

Brora Community Council

Minutes of Meeting held on 20th January 2015 at Beachview Centre,
Muirfield Road.

- 1. Present:-**Kathleen Cunningham (Chair); Russell Rekhy (Vice Chair); Lee Bright (Sec); Karen Mackay (Treasurer); Margaret Mackintosh; Catherine Sutherland; George McBeath;

Jennifer Wilson taking Minutes.

Representing SSE – Ruth Liddicoat, (community liaison); Nicky Small, (Project Manager); Anna Webster (Landscape and Visuals Officer).

5 members of the public.

- 2. Apologies:-** Lorraine Davidson-Payne

- 3. Chair's Welcome and News:-**

The Chair, Kathleen Cunningham, welcomed everyone to the Meeting, including Jennifer Wilson who has agreed to do the Minutes, and the 3 representatives of SSE/Gordonbush Windfarm development.

She wished all a Happy, Healthy and Peaceful 2015, and is delighted to report that the many Parish Events over the Festive Period went really well. The village was beautifully decorated. Volunteer Groups and Individuals worked hard and the Community supported their efforts.

Then came the BLAST! Causing extreme hardship and worry for so many households, including some very vulnerable people, who were left without power. I wasn't in the village over that extended weekend of hardship, but through the power of "Facebook" watched evidence of a "coming together" in true community spirit. Groups of volunteers provided support in so many ways . . . opening up the School, which lies at the heart of this community, and the Community Centre facilities to provide meals, showers and company.

When the request for emergency provisions went out, enough food to feed an army was delivered. Seldom had so much food been seen under one roof. Shops supported in many ways and volunteers actually went round areas knocking on doors to offer information and transport. In any remote, widespread community, communication at a time like this is going to be extremely challenging for everyone. Fortunately the size of the community has its plus points – in that we know our neighbours and who might be severely affected. Apart from the local Community Services efforts, the emergency response from the Hydro/SSE teams worked tirelessly in extremely adverse and dangerous conditions. All these efforts should be recognised and applauded. We would ask Ruth to take this message back to the Hydro workforce and include appreciation regarding their provision of hot meals at the Sutherland Inn as well as the services of a catering van. These provisions were replicated in other communities.

There is a move locally to put together some emergency "contingency plans" should this occur in the future. We will ask to be kept informed

Our secretary will also be mailing our appreciation to the local Community services teams as mention should be made regarding the efficient handling of the picking up of rubbish and debris which was strewn around the village by the storm.

On a "lighter" note, we agreed a Micro Grant for our village Events Group to hold a Fun family Day on 1st February. They have invited a representative of the community council to judge the fancy Dress. George MacBeath agreed to volunteer with Kathleen Cunningham.

4. Police Report:-

An incident at the War Memorial on 1st January 2015 has been reported to the Police.

5. Proposed Gordonbush Windfarm Extension – a Project Team Report to the Community Council by Ruth Liddicoat, Nicky Small and Anna Webster.

In opening the presentation Ruth Liddicoat said that SSE considered the initial contact with BCC to be an important lead into the open Exhibitions which would take place in Brora in early Spring 2015.

She gave a short general resume of the existing Gordonbush Windfarm and the previously circulated Scoping document for the new Application for Planning Permission.

The revised Plan had been reduced to 16 Turbines and was presented by the project manager, Nicky Small, and the Landscape and Visuals Officer, Anna Webster contracted to SSE, talked those present through photographs taken from 14 viewpoints. Exhibition montages using Wireline "images" is their preferred option to enable a clearer interpretation of visual impact.

Discussion then took place on changes to Turbine positioning using hills and natural contours to lessen visual impact. Various consultations had taken place, including with SEPA and Highland Council. Efforts were being made to use existing tracks and routes, with the turbines going further up the hill than in the original plan.

The noise levels from Turbines was shared and some concern voiced regarding the close proximity to several houses on the Estate where noise could be an issue.

The cumulative effects of Kilbaur and the Gordonbush extension could come into play. It was possible that existing woodlands could be removed which would change the visual aspects of the site and turbines from certain locations.

Other concerns: - the fragility of the A9, which is very much in evidence. A robust traffic control plan would be vitally important. The vulnerability of the A9 could be compounded if the proposed windfarm development at West Garty went ahead.

It was emphasized that any deviation from a set route for windfarm traffic should be reported to SSE immediately, in view of the previous problem of heavy goods vehicles using erroneous SATNAV directions, rather than the set routes.

Golspie and Brora are the only two villages affected directly and concern was again raised about the River Brora bridge. This matter should be raised with THC's Trunk Road Manager, BEAR and SSE.

The Scoping Report and revised display montages will be placed in Brora Library/Service Point for general reference.

These documents will also be shared locally for other suggestions on Viewpoints with might be appropriate of inclusion.

SSE are very interested to hear from the community about areas round the windfarm site, which are of local interest, use or amenity – e.g hill walking, fishing, etc.

Feedback from BCC is welcome at a later date, probably about 4 weeks time – end of February would be acceptable. The Planning Application would probably go in early Spring/summer.

Ruth Liddicoat reasserted SSE's wish to keep BCC and the community informed to avoid any misunderstandings, and to give BCC up-to-date information.

The chair thanked the ladies for their explanations and contribution to BCC's understanding of the extension, and stated that SSE had been very good at keeping BCC informed.

Sustainability Funding £70,000 proposed Guidelines & Application Form.

Draft paperwork was received from Fiona Morrisson SSE/Gordonbush WindFarm for the Sustainability Funding Applications (£70,000.00 ring fenced for potential Brora Community Council District sustainable projects) It had been agreed to 'approve & action' the Application Funding procedure at BCC January meeting (Tuesday 20th).

SSE acts as the 'administrator' for applications, Fiona Morrison will advertise, handle administration of the applications, contact applicants for any further information, & to include initial assessments. All Applications meeting the required criteria will then come back to BCC as the Community Advisory Panel working with SSE for a final decision making on a single or maximum of 2 successful projects.

Following discussion round the table it was agreed the funding application process should be handled in 2 stages. 1st stage Funding Information & general project viability documents (2 months) 2nd Stage Formal application; period for assessment; Panel date (5/6 months)

Suggestions Guidelines/Criteria

Item 1 Guidelines + Bank Account

Item 5 Guidelines Given type of projects & level of funding Cost Breakdown AND a Business Plan should be supplied.

Item 6 Guidelines Recent community consultations

BCC as the Community Advisory Panel for SSE may wish to set a separate evening date towards end May for 'decision making' on applications given General CC meetings are open to the public & could inhibit open discussion.

BCC will make contact with Fiona Morrisson/SSE & relay the above points for her consideration

6 West Garty Windfarm Development.

BCC have received an extension of time to enable comments to be submitted. A response to go to Highland Council Planning Dept & Scottish Government department by 30th January 2015.

To date there have been 250 objections, not only from local people but also from those who are regular visitors, or have local connections and are familiar with the area. There are many local sensitivities as it is a Landscape Area, and the turbines could be seen from as far afield as Tain.

S.E.P.A. has serious concerns over the lack of exploration and engineering regarding peat bog destruction. From the Planning Page Responses several important HC Consultants have yet to submit responses to the application.

Highland Council has to put its own research in place to be able to comment.

Communication with Muirden has been sporadic and Community contact inconsistent. Some Brora residents have received a flyer from Muirden, but not all. There are no material changes in the Plan since the Scoping report was issued last March.

Caithness & Sutherland Plan includes designated Highland Council Special Landscape areas which it is hoped will be taken on board by Scottish Government planning department. It is referred to as a 'constraint' on the Windfarm application.

Following serious discussion the motion was carried by the majority of BCC

Members with 1 abstention, to object to the West Garty Windfarm Application (14/04486/S36) A letter of objection carrying full details of reasons leading to the objection will be lodged with the Scottish government Planning and Highland Council Planning Department. This Letter of Objection to be circulated to BCC members and to councillors MacKay, Phillips and MacGillvary.

7 Correspondence.

The Secretary had received the following correspondence:-

Highland Council Planning Consultation on West Garty Windfarm.

Land Reform Consultation

Planning Workshop on 12th January – cancelled

Digital engagement Workshop for Community Council Website

Contact Details for consulting on Planning Applications

Caithness and Sutherland Plan – new date is 25th January

Update re Gordonbush Bridge works

Notification of Phil Tomalin's 18 month secondment to Care and learning service and introduction to his successor – Gary Cameron

An e-mail from West Garty to say that people are using the wrong address for representation to the Scottish government.

A thank You had been received from the Afternoon Ladies, and one from the head of Brora School with Thanks for a grant for the Christmas ' Switch On' celebration.

An Application had been received for a micro-grant to help set up a Beavers and Cubs Unit in Brora from Nicola Morris. It will not start until disclosures are done. The application is a request for funds for uniforms for both adults and children. It was agreed to give further consideration when more information is available.

A grant for training is available meantime.

Poppy Collection – this raised £1,634.87 in Brora and a letter from Danny Strams, community Fundraiser , North of Scotland Poppy Appeal is prepared to visit BCC to explain where the money is spent.

8. Highland Council Report.

Councillor Mackay was not present, but sent the following reports

School janitorial Issue.

There is to be a review and Bcc members might find it helpful to have sight of this report, which went to Highland Council committee last week (circulated among BCC members).

It was agreed at the Highland Council meeting that users of the school/community facilities are to be included in the review.

Councillor Mackay and Kathleen Cunningham (Chair BCC) are meeting with Brora Primary School Council on Thursday 22nd January.

Customer Services Review (Service Point Provision)

Waiting dates for Consultation at local level. Again all service users will be included in the local review

Caithness and Sutherland Development Plan (Charrette) Workshop

Monday 26th January at 6.30pm in Brora Community Centre. All Welcome to attend to share opinion in the local area.

Reaching high supporting our Communities

Joint event organised by Highland Council and National Health Service highland took place at Highland Council H.Q. on Friday 16th January. Brora Community Learning Centre and Beachview participated in an excellent showcase for Brora.

Following on from the Brora event held last year, a youth Stakeholder event took place in Beachview. This focussed on Education, Health and Leisure opportunities.

Braes Hotel

Work at the Braes Hotel is being monitored and inspected by Highland Council building Standards. BCC will be kept informed. Safety fencing will remain in place until such time as there is no danger to the public.

It was pointed out by a BCC member that the fencing does not extend round the corner to the Salmon Leap, which has a fragile door. Could Building Control do a structural survey on the building? This was refused once in the past, but it would be possible to ask again.

9. November Draft Minutes/Matters arising

The Minutes of the November meeting of BCC were approved - proposed by Karen Mackay and Seconded by Catherine Sutherland.

Matters Arising from November 2014 BCC meeting

Caithness and Sutherland Development Plan – is seeking people's views on the main issues affecting the area and location of future developments.

- Consider what the Plan should deliver in terms of employment, growing communities, connectivity and transport, environment and heritage.
- The next meeting will be held in Brora on Monday 26th January from 6.30 – 8.30 pm. Good attendance at this workshop is hoped for. This involves Charrette opportunity for Brora, Golspie, Helmsdale and Rogart to identify and discuss potential project development and how to take things forward effectively.
- **Customer Services/Service Points Review**. It was minuted in our November minutes that consultation proposals include key stakeholders. Councillors, Communities, Service Point users/Tenants, staff, community Councils, focus Groups will be run in each community affected and will be independently facilitated. Service Point staff can invite people to participate
- **Fountain Square Planters** – contact was made with this department through Anne Hackett regarding their “non-maintenance” and the matter was speedily resolved.
- **Trip hazard at Cunningham's** – this was identified as a priority with BEAR and was resolved by the end of November. BEAR sent photos of the completed work.
- **Community Centre Paintings** – Paintings now with the Health Centre
- **Core Paths consultation** – Footpaths Officer Matt Dent has been in attendance at Development Plan events. The related website is www.highland.gov.uk/corepathplans.
- Paper information is available from Library and Service Points. Comments are invited up until 27th March 2015 BCC could make this information available to Riverside Walks Group who is familiar with these paths. It's very important to communities that these paths are clearly identified in any Development Plan.

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10. Financial Report

This was circulated to the Meeting.

The Books will close on 31st March 2015.

The A.G. M. is on 19th May 2015.

The Chair will ask Gordon MacBeath if he is willing to continue as Independent Examiner.

This is the BCC annual A.G.M. The election for all Community Council members in the Highland Area, comes up in November 2015. This election is administered by The Highland Council.

VGES Annual Subscription/ Data Protection renewals are to be followed up by Lee (Secretary) and Karen.

The Chair thanked the community for its generosity prior to and at the fireworks and bonfire display on New Years' Day, and the organisers for their efforts to produce a great display, despite the weather.

11. Public Discussion

None

The Chair closed the meeting by thanking Beachview for providing such a lovely venue.

The next meeting will be on March 17th at 7pm in Brora Community Centre.

Addendum

Ref item 9 Matters Arising. Customer Services Review (Service Points)

Consultations on Proposals are being carried out independently by HIE.

Copies available from Libraries/Service Points and on The Highland Council website. Closing date 19th March. Please promote widely.