



# MINUTES

Comhairle Coimhearsnachd Nis/Ness Community Council

*Date:* 09/07/24 |

*Location:* Taigh Dhonnchaidh

## In Attendance

David Green Muriel MacLeod Cairstiona Macleod Annie MacSween Alison MacDonald Mary Duff

## Apologies

Donna MacIver Cllr Donald MacSween Cllr Kenneth MacLeod

Chair: David Green

## AGENDA

1. Welcome/apologies for absence
2. Presentation and consultation, Northland Power/Spiorad na Mara Ltd
3. Minutes of the meeting of 28<sup>th</sup> May 2024
4. Matters Arising
5. Local Housing Strategy: CCN/NCC input to CnES plan, deadline 28<sup>th</sup> June (submitted).
6. Local Development Plan: to consider our approach to this, feeding into the CnES plan (lead officer, Alice Murray) and partnering with Airidhantuim CC and Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn.
7. Any Other Competent Business

## Point 1 Welcome

Chairman David Green welcomed Denise Horan of Spiorad na Mara, Jemma MacVicar of Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn and seven community residents in attendance.

## Point 2 Presentation Northland Power/ Spiorad na Mara Ltd.

Denise Horan introduced her own role as representative of the stake holder engagement team, and highlighted that Spiorad na Mara are currently recruiting a new locally based liaison officer, and that the company are working with a local media company, introducing Katie MacInnes of this company who would also be taking notes of this meeting. Katie MacInnes facilitates Gaelic translation services for Spiorad na Mara.

A Royal Mail distribution of Spiorad na Mara's information brochure is currently underway and all Island residents should



receive this within a fortnight, and many at this meeting received theirs today.

## Point 2 Contd. Presentation Northland Power/ Sporaid na Mara Ltd.

Initial slides focused on outlining what Denise termed “at this stage the proposed wind farm project”



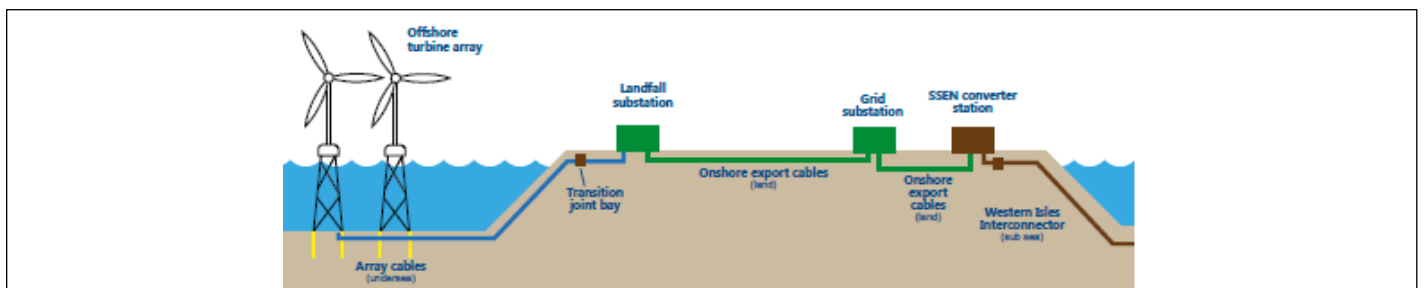
The figures presented were expanded upon, and it was clarified that the distribution of electricity is not controlled by Spiorad na Mara, and that currently all that can be detailed is bare capacity, and equivalence is all that can be identified. A later assessment of both payback period and precise carbon footprint will be required.

INDICATIVE PROJECT TIMELINE	
2024	Expected date for submission of planning application
2028	Potential start of construction
2030	The 1.8GW interconnector from Lewis to the mainland will support Spiorad na Mara
2031	Expected date when the wind farm could be operational
35 Years	Anticipated operating life of wind farm

Denise highlighted that ESB is an Irish company established in 1927, who have a quarter share in the project since they bought in and Northlands, the Canadian company has the other three-quarter share in the proposed project. The project timeline was presented and discussed.



The Overview information identified two current areas of investigation for landfall as Barvas and Arnol/Bru; and additionally the two options under consideration. These two options mirror base elements with the key difference being that one has a landfall substation. Denise responded to questions regarding scale of an onshore landfall substation. Typically these structures resemble large warehouses and are single storey sites, particularly if on an elevated site. Depending on location, if visibility allows, sometimes these structures have a smaller footprint and are higher. Ancillary equipment will also be required to be housed around the main structure, such as tanks. An outline of the elements of the project set out that in 161km offshore site there would be a maximum of 66 turbines



## Point 2 Contd. Presentation Northland Power/ Spiorad na Mara Ltd.

Denise explained that due to the infrastructure already to some extent being established along the main road across the Barvas Moor, this would be the area chosen to run onshore cable. SSEN changed the focus four months ago from a Marybank site for their convertor station, and as Spiorad na Mara must be within 500m of SSEN convertor station this will have an impact on planning. Also, the Marine Directorate submissions and Environmental Impact Study were discussed.

It was highlighted within discussion that the question of moving the N4 site is not feasible as this was allocated as the designated area and then the competitive process began, so Spiorad na Mara had no role in selecting the area of seabed, and competed for the lease option on the site only. This clarification was appreciated by those attending this meeting.

The logistics and lifespan of the LIDAR survey tools were explained, and the limited environmental impact of a Met Mast. In 2024 Spiorad na Mara's focus will be the broadening of engagement within the local community. The impact of the proposed project will undergo scrutiny in terms of Positive, Negative and Neutral outcomes and planning will be shaped according to how negatives can be mitigated, or turned into neutral outcomes. The company are already investigating the supply chain, as there are no turbine manufacturers in the UK, and only 4 globally, but this may change, and Spiorad na Mara are keen to participate in this progression.

The issues of future-proofing this proposed project for the community were raised through a series of questions such as "For how long will Spiorad na Mara hold responsibility?" "what would future developers be required to do in terms of decommissioning?" etc. The Moray Firth project was cited as demonstrating a relevant process established in such a construction plan. The information provided in response was:

After 35 years there will be two possible routes:

- 1) Repowering – the onus would fall to project owners to reapply to establish a repowering project, should this be viable;
- 2) Decommissioning – if the project owner cannot repower, they would have to meet the terms of conditions set out for responsible decommissioning. There is a bond in place to ensure costs can be met in this sort of circumstance. The Government ultimately retain responsibility over this. Safeguards would be in place to ensure that the planning consents must continue to be met.

Annie MacSween raised the following points:

- Will there be opportunities for investment in the project?
- Will there be any discount for local community electricity?

Response:

It is common for local scale wind turbine projects to enable local level investment. However, a project on the proposed scale is beyond the reach due to level of capital involved and there is no mechanism in place for local community investment

The idea of discounting electricity for the island was explored further in discussion and it was stated that there is in place a complex mechanism nationally, as it is an open competitive market and regional options may not be readily available, but there may be regulatory changes to explore. The example of Octopus Energy’s July 2024 announcement that they will be discounting electricity along these lines was presented from the floor, which challenges this statement.

Denise emphasized that the Community Benefit Fund would be administered at local community level rather than local authority level.

*Five members of the community and the representatives of Spiorad na Mara left the meeting after this item.*

### Point 3 Minutes of 28th May 2024

The minutes were approved by Muriel Macleod and seconded by Cairstiona Macleod.

The previous actions to be taken were reviewed:

Agenda Point	Action	Responsibility	By
4	Pay over-40s team £200 when purchase information received	Treasurer	On receipt of information
5	Write to War Memorials Committee confirming offer of £200.	Chairperson	14 <sup>th</sup> June 2024
8	Post information on the elderly care discussion to the CCN/NCC Facebook page	Vice Chairperson	14 <sup>th</sup> June 2024
9a	Advertise car scrappage scheme on Facebook page	Vice Chairperson	ongoing
9b	Source stickers and banners	Chairperson	End June 2024
9c	Book a table for Ness Gala	Chairperson	End June 2024

From the Actions Agreed, Agenda Points 4,5 9b and 9c have all been completed. Points 8 and 9a are underway also.

Action Point 9b was completed by Cairstiona MacLeod who presented everyone at the meeting with one of our new stickers and the showcased the new banner which was agreed to be fantastic.

### Point 4 Matters Arising

David Green picked up on Agenda Point 1 from the 28<sup>th</sup> May meeting. Due to feedback from the Ness community, and after attending the Ness/Westside Forum meeting on 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024, at which Crown Estate Funding Allocations were received. He has corresponded by email with Alice Murray, lead officer in this, and a full response is to be progressed. Fifteen organizations applied for funding and no discussion was undertaken

at the meeting to reveal who would receive funding. It was stated at the meeting of 11<sup>th</sup> June 2024 that all local organizations who applied would receive some level of funding. Subsequently this has not happened and some applicants have received notification that they will not receive funds. The NCC agreed upon discussion that elected members must be held to account and our role is to take appropriate steps to support the process in future to ensure transparency, consistency and equity when public funds are being allocated from Crown Estate Funding.

Step 1: Following on from prior discussion with Airidhantuim Community Council, representatives from NCC and ACC to invite elected members to meet and discuss their concerns.

Step 2: to request that there is a review of the criteria upon which decisions are based, and that these criteria are publicly available for anyone considering applying for this public funding.

Step 3: to seek assurances from elected members on transparency, consistency and equity in future.

Step 4: investigate and provide comparative processes from other wards to help shape Steps 2 and 3.

## Point 5 Housing Strategy

Local Housing Strategy – David Green successfully collated and circulated the Ness Community Council response to the local authority and met the submission deadline of 28<sup>th</sup> June 2024, which was greatly appreciated by all NCC members.

## Point 6 Local Development Plan

The NCC support involvement in taking this opportunity to map out plans, to have an input in Local Place Plans, particularly as a means to combat the continual default position of lack of available funds. Annie MacSween expressed an enthusiasm which was shared by all to regenerate empty houses, and Jemma MacVicar was able to update that Urras Oighreachd Ghabhsainn have identified 20 potential homes, and clarified the challenges involved, even with the financial input of the Empty Homes scheme.

David Green confirmed that he and Jemma Macvicar will be meeting with representatives of Airidhantuim Community Council on 11<sup>th</sup> July to scope the requirements for a local development plan, map it against the UOG Strategic Plan, and progress our contributions to the various stages of the LDP in liaison with the designated CnES officer, Alice Murray. A report on progress to be brought to the informal August meeting.

## Point 7 AOC

Muriel Macleod created a questionnaire of five questions to enable the NCC to directly engage with the community and gather data regarding local areas of concern. This was voted 10/10 in both its English format and in the Gaelic version. The questionnaire will gain responses online, and also paper copies will be available in Cross Stores and distributed during the Ness Gala, and all of the NCC members look forward with interest to responding to the returns.

It was suggested that the newly elected Labour MP for the Western Isles, Torcuil Crichton be invited to meet with the NCC, and all agreed that this would be a positive idea.

Netty Sopata attended this meeting online, as a resident of Ness and also as reporter for Fios. A discussion was held regarding whether we would like to make this route to attend online available generally in future, and the constitution will be checked to see if guidelines for this currently exist, for discussion at the next formal meeting which will be in September. At this meeting we will also discuss the technical and other issues relating to making meetings available online. A suggestion was made that a webinar format could be used, in which online attenders can watch and listen but not interact.

**Actions Agreed:**

Agenda Point	Action	By Whom	By When
4, Matters Arising	Complete the four steps agreed and listed under this item.	David Green	Steps 1,2, and 3 by end July 2024. Step 4 as appropriate.
6, Local Development Plan	Meet with UOG and ACC and report to next meeting of CCN/NCC	David Green	13 <sup>th</sup> August 2024
7.1, Community Questionnaire	Finalise and print, make available in local retail outlets, at Ness Gala, etc.	Muriel Murray	Ongoing
7.2	Invite MP for Na h'Eileannan an Iar, Torcuil Crichton, to attend a future meeting.	David Green	13 <sup>th</sup> August 2024
7.2, Online attendance	Check potential for online attendance at CCN/NCC meetings, including constitutional and technical issues, and discuss at September meeting.	David Green and everyone	10 <sup>th</sup> September 2024.

The next informal meeting, for members only, will be held on Tuesday 13<sup>th</sup> August 2024 at 8.00 pm in Taigh Dhonnchaidh.

**The next full meeting, to which members of the community are invited, will be held on Tuesday 10<sup>th</sup> September at 8.00 pm in Taigh Dhonnchaidh.**