

Stornoway Community Council

Minute of Meeting held in the Newton Ward Community Rooms, Stornoway
on Thu 26 Sep 2024 at 7:00 pm

Present	Robert Doig (Chair) Josh Gibbens (Treasurer) Janet Macdonald (by Zoom) Morag Smith Cllr Angus McCormack	Kenneth Burns (Vice Chair) Mike Macleod (Secretary) Ian Minty Cameron Thompson Cllr Frances Murray
In Attendance	Kirsten MacInnes (Community Development Worker) Kayleigh Macleod (Community Development Worker)	Colin Bell (SSEN) John Douglas (SSEN) Kevin Morrison (SSEN)
Also present	3 members of the public.	
Apologies	1 Betty Jappy Cllr Rae Mackenzie Sharon Reid	Cllr Duncan Macinnes Cllr Gordon Murray Hilda Pitcaithly
Minute of Meeting 29 Aug	2 Adopted, with the correction that under Apologies, Hilda Mackenzie should be corrected to Hilda Pitcaithly. Proposer Josh Gibbens, seconder Ian Minty.	
SSEN Interconnector	4 Taken out of sequence. Kevin Morrison (Community Liaison Manager, SSEN Western Isles) explained that they were now doing community consultations, aiming to collect questions and take back to get answers. They already have twenty questions from Stornoway Community Council. Colin Bell (WI Lead Project Manager, SSEN) explained the background to the scheme. 10-15 years ago the Interconnector was to be much smaller, but the project has changed, especially with the Scotwind Projects – Northland and Magnora – and accordingly the Interconnector has gone from 600 MW to 1.8 GW. The original site at Arnish Point has become too small as a result, and SSEN considered eight different sites, getting feedback from the community before choosing the site we've got now. Contractors are on site, doing boreholes to find out the volume of earthworks involved. SSEN is progressing high-level design work, working with CNES and SEPA – aim is to submit the planning application to CNES in Jan/Feb 2025. There will be a further consultation event in November. Subject to consent being granted, construction will start Spring 2026. Colin Bell explained that there will be a period of 18 months to two years where the peat is removed and a certain amount of blasting is done to level the site. SSEN hopes to put most of the removed peat within the boundaries of the red line diagram, but may have to go outside. Steelwork and building then takes a further two years, with the subsea cable being installed 2028/29. John Douglas (Senior Project Manager SSEN, with responsibility for cabling) explained that SSEN is in discussions with Stornoway Port Authority to dual the existing road. As part of this process it is hoped to have ducting. The cables are 250 mm so can go through ducting once ashore.	

- 4 Colin Bell stated that the onshore and offshore windfarms connect to the AC Converter Station, the power then goes into the HVDC station which converts the electricity from AC to DC and sends it on to the mainland.

In the Q&A session which followed, it was explained that five major projects, EDF, Druim Leathann, Muaitheabhal, Spiorad na Mara and Magnora will effectively take all the 1.8 GW capacity. There could be capacity for some smaller wind farm projects to connect to the local distribution network. If we considered a small windfarm as ten turbines producing 50 MW, this would connect to the local distribution network. Resilience in system goes both ways. John Douglas confirmed the existing small interconnector to Skye will continue. The Point & Sandwick Battery facility will connect to the local distribution network. Colin explained that planning permission for the Beauly transmission section will be applied for in Oct/Nov – delays on the Beauly section will impact not only on the WI but on other areas across the North of Scotland.

Colin Bell explained that the impact of the project on transport links will be challenging for the island. They are working closely with Stornoway Port Authority and CNES. Demand for ferry capacity could rise three-fold in the next few years and could justify investing in a third ferry.

Accommodation is another challenge – there will be 350 people at peak – SSEN working to identify capacity – committed to leaving a lasting legacy and invest in the housing stock. They had been given a detailed list of sites – either brownfield sites or existing sites. SSEN would aim to avoid using hotel accommodation during the peak tourist seasons. A mix of solutions being looked into. SSEN is looking at accommodation in the airport area – will be submitted as a planning application.

Kirsten MacInnes said that infrastructure, childcare, transport, all of these will be under pressure. Colin Bell stated that SSEN aims to maximise local workforce, working with contractors. The plan is for a two-week rotation. The impact on flights is being considered. As regards Education, SSEN will look at the skill shortages. We need to employ skilled people in maintenance. They hope to engage with young people in third year and encourage them to consider this industry as a career.

Colin Bell explained that SSEN will be spending £11 billion across the North of Scotland, £1.8 billion here including the subsea cable. As regards the Community Fund, SSE announced a tranche of fund of £2m – eventually there will be £100m across the Highlands & Islands over ten years. Kevin Morrison explained there is a difference between SSEN and developers – there wasn't scope in any transmission scheme for community fund. Colin Bell stated that SSEN is waiting for a Government Report to determine level of community benefit, and on what basis it should be allocated. Kevin said he hopes to set up a community liaison group including Community Councils. Colin said there is the official community benefit fund, and the project team has some discretion. The Secretary made the point that the development is inevitably going to impact adversely on the amenity of the Castle Grounds, particularly the walks closest to the Creed, and a peat reclamation expert has explained to them the difficulties in mitigating this by planting trees, since whether this is possible at all seems to depend on the state of the peat near the development. Therefore the argument was that the damage to amenity should be considered as Community Detriment, as a cost of the project. Colin will consider this.

**SSEN
Interconnector
(contd.)**

- 4 Kevin Morrison stated that as part of the second round of consultation, SSEN will look to see what we can do to address some of the themes. An Environmental Impact Assessment will form part of the planning process. The Chair asked if there are external assessors for this assessment. Colin Bell confirmed that this is being put together at Governmental level. As regards Community Benefit, Kevin said that SSEN appreciates that we need to have something to give back to the community, but we are so tightly regulated that there are limits on what we can do. Colin explained that SSEN has to submit a lengthy project assessment to Ofgem which they have to approve – all costs for logistics, construction, community benefit, everything. SSEN would get a decision at end 2025.

Councillor Angus McCormack stated that the Comhairle has aspirations – given the implications for the Western Isles – benefit should reflect the impact this project will have on our islands. The Comhairle is just not interested in the 'industry norm' – throwing small sums will not cut much ice with the Comhairle. Councillor Frances Murray said that if we're getting compensatory sums for this project but still getting large charges for electricity, this is unsatisfactory, some arrangement on electricity costs is required. Colin Bell said he would encourage them to contact their new MP, Torcuil Crichton. Kevin Morrison explained his previous role in the Uists, working with people in fuel poverty. The whole plan behind these renewables projects is to stabilise energy prices if these projects go ahead – we will no longer be dependent on fluctuating world prices. Kirsten MacInnes explained some of the difficulties of helping people in fuel poverty.

In conclusion Kevin explained the next consultation meeting will be in the Cabarfeidh on 14 November, between 3 and 7 pm. They will have the 3D website, engineers, project managers and there will be a more full picture of what the development will look like. In meantime Kevin will aim to come along and speak on issues of concern, as often as required.

**** The three SSEN representatives left the meeting.*

Matters Arising

- 3 Robert took over the Chair from Kenneth.

Finances – The Treasurer reported that he had applied for a bank account – waiting for that to be progressed. We would inherit approx. £3600 from the previous Community Council.

Speed of Traffic – Morag Smith reported that Bayhead Community Association had raised concerns about this, and also about the weeds.

**Stornoway Area
Forum**

- 5 The Secretary had attended the inaugural meeting of this. The two priorities chosen agreed with what had been discussed at our last meeting – £20,000 was to be spent on cleaning up the town as the top priority, with the option for more to be spent if necessary. After that the next objective was the Pedestrian Precinct. The Council Officer Calum Mackenzie was on top of the project, and had explained that intelligent bollards cost £5k each, with the total expenditure on bollards coming to £80k-£100k. On top of this is the civil engineering cost, and then the back office cost. Clearly this project would have to be over two years.

- Stornoway Area Forum (contd.)** 5 Councillor Angus McCormack explained the difficulty – that there isn't any money in the Comhairle itself, but that it is possible sometimes to leverage in money from outside funds. An example is North Street Sandwick, where money from a Road Safety Fund was accessed for pavement improvements. The Treasurer suggested negotiating a Section 75 Agreement with SSEN, so that it would be a planning condition. Cllr McCormack said there could be a long set of conditions. The full Comhairle will take the decision on SSEN, not the Planning Board. Councillor Frances Murray said that the £100,000 from the Crown Estate is not guaranteed for next year. Cruise Ship Levies were mentioned, and Ian Minty stated that the Port Authority were somewhat cavalier about the impact of the Cruise Ships on the town.
- Teenage Anti-Social Behaviour** 6 On the Treasurer's suggestion, the meeting expressed its concern for the elderly person who had sadly been seriously injured. Morag Smith said that the Youth Café was not open very often. Her concern was that the public bodies did not seem to be communicating effectively. Councillor Frances Murray reported that at the Community Safety Meeting on 18 September, it was agreed to have a Anti-Social Behaviour Strategy for Stornoway. The Chair asked if the community's reaction to what has happened was making things work? Kirsten MacInnes stated that social media was making things worse. Councillor Angus McCormack mentioned that the Police were sufficiently concerned at the Co-op incident to have phoned every Councillor to say the boys had been charged and that the social media images did not give a true impression. An update on correspondence from the Area Superintendent and Inspector Cowan was given by the Secretary. Ian Minty mentioned there had been an incident involving at least two armed policemen on Keith Street on Friday. Morag Smith stated that we need to continue to follow up and push. The concern is that there are no youth workers, kids get into this behaviour and have to be persuaded out of it. Nothing is happening for kids. Councillor Frances Murray stated that the big change in the last twenty years is the big fall in volunteers. People are now less likely to give up time to work with young people. The Chair said we should really have a separate item on the Agenda – Youth Work.
- It was agreed to write back to the Area Superintendent and separately to the Rector of the Nicolson, following up Councillor McCormack's suggestion of inviting two pupils to join the Community Council.
- Point & Sandwick Trust Battery Project** 7 *Councillor Angus McCormack declared an interest and left the meeting.* The Community Council will have a Zoom meeting with Point & Sandwick this coming Monday.
- AOCB** 8 Councillor Frances Murray asked if the Community Council could front up a proposal for Christmas lights – Stornoway South Councillors will pay from their Ward Funds. After consideration, this proposal had to be declined, as it is not known how long it will take to open a bank account.
- Morag Smith explained that Bayhead Community Association has been awarded £10,500 from the Crown Estate for Youth Outreach. As part of this they plan to carry out a consultation with young people. Did the Community Council want to do a wider consultation with adults? This might cost around £200. It was agreed to explore this.
- Close** 9 The Chair thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.