

Stornoway Community Council

Minute of Meeting held in the Newton Ward Community Rooms, Seaforth Road,
Stornoway on Thu 25 July 2024 at 7:00 pm

- Present**
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| Kenneth Burns (Vice Chair) | Mike Macleod (Secretary) |
| Josh Gibbens | Betty Jappy |
| Ian Minty | Morag Smith |
| Cameron Thompson | Cllr Duncan Macinnes |
| Cllr Rae Mackenzie | Cllr Frances Murray |
- Also present** 10 members of the public.
- Apologies**
- | | |
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| 1 Robert Doig | Janet Macdonald |
| Cllr Angus McCormack | Cllr George Murray |
- Minute of Meeting 27 June**
- 2 Adopted, with the correction that at the end of the first paragraph of item 8 the following sentence be inserted: "The Secretary and Morag Smith are to liaise on invitations."
- Matters Arising**
- 3 The Secretary reported that the Constitution had been signed and returned to Comhairle nan Eilean Siar (CNES). Our contact details now appear on the CNES website. The domain sycommunitycouncil.org.uk has been registered and email is now working. Invitations to attend meetings had been sent to the Chief Inspector and to CNES Education & Children's Services. He had not been able to read the report on the Move More service sent to him by Cllr Duncan Macinnes as this had strangely disappeared from his email, so had not been able to write to the NHS. Cllr Duncan Macinnes reported that the Health Board were not sending any more referrals. The termination of the service was due to a new Director of Medical Care at the Health Board. While CNES had extended the contracts of the one full-time and two part-time workers, sadly they are due to be paid off shortly. Any future service would have to be paid for by the users.
- Appointment of Treasurer**
- 6 Taken out of Sequence. Cllr Frances Murray reported that Ian Morrison was not able to take this post on. The Secretary confirmed that John MacKillop had already been approached and had declined. It was agreed that the three officebearers should discuss and try and find someone suitable.
- Point & Sandwich Trust – Proposed Development at Battery, Newton**
- 4 The Secretary confirmed that the Community Council had sent a Submission into CNES, which now appears on the Council website, along with supporting files. We had invited Point & Sandwich Trust (PST) to attend this meeting. PST had expressed a wish to meet with us, but had explained that they wished to have someone come from the mainland for this, and asked for a range of alternative dates. These have been provided to PST.
- Recognising that not everyone present will be familiar with the project, the Secretary and Vice-Chair gave an overview of the project, which was a £14 million 25 Mw Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) to be located

PST – Proposed Development at Battery, Newton (contd.)

- 4 close to the Power Station at the Battery, Newton, on land owned by the Stornoway Port Authority. The BESS is likely to be very profitable for PST as it will facilitate energy trading – buying electricity when it is cheap, then selling it back when prices are high. In particular when there is a grid outage, it takes two hours for the Power Station to resume full power to the island. The BESS would enable power to be restored to every part of the island almost instantaneously. The concern is that the Lithium-ion batteries used are new technology. Major fires are rare, but when they do occur they are catastrophic – toxic smoke is emitted, presenting a significant risk to human health and life. It can take days for the fires to be put out. The Newton site is very close to one of the most densely-populated parts of Stornoway. Also the large quantities of water required to put out any fire would quickly flow into the sea, taking chemicals with them, and causing an environmental disaster. All this had been put into our Submission to CNES, which had recommended that any decision should be delayed by some months to allow proper public consultation, that any development should first be subject to a thorough fire risk assessment to be carried out by the Scottish Fire & Rescue Service, and that another location be considered instead.

The Secretary then disclosed additional information which had not been available before our Submission to CNES Planning was made. A thorough examination of the PST Minutes revealed that PST had initially seriously considered two locations for the BESS – Newton, and the SSEN Converter Station at Arnish Road End (near Macaulay Farm). Combined with information obtained informally from someone knowledgeable about the electricity industry, this led to the inevitable conclusion that there was no technical reason whatever for the BESS to be located at Newton. The Secretary then pointed out that this meant, from a planning perspective, that if CNES refused planning permission for the Newton site, this did not terminate the project and risk losing the significant economic benefits the development could reasonably be expected to generate. Instead PST could simply go back to the drawing board and submit an application for Arnish Road End.

In the subsequent discussion, no member of the public nor of the Community Council spoke in favour of the PST project. Cllr Duncan Macinnes pointed out that Inverness Caledonian Thistle FC had had a BESS project refused planning permission by Highland Council. A member of the public pointed out that the whole area would have to be cordoned off if the BESS went on fire – this would include the Coastguard and the Power Station itself – this could lead to the island being without electrical power for some time. Also that the gas works and oil tanks (not so far away from the proposed site) would never be placed where they are today. The Vice-Chair stated we should be thinking about safety – locate such a project where if it does go on fire, it can be dealt with safely. The whole problem with this proposal is that the more you look into it, it raises more questions than answers.

Josh Gibbens mentioned that PST have not published their Minutes from 2023 onwards. The Secretary said this was properly a matter for the residents of Point and Sandwick. Cllr Rae Mackenzie asked if Newton Ward Community Association had made a submission on this project.

PST – Proposed Development at Battery, Newton (contd.)

- 4 It seemed they had not. A member of the public resident in Newton explained that they had asked for a community meeting, a flyer was put round Newton but not by PST. Then at the meeting here on 15 May, PST turned up, they and others had asked questions but not had proper answers from the PST representative. The Vice-Chair stated that people in Newton were not being treated with the respect they deserve.

A member of the public stated that at one of the PST consultation meetings in 2022, he had been told by a PST employee that the only reason the development was to be at Newton was because the Stornoway Port Authority was easier to negotiate with. The Secretary remarked that if the development was to be at Arnish Road End then PST would probably have to negotiate with the Stornoway Trust. The Stornoway Trust are considered generally to be extremely tough negotiators, who will aim to extract the best advantage for the community as a whole.

Ian Minty said that it seems that everyone in the room is favourable in principle to this proposal – but not at the current location. It was agreed that PST should be invited to a meeting dedicated to the issue, and that a further submission should be made to CNES Planning.

Sporad na Mara Windfarm Development

- 5 The Secretary discussed his initial meeting with Northland Power, the developers of the Sporad na Mara windfarm project. They are actively involved in community engagement and very much wish to meet with us. Northland themselves were completely upfront, and explained that until the technical assessments are completed, they cannot confirm the final route for the Onshore Cable, how many people will work on the project. The meeting accepted that any work on bringing the Onshore Cable from the West Coast to the SSEN Converter Station near Arnish would potentially involve disruption to the Barvas Moor Road and was therefore very much of concern to Stornoway residents. Given the pressure on housing on the island, it was not clear how the construction workers would be housed. There was inevitably also serious potential for disruption to flights to the mainland, at any time when even a small portion of the construction workers here decide to travel home.

Morag Smith reported on a meeting she had had with the Council Leader – there may be as many as 2,000 workers coming onto the island. One plan is to have modular housing units with services such as electricity and water piped to them – we would end up with developed areas with services. Cllr Rae Mackenzie stressed the importance of getting a housing legacy afterwards. We will be looking at modular hotel-type, work-camp things. Morag mentioned that the Council is looking at having additional flights at the weekend – these would be primarily for the windfarm workers but would also be open to local residents.

Cllr Duncan Macinnes stated that the Comhairle was aiming to get the maximum of community benefit, in the way Shetland had done with oil. Cllr Rae Mackenzie said there will be fortunes made. We have to be careful or we'll have missed the best opportunities. The Vice-Chair said the developers have come here wanting something we've got. It was agreed to invite Northland Power to a future meeting.

Elections - Polling Places 7 Josh Gibbens reported on the issue he encountered at his polling station at the Grianan Centre, Westview Terrace, on election day. Despite there being a fair number of voters, there was only one polling booth. This resulted in someone almost walking in on him while he was voting. The Secretary pointed out that the Polling District in question, E09B, had the second-highest number of voters in the Western Isles. It was agreed to write to the Returning Officer.

Goathill Crescent Park 8 Ian Minty explained that a member of the public had expressed concern about dog-fouling in Goathill Crescent Park, which is regularly used by nursery-age children. Betty Jappy pointed out the same issue at the playing field at the intersection of Smith Avenue and Goathill Road. Cllr Frances Murray confirmed both properties were Council-owned. Cllr Rae Mackenzie explained that he had arranged for both properties to have notices saying "No dog-fouling". He had also arranged for benches to go into the Goathill Crescent Park. He undertook to get the notices changed to "No dogs allowed", and, at Betty Jappy's suggestion, to make them very prominent.

Teenage Anti-Social Behaviour 9 At the request of several members of the public, some of whom had come some distance across town to this meeting, this subject was discussed in detail. Numerous alleged incidents of serious damage to property and threatening behaviour were highlighted. These allegedly included a threat to rape an elderly lady. The result is that some elderly people feel unsafe and are afraid to leave their homes. A letter written by a resident was read out. There was discussion of the individuals alleged to be involved.

In an emotional discussion, every member of the public who spoke expressed strong dissatisfaction with the response of the Police as well as anger at the teenagers allegedly at fault. They related long wait times on the 101 number. If they managed to visit Stornoway Police Station at a time when it is open, they felt the police officers they spoke to displayed a lack of interest. Two people separately stated how they had seen officers throw their hands in the air and claim that they could do nothing. Several people expressed a lack of confidence in Chief Inspector Jane Mackenzie and in Jack Libby, the CNES Youth Services Principal Officer.

Morag Smith stressed the importance of writing to the Children's Reporter Erica Murray. If the Children's Reporter receives eight or nine letters about a particular child, this will give them an incentive to take action. We might also wish to think about setting up a support organisation.

The Vice-Chair stated that he had been a Councillor in Glasgow for five years, and a member of a Community Council there for twenty, but had never heard so many concerning stories of teenage misbehaviour as these. Cllr Rae Mackenzie said the latest idea is to have a Campus Policeman at the Nicolson. His fear is that there will have to be a serious crime committed before something is done.

Teenage Anti-Social Behaviour (contd.)

- 9 Morag Smith reiterated the importance of writing to the Children's Reporter and said that the Community Council should set up a meeting with the Chief Inspector and the CNES Director of Children's Services. In her experience these individuals find it extremely difficult to listen to the experiences of those who have been directly impacted by anti-social behaviour. It was agreed that such a meeting should be arranged.

Betty Jappy mentioned that Cllr Gordon Murray had written to the head of the Community Safety Board asking for details of their policy. Cllr Duncan Macinnes explained that the Anti Social Behaviour Policy still had to be signed off by CNES, Police Scotland and Hebridean Housing Partnership.

The Secretary suggested that Police Scotland, like any other bureaucracy, may have a tendency to under-report (if it isn't on the computer, it didn't happen). Therefore it would be a good idea to insist on getting a crime incident number any time an incident is reported. Cllr Duncan Macinnes stated this suggestion was in the written advice that he and other Councillors had distributed.

Ian Minty said the situation was so serious that the Community Council should write to the Chief Constable of Police Scotland. This was agreed.

Close

- 10 The Vice-Chair thanked everyone for coming, and closed the meeting.