

Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston Community Council
Draft Minutes of meeting held at the Millennium Hall, Invermoriston
on Wednesday 25th January 2025

Present:



Deirdre MacKinnon - Chair (DM)

Jenny Findlay - Vice-Chair (JF)

Mike Anderson - Treasurer (MA)

Helen Clay - (HMC)

Clare Levings (CL)

Leanne Findlay (LF)

Daniel Clark (DC)

James Prince (JP)

Cllr. David Fraser (DF)

Apologies:

Claire Pegrum - (CP)

Cllr. Chris Ballance (CB)

Minute Taker D Crawford

Presentation from SSE Renewables concerning the Bhlaraidh extension

Eilidh Edgar explained that the internal SSE decision for financial investment had been declined (not shelved but delayed) owing mainly to increases in supply chain costs, but also the uncertainty of zonal pricing guidance from the UK government. The project will be revisited and refined to determine if it could proceed, but would need to go through the entire planning process.

This decision means that the Cloiche scheme (extension of Stronelairg) will come online sooner with a financial decision expected in October 2025 and construction March 2026.

Community Liaison Groups covering the communities of Laggan, Stratherrick & Foyers and Fort Augustus & Glenmoriston would be set up well before construction begins.

Carol Masheter explained that the community benefit calculation is done after the impacts on a community have been determined. Key projects of benefit to the wider community can be funded outside of a grant process.

DF led a discussion about the definition of zonal pricing (connection to National Grid), the suitability of the infrastructure of the region for the multiple projects and the impacts of their works on the environment and specific communities. It was noted that constraint payments had reached 1.8Bn and yet the community benefit payment had remained at 5K per MW for more than ten years. Everyone concurred that this should at least be index-linked, and preferably from enabling of works, not from completion. A Scottish Government consultation on updating the good practice guidance for developer payments runs until 11th April.

Previous Minutes:

Addendum

Nick Wright requested that the previously reported bullet points for the Local Place Plan (LPP) were made more explicit. Councillors were happy that his explicit points had been included in the subsequent LPP submission to Highland Council (HC), but that the following bullet point could have been clearer in the minutes.

- *Reference to swimming pool should be clear that a swimming pool remains a long term ambition even if it is difficult to see a route for delivering it in the foreseeable future.*

Proposed by CL seconded by LF

Matters Arising:

Redburn - At the AGM of Glenmoriston Hall, a resident queried why the bollards had not been installed, and was advised that it was a council matter. DM had spoken with the Chair to reiterate that the Community Council had done everything in their power, with updates in the monthly minutes, and it now rested with BEAR and Transport Scotland to proceed (with some delay caused by dealing with the major landslides that had occurred). DF added that the owner of the cows had been informed that BEAR expects to install the removable bollards in March. It was deemed prudent to try these first instead of concrete, because the idea may not even work.

Inchnacardoch Bay DM and Chris Nelson from the Community Company had received legal advice concerning the issues of burdens and liabilities, and it was now clearer to all that the legal status of the Community Company prohibits taking responsibility for Inch Bay. The status quo is untenable for the Community Council officers, so a vigorous discussion took place on how to proceed in the long and short-term to minimise risk and keep Inch Bay as an asset within the community. Varying opinions were expressed, and it was decided to invite Fort Augustus resident Chris Rose to the February meeting to present his previously suggested proposal for a Community Interest Company, with comparison to an alternative legal status

of Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation. The latter would need to satisfy OSCR that there would be a community benefit before any asset transfer would be allowed. Hopefully the proposal would be of help to the Community Councillors in deciding the future of Inch Bay.

Short-term action until either a CIC or SCIO is in place, is to block off access to vehicles with stones or concrete blocks, with DM to notify boat owners in advance.

Scottish Canals - DM is to invite Laurie Piper to the March Community Council meeting to progress complaints and promote partnership working.

Long term complaint (>3 years) of water leaking from lock onto Canalside North. DC advised that the bank from where the leak appears is waterlogged and could collapse at any time.

BEAR is responsible for the bridge pavement and salting in icy weather, however DC commented that when he approached workers to do so, they refused to accept responsibility.

Kilchuimen Academy - Last month Kate Forbes and DF had both written to David Summers, regarding the early service bus between Fort Augustus and Drumnadrochit owing to community concerns. DF explained that under Scottish Schools legislation, parents could request a placement in any area. Currently ten pupils attend Glenurquhart and eight pupils attend outwith the catchment of Fort Augustus (Invergarry is not in catchment). Notwithstanding this, DF had investigated and wanted to assure the community that the school is not in any way at risk. The same legislation gives special protection against closure for rural schools - any process would begin informally with the Community Council, and a presumption against closure or downgrade. This process has not been initiated and has not been discussed at Highland Council at all.

If community concerns remain, DF recommended that having community transport could make the catchment more viable by encouraging attendance from lower South Loch Ness.

Flooding in Invermoriston:

Residents attended the meeting to highlight the excess flooding encroaching their properties from land outwith, and to express their fears about the danger of landslides and subsidence of their house foundations. All of the properties have drainage systems and HC has been digging out the culverts, but the sheer amount of water from the woodlands and hillsides is overwhelming. DF agreed to escalate the matter urgently.

Visitor levy:

A resident asked if the Community Council held a view about whether the proposed Visitor Levy is fit for purpose, and the effects that it might have on the village. An HC consultation is open until the end of March and DF encourages all residents to participate as individuals, or as businesses. The following points were raised and discussed:

- no clear directive from HC on how the levy is redistributed to communities
- no clear directive from HC on how the levy is to be spent within communities
- applies to all residents paying for accommodation, not just tourists
- camper vans exempt, unless on a campsite

- administrative burden on small family-owned businesses (% calculation not flat rate)
- smaller businesses may be pushed over the VAT threshold

JF remarked that the Community Council may not be able to reach a consensus on the matter, but encouraged all to respond to the consultation.

Treasurer s Report:

Current balance is 6905.81 with 1500 ring-fenced from Community Company towards solicitor costs. Cheque for 79.20 issued to British Legion for Scotland

Planning:

Planning Applications Validated 26/11/24 27/01/25

Ref: 24/04782/FUL

Location: Bramble Lodge, Millfield Fort Augustus PH32 4BY

Proposal: Change of use from holiday lodge to residential (retrospective)

Applicant: Mr Scott Bremner

Ref: 24/04823/FUL

Location: Land 350M North Of Newtown Invergarry

Proposal: Formation of temporary construction yard and associated welfare and accommodation facilities

Applicant: Balfour Beatty

Notes: Temporary accommodation for initial 96 workers for Skye Reinforcement project.

Ref: 24/04946/FUL

Location: Plot next to Taigh Sealladh F idh (formerly Netherwood), Newton, Invergarry

PH35 4HT Proposal: Erection of house, garage and associated works

Applicant: Mr Robert Sandham

Ref: 24/05317/PNO

Location: Land 195M SW Of Netherby Auchterawe Fort Augustus

Proposal: Formation of turning head

Applicant: Forestry and Land Scotland

Notes: Decision already made that prior approval is not required

Ref: 24/04714/FUL

Location: Fort Augustus Golf Club PH32 4DS

Proposal: Formation of car park

Applicant: Fort Augustus Golf Club

Notes: Proposal for 29 space car park to be created to north of club house. To be accessed through Loch Ness Lodge Retreat.

Ref: 24/05307/FUL

Location: The Bothy, Glendoe Fort Augustus PH32 4BZ

Proposal: Conversion of workshop to house

Applicant: Glendoe Ltd

Notes: Located within Glendoe estate.

Renewable Energy Projects:

Coire Glas - Councillors DM/JF attended the Coire Glas consultation at Invergarry on 11th December. Main construction is planned to begin August 2026.

Community Amenity Issues:

Achnaconeran Road - sleeping policeman still required. Consider signage - tourists regularly mistakenly take the turning and then get stuck.

Pothole by Telford Centre.

Unsociable neighbours have been reported to HC. DF will ask for an update from the council officer.

CL enquired about the permissions for campervans at Forest Glen holiday park. DF to review the paperwork and speak to the compliance officer.

Signage: the council sign for the Police Station needs to be removed; the elderly sign close to West End Garage is obscured by the new 20mph sign; the brackets for the Oich bridge pedestrian signs are too large for the poles, thus rotating in draught from traffic or wind.

Lighting: the street light outside the canal centre is filling with water; the lights at the back of the main car park are not functioning; give way at Bunoich Crescent is flickering constantly; Christmas lights are still on.

Bins: Residents are still leaving their bins in front of the village hall in Church Road. With absent owners in some cases flyers through letterboxes may be necessary.

Empty properties: any resident can write to HC about a property they consider to be an eyesore. A resident commented that short-term let licences are difficult to check online.

Ness News submission deadlines are brought forward by 7 days to ensure the editor and designer have enough time before printing. 21 Feb/24 May/24 Aug/15 Nov

AOCB

DF advised that HC had allocated funds to the Community Council for play parks and would be reviewing all play parks and developing a strategy in line with the LPP (once approved) and after consulting with children. It is hoped that these funds would be supplemented by the Community Company.

The Scottish Government is running a consultation on a change to the national speed limit.

The Great Glen Way diversion should be cleared by 5th February.

DM has been told by the owners of Loch Ness Highland Resort that village children are welcome to use the play facilities onsite, and the gym facility is open to village residents. She had previously been approached by residents unsure that the facilities were for local access, so has suggested the owners create a notification for inclusion in Ness News.

The Community Company is holding an inaugural Directors Surgery, open to all residents, on Wednesday 19th February in the Fort Augustus village hall. It is hoped that this will become a regular event for suggestions, concerns, and questions to be raised and discussed directly with members of the board.

DC advised that the Chair of the Scot II charity is shortly to retire from the position and asked if anyone was aware of an interested party. It was suggested that an item be created for publication in Ness News.

LF reported that the drainage was inadequate on the adopted road at Redburn, with water regularly sitting on the road. Cars lose traction when icy.

A resident asked why BEAR had declined railings at the pedestrian access to Caledonian Court. Councillors are waiting for BEAR to undertake, and report on, an audit of all walking routes around Fort Augustus.

CL reported that once again, diversionary signage for road and bridge closures were misleading or inaccurate. During the current works at Fort Augustus, BEAR closed the canal bridge for a third unplanned night without warning.

Next meetings:

Memorial Hall, Fort Augustus on 26th February 2025 at 7pm.

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