

# Stornoway Community Council

Minute of Meeting held at An Lanntair, Stornoway on Thu 27 June 2024 at 7:00 pm

<b>Present</b>	Robert Doig (Chair) Mike Macleod (Secretary) Betty Jappy Morag Smith Cllr Frances Murray	Kenneth Burns (Vice Chair) Josh Gibbens Janet Macdonald Cllr Duncan Macinnes
<b>Apologies</b>	<b>1</b> Ian Minty Cllr Rae Mackenzie	Cameron Thomson Cllr Angus McCormack
<b>Minute of Meeting 18 June</b>	<b>2</b> Adopted, with the corrections that Josh Gibbens' surname is spelt with an 'e' and that Duncan Macinnes is a MBE.	
<b>Matters Arising</b>	<b>3</b> None.	
<b>Appointment of Treasurer</b>	<b>4</b> After discussion, agreed that Frances Murray will approach Ian Morrison, who resides in the Community Council area.	
<b>Adoption of Constitution</b>	<b>5</b> After discussion, it was agreed to adopt the Model Constitution, and if necessary, to amend it later. Officebearers to formally sign and send to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES).	
<b>Choice of Domain Name for Email</b>	<b>7</b> Taken out of sequence. After discussion, it was agreed to register <a href="mailto:sycommunitycouncil.org.uk">sycommunitycouncil.org.uk</a> – Secretary to action.	
<b>Point &amp; Sandwich Trust – Proposed Development at Battery, Newton</b>	<b>6</b> Thoroughly discussed. It was noted that Stornoway Community Council had become established part-way through the planning process for this project. This resulted in the Community Council only being given two weeks to consider the project. It was not thought realistic in this limited timeframe to carry out the thorough community consultation which such a major project deserved. This should naturally include a full opportunity for Point & Sandwich Trust (PST) to present its case to the Community Council.  It was agreed that it had been reasonable for CNES to treat this complicated £14 million Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) as a 'major development', despite the relatively small land area involved.  The Community Council accepted that PST's proposal for a BESS at Newton could potentially generate significant profits for PST and other community windfarms, if a facility was created to allow the variable energy flows from windfarms to be utilised when the existing diesel-fired Power Station is in operation. It was also accepted that the BESS would allow power to be restored almost instantaneously to the island when the grid suffers an outage, instead of having parts of the island wait up to two hours for the existing diesel-fired generators to come into operation. The offer of community benefit was understood to be modest, only £5,000 a year to the Newton Ward Community Association and the possibility to apply to PST for grants.	

**Point & Sandwick  
Trust – Proposed  
Development at  
Battery, Newton  
(Contd.)**

- 6 It was noted that a number of Newton residents had expressed concerns about the safety of the proposed BESS at a consultation meeting held in the Newton Ward Community Rooms on 15 May. It was understood that none of the approximately fifteen Newton residents present at that meeting expressed support for the project. The concerns raised at that meeting included mention of the fire at a BESS in Liverpool in September 2020 – this took over fifty hours to be extinguished.

Josh Gibbens had very kindly researched this incident online and the Significant Incident Report by Merseyside Fire & Rescue Service had been circulated electronically. Given that Newton is a heavily built-up area, with residential buildings only a matter of yards from the proposed BESS, if that were to go on fire, there was a strong possibility that toxic smoke would be blown towards nearby houses by the prevailing wind. Also there is a risk of explosions carrying debris. Since significant quantities of water would be required to extinguish any fire, it is very likely as a result that poisonous liquids would flow from the BESS into the harbour, killing any wildlife in their way. In short, any significant fire at the BESS will probably be a serious risk to human life and an environmental catastrophe.

Josh had also found the National Fire Chiefs Council document – “Grid Scale Battery Energy Storage System planning – Guidance for FRS”. Amongst much useful guidance, the recommendation is that prevailing wind direction should be taken into account at design stage. The prevailing wind direction at the Battery is from the South West, meaning that in the event of a fire, the wind would most likely take the smoke directly across into nearby houses. Also there should be at least two separate access points for Fire & Rescue Services vehicles to the site to account for opposite wind conditions/direction. It does not immediately seem that the BESS Newton site complies with this recommendation.

It was further noted that on Sunday 23 June another serious fire broke out at an Electric Battery Recycling facility in Linwood, near Paisley. This resulted in residents being asked to stay inside their houses until the toxic smoke dissipated.

It was also noted that Newton, in addition to being heavily built-up, has the Gas Works near Seaforth Road and the Oil Depot near Tesco’s – both developments that would never be permitted now. Significantly, CNES has a definite plan, once offshore windfarm developments come on stream, that a facility producing green hydrogen shall be established near Arnish, and that Stornoway’s small mains gas network will be converted to be run on hydrogen, allowing the closure of the existing gas works. Establishing a new, risky, development at Newton would seem to run counter to the stated CNES intention to move potentially dangerous facilities away from residential areas.

It was noted that the 200-year old retaining wall at Newton Street, built on shingle, was in no condition to take heavy traffic. Also that Goat Island itself is a major industrial estate, with hundreds of jobs in a seafood facility and at the shipworks there. And that already vehicles regularly have to queue up to access Goat Island, making the impact of construction works problematic.

**Point & Sandwick Trust – Proposed Development at Battery, Newton (Contd.)**

- 6 Ian Minty, who had been unable to attend this meeting, had asked that two questions be discussed – “Why is it PST making the application not SSE given that the new plant will be directly linked to the SSE power station at the Battery?” and “Why does the battery plant have to be placed here, immediately adjacent to Newton Str and so many houses, given the potential fire risk?” On the first question, it was noted that SSE itself has considerable expertise in BESS and is building two massive 250 MW BESS facilities in England. It was considered unlikely that we would get an answer from SSE, who may well claim ‘commercial confidentiality’. As to the second, it was understood that the current connections from windfarms run to the current small interconnector at Arnish and not to the Battery power station. Therefore it is unclear how the PST BESS facility could moderate the varying power flows from windfarms unless some substantial cabling was run from Arnish to the Battery. In turn, this begs the question as to why the BESS is not to be situated at Arnish. From PST Minutes seen by Josh, it seems this was considered at one point – these refer to abortive discussions with a local landowner.

Morag Smith questioned whether the Community Council had a mandate to recommend that CNES should refuse planning permission. In a straw poll, she had canvassed 28 people, 10 of whom came from Newton. Five were opposed, 8 in favour, 6 undecided and 9 didn't care. That is, opinion in Stornoway about the project is not certain.

\*\*\* Janet Macdonald had to leave the meeting.

Taking this feedback into account and that, from the point of fairness, the Community Council has not had the opportunity to question PST on the various troubling issues which our discussion had highlighted, on balance it was not thought reasonable at this time to formally recommend outright that CNES should refuse planning permission for the project, despite the obvious valid safety concerns.

It was agreed that the Secretary should draft a submission to CNES Planning Department and circulate for approval, with the recommendations being –

That the planning period should be extended to allow Stornoway Community Council to carry out a full public consultation, and to give PST the opportunity to address the various concerns which have emerged.

That CNES should give serious consideration to asking PST to locate the BESS elsewhere, perhaps at Arnish.

Regardless of the final location, it would be prudent for Planning Permission only to be granted after a comprehensive risk assessment by the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service – this should be by the SFRS Head Office, since it is not realistic to expect that the local branch would have the expert knowledge required. With the requirement that PST should implement any mitigation measures such as blast walls which the risk assessment may recommend.

**Point & Sandwick Trust – Proposed Development at Battery, Newton (Contd.)**

- 6 Finally, if planning permission is given for the Newton site, a comprehensive construction traffic flow plan should be agreed with PST, to avoid damage to the Newton Street road/wall and to minimise disruption to the businesses operating from Goat Island.

**AOCB**

- 8 After discussion, it was agreed that Teenage Vandalism, including also concerns about bullying and teenage drug use at the Nicolson Institute, and Road Safety (particularly regarding the poorly-managed pedestrian precinct, lorries unloading inappropriately on Kenneth Street and the lack of a Traffic Warden) would be valuable topics for discussion at future meetings. The suggestion from Councillor Angus McCormack, that two pupils from the Nicolson Institute be invited to join the Community Council will be pursued after the Summer Holidays.

Accordingly once a schedule of meetings is agreed, the Secretary is to write to the Chief Inspector of Police and to CNES Education Department to invite them to attend a future meeting of the Community Council. The Secretary and Morag Smith are to liaise on invitations.

Move More scheme – after discussion it was agreed the Secretary will read the Annual Report for this, then write to the Director of Public Health at the Western Isles Health Board, asking for the justification for terminating this service, which seems to be valued by the community.

**Schedule of Meeting Dates**

- 9 After discussion, it was agreed to hold monthly meetings on the last Thursday of each month. Venues to include the Newton Ward Community Rooms and the Failte Centre, Bayhead as well as An Lanntair.