

Lairg Community Council

Minutes of meeting held in Lairg Community Centre on Wednesday 7th September 2016 at 7.30pm

Present: Jeff Norrie, Chair (JN), Hector MacLennan, Treasurer (HM), Sandy Allison (SA), John Sutherland (JS), Jackie Young (JY),

Apologies: Andrew Mackay, Vice Chair (AMK)

Police Scotland: None present

Also present: Highland Councillor Hugh Morrison (HMN), Magda MacDonald, LDCI (MM), Emma Armstrong (EA), Peter Jones (PJ), David Mackay (DM) and David Paterson (DP) of SNH

Minutes Secretary: Mary Goulder (MG)

Item 1. Welcome/Apologies (as above)/Police report. Chair Jeff Norrie opened the meeting welcoming the representatives of CALL, the Grazings Committee and SNH who had all come to discuss the proposed route for the SSE pylon line through Lairg. **There was no police report available.**

Item 2. CALL update. To facilitate prompt discussion this item was moved up the agenda. EA also welcomed the SNH representatives and the opportunity to discuss their opinions regarding the implications for and impact on the bird/wildlife in respect of the two proposed routes for the pylon transmission line. She stressed that CALL and the Lairg community fully appreciate that the line must go ahead but all concerned wish to ensure that the most appropriate route is chosen with the least possible harm to the human population as well as to the environment as a whole. Using a map which outlined both the SSE and the community proposed routes, she explained that the SSE favoured one goes through a well populated residential and crofting area. The alternative route, researched and proposed by the crofters and residents would run behind the houses and would follow the line of the hill. SSE has 'dismissed' this route due to engineering reasons and wildlife concerns. Peter Jones, a resident in the area concerned, is a retired bird ecologist and he attended to add his expertise to the discussions.

Inviting SNH to address the meeting JN stated that everyone understands that SNH is consulted by SSE on all routes and that their remit is to advise regarding protected areas and not comment on other side issues. However the lives, health and livelihoods of local residents must be given proper consideration and respect by SSE. So far the community has been disappointed by the attitude of SSE. A compromise must be found.

For SNH DM stated that both routes have the potential to cause the birds to collide with the overhead wires. The two species affected are Black Throated Divers and Hen Harriers. The community proposed route poses a higher risk of collision and/or displacement to the Black Throated Divers as it runs closer to the edges of the Lochs. The areas in questions are around Loch Dola and Loch Craggie and the bird routes from these to Loch Shin. SNH has advised SSE that more work needs to be done on their route and it is understood that a walk-over survey will take place between 19th and 30th September. Currently there is a pair of Divers on each loch. The community route runs very close to the breeding/nesting area of the Hen Harriers. Construction of this route would have habitat impact on the environment. The construction period is expected to be over a 2-3 year timescale. SNH advises of the conservation objectives for each site with four or five elements assessed for each proposal. Applications must meet these objectives to gain approval, or seek another route. PJ asked if SNH considers the separate issues raised by construction and longer term and if there are other areas in the country where similar issues have been unresolved. DM replied that both

construction and long term effects are taken into full consideration. He is aware of a similar situation in Caithness where SSE has had to underground sections of a route but this can of course lead to further issues arising with SEPA. PJ pointed out that Hen Harriers are already feeding under overhead power lines near Loch Buidhe and DM agreed that this does work, using line markers. Fledglings are more likely to collide with wires but also breeding behaviour and mating displays can be affected. The Hen Harrier has legal protection and during the breeding season work in any such areas would be suspended.

JN proposed that a meeting be called, independently chaired by MSP Paul Monaghan, attended by SSE, SNH, CALL and other relevant local parties. SSE should be asked to provide a cost analysis for undergrounding the cables at the appropriate sections of their route as this would resolve many issues.

EA confirmed that CALL will continue to work towards the best compromise possible and will keep the CC informed regarding further meetings. With thanks from the CC, the SNH and CALL representatives left at 8.05pm.

Item 3. Adoption of Minutes of August meeting. The Minutes of the August meeting were adopted as a true and accurate record. Proposed: Sandy Allison; seconded: John Sutherland.

Item 4. Matters arising. None raised.

Item 5. LDCI update. MM presented her monthly report taking time to detail and discuss centre points. The main focus of the report was on the proposed Lairg Care & Well-being Centre. A tender brief has been prepared and distributed to the consultants. The scope of the proposed project includes a community-run care facility to provide residential and nursing care plus respite and rehabilitation units, a rehab/treatment/health facility, and a well-being centre. A Stage One application to the Scottish Land Fund is being prepared to cover the feasibility study and business plan. Further match funding will also be sought and if successful a professional consultant will then be involved to conduct a public consultation as well as the feasibility study and business plan. This will be in preparation to moving to a Stage Two application to cover the land acquisition and other costs associated with the project. This will require the employment of a further post within LDCI to enable both the project and all other ongoing works to continue. The CC expressed full support for the project and urged LDCI to keep the initial project simple with the additional facilities being added once the establishment is up and running. HMN also pledged full support indicating that the three north coast CCs lend their support and encouragement to the plans. MM was congratulated on her very hard and detailed work in bringing the project this far in such a short time.

Within the monthly report the second item to receive discussion was that of Lairg business representatives and LDCI to withdraw from the Heart of Sutherland Tourism (HOST) initiative after the initial discussions. It was felt that the wishes of the Lairg community were not in tandem with those of HOST, mainly in that more time to prepare a funding application to VisitScotland would allow Lairg to create its own vision for the promotion of this particular area, rather than as a much smaller part of the wider Kyle of Sutherland plans. Other items in the report covered the site improvements at the Church Hill woods and Ord Place picnic area. The Social Enterprise project has stalled due to the loss of the hoped for premises and the grant awarded by SSE Achany Fund has been returned on the understanding that should the situation change a re-application may be made. The Community Broadband project is ongoing, BT is behind schedule with its delivery of Superfast Broadband and the coverage is not as widespread as anticipated.

The SSE Resilience Community Project funding is in place, held by Lairg Community Association which will host the facility and act as a command post in the event of such an emergency. SSE undertakes to get a generator to the centre ahead of any anticipated long term power outage. An emergency plan must be made with a full outline of the cascade of

responsibilities of organised groups and individuals alike. A group of volunteers is urgently needed to take this planning forward; it was suggested that two representatives from LCA should be invited to attend a meeting with LDCI, CC, all other interested parties and an SSE representative if available. With winter approaching, an early date of 20th September was agreed. MM will make the appropriate arrangements and issue invitations, also responding to the recent letter of enquiry from LCA. **MM Action.**

Item 6. LCA update. No report received or attendance made. An application from LCA regarding upgrading of signage has been received.

Item 7. Falls of Shin update. Work has started on clearing the site in preparation for building the new facility. An 'Open Day' was held this week to mark the start of the work and to show invited guests around the site and to view the plans. This was well attended and received wide media coverage.

Item 8 Financial report. (MG) Treasurer's Account balance stands at £3,010.62. The wreath ordered from the Lady Haig Poppy Factory has been received, cost £86.20. It was agreed to order a badge for the centre piece of the wreath. SA undertook the safe keeping of the wreath and will lay it at the war memorial on Remembrance Sunday on behalf of the CC. **MG/SA Action.** The Windfarm Account balance stands at £417.76 with the Project Account unchanged at £4.73. Cheque was issued from the Treasurer's Account for £13.87 for costs of black wood stain used on the wooden sheep at Ferrycroft.

Item 9. Planning applications. Nothing relevant.

Item 10. Windfarms. No updates available.

Item 11. Correspondence. (1) The recent communication from THC Ward Manager, Garry Cameron regarding CC membership, resignations, vacancies etc was discussed. There is one vacancy which could be filled by co-option. Members should seek to find a suitable and willing candidate and bring details to the October meeting. **All Action.** (2) A thank you card has been received from the recently retired Ward Manager Andy Mackay for the gift and good wishes sent to him by the CC. (3) A letter concerning damage to a local resident's green house, apparently caused during THC works, was passed to HMN. **HMN Action.** (3) A letter received from Mrs Marion Ross with a complaint that horse dung has been left uncollected from the Main Street was read to the meeting. There is no legislation covering this issue, unlike the issues with dog waste, and therefore the CC is powerless to take any action other than to support the complainant. A reply will be sent to her, with the suggestion that she takes the matter to THC. **MG Action.** HMN took the letter and will await further contact. (4) CASPLAN update has been received.

Item 12. Any other competent business. (1) Archiving of CC records. MG has raised this matter with all three local CCs, all of which would seek to deposit back files with Highland Archives if possible. MG will find out more details and report at October meeting. **MG Action.** (2) As stated last month SA will remove the outdated Vehicle Testing Site signs. **SA Action.** (3) Village clean-up days. HMN advised he has not received any requests for help with funds/equipment for a clean-up day, previously undertaken by the Football Club. The committees of both Lairg in Bloom and Lairg Gala Week could be interested in helping with such an event. This is to be an agenda item for March 2017 with a view to action prior to the summer season. **Agenda item/MG Action.** (4) TECS. Sycamore trees at loch side are undermining the pavements; many roadside verges have been cut although many of the local single track roads have not received this attention. Trees are springing up on the verges and also need to be removed. Junctions, eg Shinness at AA box, are blind-sighted by a proliferation of road signs. **HMN Action.** HMN advised that next season there will be a greater number of roadside waste bins in place on local roads. (5) CC meeting schedule. To be discussed at October meeting, it was proposed that the coming year should see no meetings in January, July or August 2017. It was also suggested that, as so far this year only

two months (January and July) have had no meetings, perhaps December should be meeting free. Further discussion to take place at October meeting. **Agenda item/MG Action.**

Item 15. Date and time of next meeting. The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 5th October 2016 in the Lairg Community Centre. The room is already booked.

Item 16. Lairg Windfarm Ltd – Lairg Community Fund. At a private meeting following the regular CC meeting, awards were made to Lairg & District Learning Centre, £2,000 towards administrative assistant costs, LDCI £2,000 towards running costs and £2,000 towards Winterfest; Lairg Community Association, £1,000 towards new signage. The cheque issued last month for an award from the Micro Grant Scheme to Lairg Football Club was amended to reflect the correct name of the club.

Meeting closed at 9.55pm.