

Minutes (draft) of Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council (TKCC)
Meeting held by Zoom 7pm
Wednesday 20th November 2024

Present: Caroline Hamilton (Chair), Sue Whiting (Secretary), Steve Schnabel (Treasurer), Colin Stevenson, Maud McIntyre, Jackie Todd, Alpin Stewart, Councillor Chris Birt.

Apologies: Tom Forrest.

5 members of the public.

1. Minutes of meeting on 23rd October 2024

Approved.

2. Matters arising from meeting on 23rd October 2024

Roads – SW has written to thank HC roads team for repairs done to potholes in Glen Docherty.

Shared Rural Network (SRN) – At a recent debate in Westminster Hall about digital connectivity throughout the UK, Angus MacDonald MP pointed out to Chris Bryant, the minister responsible, that a huge amount of money could be saved if the Total Not Spot part of the SRN programme was paused and reviewed. Chris Bryant said he knew the Highlands well and that, in his view, there was no point putting up masts in remote areas and despoiling the landscape simply for the purpose of meeting a 95% geographical target. TKCC members were encouraged by this, as it is the first time that anyone in a position of power has acknowledged the target does not make sense.

Angus MacDonald's scheduled meeting with Chris Bryant was cancelled and unfortunately Angus is unable to make the replacement date. He has therefore briefed his fellow MP, Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross), so he can attend in his place.

Planning application 24/02266/FUL for a mast at Heights of Kinlochewe has been approved by HC. The application went to committee on 29 October and, in his presentation, Dafydd Jones (Area Manager, North Highland) stated that the mast was highly unlikely to provide useful coverage but there was no planning reason why permission should not be granted. MM noted that the decision has not yet been posted on the HC planning portal which she found odd.

Bin store in Fasaig – NHI grant application to be submitted this week.

Action: SW

Local Place Plan – This has now been accepted and registered by HC.

First responders – JT has spoken with Earle Wilson, Team Leader for Community First Responders for North of Scotland. He is keen to support the community in getting a scheme set up in our local area, and has recently sent JT some posters and information sheets. TKCC members agreed we should distribute these on noticeboards and social media.

Action: JT/All

Anyone interested in being a first responder, or in finding out more about what it would involve, should contact JT at councillor5@tkcc.scot. If there is sufficient interest, Earle will come and host an information evening.

JT is also co-ordinating with Gairloch CC which is interested in becoming involved as well.

HC motorhome tourism leaflet – Cllr Birt to feed back to HC that paper copies are needed.

Action: CB

Chemical waste disposal road signs – HC says they will be installed soon.

Signed constitution - Done.

HC Community Council Review 2024-25 – CH completed on behalf of TKCC.

Kinlochewe recycling point – CH confirmed to HC that TKCC has no objection in principle to a recycling bin for small electrical items being installed in the car park by Kinlochewe toilets. However, she asked for confirmation that this would not result in any of the other recycling bins being removed. To which the answer was that the 1100l blue bin might have to go due to space restrictions. TKCC members were concerned about this.

MM said COW Trust has expressed the same concerns and is in active discussion with HC about the matter. It was agreed to leave the discussions to COW Trust.

SWRCCS AGM – MM represented TKCC as agreed.

Wester Ross Biosphere Area Place Plan – Torridon and Kinlochewe Local Place Plan subgroup reviewed the draft and made a number of comments. These included that the lack of affordable housing needs to be highlighted as the principal issue throughout the document.

HC Community resilience survey – CH completed on behalf of TKCC.

24/03851/FUL - Land 1.7KM SE Of Garbaig House Slattadale Loch Maree Achnasheen - Extension of existing dam and access track – With SW's and MM's assistance, CH submitted comments as agreed.

Circulating minutes – JT provided details for the Kinlochewe Village Hall mailing list and minutes will be circulated on it in the future.

Coire Dubh car park – Rory Shannon at NTS is drafting a letter for TKCC to send to HC in support of NTS' request for a waste bin.

3. Treasurer's report

No transactions this month, bank account balance remains £1,944.53.

Bank of Scotland has recently announced its intention to start charging TKCC and other community councils £4.75 per month for its services. SS has written to protest, however they are not changing their mind. He therefore proposed that we move to Virgin Money where we should be eligible for a free account.

TKCC unanimously resolved to authorise SS to open an account for TKCC at Virgin Money.

Action:SS

4. Guest speaker – Katie Anderson, TDCA community development officer

Katie started work as Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Development Officer in April 2024, thanks to funding from HC Community Regeneration Fund, Lottery Awards for All Scotland and a small grant from MOWI. She is now halfway through her 12 month contract.

Katie presented her achievements so far and said she was looking for feedback, including on planned future priorities. She will be holding drop in sessions as follows for members of the community to discuss:

Torridon Community Centre, Friday 6 December, 12.30-3pm
Kinlochewe Village Hall, Wednesday 11 December, 1-3pm

Achievements so far include:

- Funding landscape – researching and developing a funding strategy for the community development plan
- Local Place Plan - helping to finalise
- Torridon School and playpark – community information/feedback events, liaising with HC re possible Community Asset Transfers (CATs). Obtaining funding for large capital projects such as these is extremely challenging.
- Torridon campsite – research for a feasibility study to explore a possible CAT
- Wester Ross Village Halls Lending Library – developing in conjunction with Kinlochewe Village Hall
- Kinlochewe action groups – identified groups to take forward priorities
- Local services information pack – obtained grant funding, working with a designer, to encourage use of services to assist with sustainability
- Community recycling hub – obtained grant funding
- Torridon Community Cinema – now running
- Kinlochewe games nights – started and running
- Torridon Community Centre – funding applications for new heating system
- New bin for Fasaig – helped with TKCC grant application

Proposed priorities for the next 6 months include:

- Completing short-term projects, driving progress on longer-term ones
- Funding landscape – continuing to look for funding opportunities
- Torridon School and playpark – developing funding strategy for playpark
- Local services information pack – to complete
- Community recycling hub – to complete
- Torridon Community Cinema – plans to expand

Priorities for a second year (assuming funding for Katie's post is forthcoming) could include:

- Advancing the longer-term projects above that are currently in their early stages
- Torridon playpark – assuming a CAT is agreed, secure funding, oversee re-design and installation of equipment
- Torridon school – submit a CAT and start to secure funding
- Torridon campsite – manage the technical study and finalisation of design, develop possible funding package, complete a CAT request
- Combatting social isolation – cinema, games nights and other projects
- Climate action – further projects may be developed after launch of the recycling hub, eg. Circular economy projects such as repair and reuse cafés
- Community resilience planning – help prepare for climate and other emergencies

Cllr Birt and TKCC members congratulated Katie, agreed that she has achieved a huge amount, and thanked her for her energy and ideas. It is clear a lot of the projects cannot be completed within a year and, whilst volunteers have done a lot, they cannot do it alone. It is therefore essential that funding is obtained to continue Katie's post.

In response to questions:

- If members of the community have ideas for projects that they would like help taking forward, please contact Katie - Development@lochtorridoncentre.co.uk
- Ditto if help is needed to find and/or apply for grant funding
- If Kinlochewe Primary School is closed and Katie is still funded when the time comes, she will help look at community options
- If anyone hears of funding opportunities, please send information to Katie
- Torridon campsite feasibility study will look at whether the site should accommodate campervans, tents or a combination of both
- Plans for a possible CAT of Torridon School include converting the building into a mix of business and accommodation units

Chris Johnson, chair of TDCA development plan sub-group, thanked Cllr Birt for his role in helping to secure initial funding for Katie's post. A meeting is being arranged by the sub-group with Cllr Birt and Cllr Liz Kraft with a view to discussing further funding,

5. Guest Speaker - Jess Carnegie, NTS Community Engagement Officer

Jess' placement started in March 2024 and ends in January 2025. She outlined some of the activities that she has initiated or been involved with.

Working closely with Paul and Rory, NTS rangers, activities include:

- Archaeology dig – NTS excavated a homestead on a site behind Torridon Community Centre. Members of the public and Shieldaig Primary School participated, NTS held an information evening on the history and heritage of the village and what was found at the site
- Weekly wellbeing walks – every Tuesday at 11am. 69 attendances, 26 people in total, wide mix of ages and people, including those who are post op, with dementia, wheelchair users, carers, those wishing to socialise/build confidence
- Ceilidh House – fortnightly music and story-telling evenings in Torridon Community Centre. 70 attendances, 30 people in total
- Gairloch High School – hosted overnight trip at NTS bunkhouse, including guided walk, workshop with fire service, mountain rescue, artist
- Handling kit session – sharing stories of the Torridon area with those unable to visit at Gairloch wellbeing group
- Opening access – hosted walks/visits with LGBTQ+ sports charity LEAP, Kessock outdoor education group, Inverness Feminist Bird Club, Afghan refugee families from Inverness/Dingwall

Going forward, Paul and Rory are keen to maintain the local connections that Jess has made. They will be continuing with as much as possible, including the visits, wellbeing walks and Ceilidh House.

Again, TKCC members thanked Jess very much indeed for all she has done.

6. Correspondence received

- Forestry & Land Scotland – Slattadale car park
Due to unforeseen circumstances, the planned felling operations have been delayed. There is no new proposed start date, but it is still hoped to get most of the work completed prior to the main visitor season. The carpark and trails remain open as usual for the time being.

Following installation of the Ringo pay system, income for the 2024 season is around £2,193.52. This is partly the result of a part time ranger encouraging payment; it is unlikely that a ranger will be available to do the same in 2025.

The inspection tank was replaced as planned mid-season with a gentler bend on the waste pipe which stopped the blockages that FLS experienced last year.

The application for a coffee pod was not finalised as the proprietors did not receive their licence from HC in time to set up.

- NatureScot – Beinn Eighe Nature Reserve car park
In 2025 ahead of the visitor season, NatureScot intends to trial an ‘invitation to pay’ model of car parking contribution at their National Nature Reserves, including at Beinn Eighe. This means they will invite drivers (visitors and locals) to pay a small contribution to park their vehicle but they will not be obliged to do so. Any funds raised will be used to help protect and restore nature in the local area and maintain the facilities at the NNR.

NatureScot is proposing this due to the large increase in recent years in the number of visitors, and the significant and growing cost of looking after their sites. At the same time, NatureScot is also facing budget restrictions.

CS felt it was not clear from the correspondence whether NatureScot was planning to charge campervans for overnight stays. CH agreed to ask. *Action: CH*

- Kirkhill & Bunchrew CC - Scottish Government Energy Consultation
The Scottish Government is consulting on Energy Infrastructure Consenting <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/electricity-infrastructure-consenting-in-scotland>

This is on proposals designed to speed up the application process for electricity infrastructure, including by removing local councils’ automatic right to a public inquiry when they object to a project. Instead, an inquiry would be at the discretion of a government-appointed examiner. Kirkhill and Bunchrew CC feel that without a formal inquiry process, communities wishing to contest projects may need to resort to costly legal options, which could financially burden councils and community groups.

TKCC members agreed that under the guise of making the planning process more 'efficient', the proposals appeared to amount to a considerable erosion of local democracy. It was agreed that TKCC should contribute to the consultation, CH will draft comments for TKCC members to approve. The very tight deadline of 29 November was noted. *Action: CH*

7. Planning Applications

None.

8. Any Other Business

Wester Ross Radio - CH reported that at their request, TKCC had written a letter of support to assist Wester Ross Radio in a transitional grant application.

Incheril mast – MM reported on works that have been going on for a few weeks now at the mast site in Incheril. Various contractors appear to have been involved, including SSEN with a digger. There has been no communication with the local community about these works, the reasons for them, or a start and end date.

A diesel generator has been installed which has been running continuously day and night. This is very noisy and is causing considerable disturbance to people living in neighbouring properties.

With no barriers between the site and the adjoining road, the work is creating health and safety and pollution issues. There is exposed high voltage electrical and electronic equipment; waste material such as plastics, packaging and cables is often discarded. This is also a hazard for animals including sheep in the adjacent fields.

It was agreed that TKCC should contact HC urgently. Cllr Birt suggested we involve Chris Ratter in HC Environmental Health department.

Action: MM

Date of next meeting:

Wednesday 15th January 2025 at 7.00pm

By Zoom