust, Torridon & Kinlochewe Action Plan Group. At that time, TKCC in support of those organisations wrote to the GALE directors to ask why they were making these proposed changes without any consultation with anyone in our area. The proposal was dropped at the AGM but has now re-surfaced.

The new proposed Articles remove any definition of area of operation and extend GALE's area of benefit to include the communities of Kinlochewe and Slattadale by virtue of specific IV22 postcodes. COW Trust, Kinlochewe Village Hall and TDCA have again expressed concern to TKCC that this is being done without any consultation with the people and organisations in Kinlochewe and Slattadale who are the most affected.

It was agreed TKCC will write again to the directors of GALE to express these concerns.

*Action: CH*

## **9. Correspondence received**

- **Durty Events - Celtman 2024**  
Durty Events hope to run next year's Celtman events on 15 and 22 June 2024. They recognise these can only happen with the support of the community and landowners/land-managers, and that they do place strain on the area, eg. in relation to car parking. They intend to come up with plans to help alleviate problems – these could include a 'code of conduct' for participants.

Since Celtman began, they have donated around £54k to various local projects and organisations, and have spent a further £250k with local businesses.

- **Beinn Eighe National Nature Reserve – Community Deer Stalking Initiative**  
NatureScot are looking for expressions of interest from full time residents of the Community Council areas of: Torridon & Kinlochewe, Sheildaig, Gairloch; or anyone living within 15 km of Beinn Eighe NNR to join a community based deer stalking group on the NNR. This will contribute

to NatureScot's ambitions of protecting and restoring important habitats on the Reserve. It will also help us to encourage local community involvement in the management of the NNR.

As well as interest from those who may already be deer stalking and have qualifications, they are also keen to hear from those who have an interest but have yet to gain any qualifications or experience. They hope it will be a low or no cost scheme for participants.

If you are interested, please email Doug Bartholomew, NNR Manager – [Doug.Bartholomew@nature.scot](mailto:Doug.Bartholomew@nature.scot) or call 01445 760254 or 07554 583487 by 29 September.

- Highland Council – Torridon School final report  
The statutory consultation period in relation to Torridon School ended on 21 April 2023 and the related Consultation Report has now been published. This recommends the school should be closed. AS advised that the final decision will need to be taken by the Scottish Government and we are expecting this to come through in the Spring.
- NHS Highland/ HC – Strategic Plan for Adult Services 2024-27  
NHS Highland and HC are consulting on the Strategic Plan for Adult Services 2024-27 for the delivery of integrated health and adult social care services by the Highland Health and Social Care Partnership. To read the plan and complete a survey (closing date 30 September), visit <https://www.nhshighland.scot.nhs.uk/about/highland-health-and-social-care-partnership/publications/> Alternatively email [nhsh.pmoadmin.nhs.scot](mailto:nhsh.pmoadmin.nhs.scot) for a paper version.

## 10. Planning applications

*23/03696/FUL: Alterations and erection of extension to house - Rockybank, Alligin Achnasheen IV22 2HB. No comment.*

*23/03619/FUL: Siting of 8no self-contained prefabricated pods for staff accommodation and associated works - Land 30M South of Staff Block Torridon Inn, Torridon. TKCC has already commented that no levels information (existing or proposed) has been provided, and we believe it would be prudent for the planning service to request levels information and sections through the site, and to check any proposed retention features to ensure that such features do not detract from the overall finished appearance of the development. The application mentions that some trees will be removed but there is no detail or tree survey within the package of documents. Again, we believe this information should be provided in case it has any bearing.*

*23/03190/FUL: Demolition of sunroom and erection of ancillary accommodation annexe - An Airidh, Kinlochewe, Achnasheen IV22 2PA. No comment.*

*23/03439/S37: New 33kv overhead line spur of connection to new communications mast by Loch Maree, Achnasheen. Application Decided 20<sup>th</sup> July.*

This application was made under Section 37 (overhead lines) of the Electricity Act 1989, and is a relevant point of interest regarding the new mast proposals discussed above in Agenda item 6. Even if a mast is a permitted development, it will require separate planning permission for ancillary works to be done with regard to connection of overhead electricity lines. This application was submitted, validated and decided within a period of only 3 days, a timescale we should be aware of.

## 11. Any other business

A resident of Fasaig has asked TKCC to help with blocked drains by the side of the road in the village. She has asked HC a couple of times to clear them but nothing has happened.

*Action: TF*

**Next meeting date - 7pm on Zoom:**

Wednesday, 4<sup>th</sup> October 2023

**Further dates subject to HC approval:**

Wednesday, 15<sup>th</sup> November

Wednesday, 13<sup>th</sup> December