

## **Note of the Joint Cromarty Firth and Tain & Easter Ross Ward Forum**

### **Attending / Representing**

Cllr. Maxine Smith (Chair)	Highland Council
Cllr. Mike Finlayson	Highland Council
Cllr. Martin Rattray	Highland Council
Cllr Alasdair Rhind	Highland Council
Ch. Insp. Iain MacLelland	Police Scotland
John Edmondson	Ardross Community Council
Mary Macdonald	Alness Community Council
Val Campbell-Smith	Invergordon Community Council
Tina McCaffery	Invergordon Community Council
George Dobbie	Kilmuir & Logie Easter Community Council
Alpin Macdonald	Kiltearn Community Council
Leslie Logan	Kiltearn Community Council
John Waring	Nigg & Shandwick Community Council
Eveline Waring	Nigg & Shandwick Community Council
Helen Williamson	Saltburn & Westwood Community Council
David Cowie	Highland Council
Scott Dalgarno	Highland Council
Helen Ross	Highland Council

### **Apologies**

Cllr. Fiona Robertson	Highland Council
Cllr. Jamie Stone	Highland Council
Cllr Carolyn Wilson	Highland Council

10 members of the public

1. Cllr Maxine Smith welcomed everyone and opened the meeting.

**2. Police Scotland update** – Ch Insp. Iain MacClelland introduced himself and asked for any questions/comments:

Q. Saltburn & Westwood Community Council appreciate police attendance at meetings, whilst accepting it will not always be possible. However attendance has not been regular and the chair has had difficulty in making contact by email. Can this be improved?

A.Ch Insp MacClelland to check and seek to ensure improved attendance and communication and will contact the chair.

Q. If officers are not able to attend a community council meeting for operational reasons can the community council be advised?

A. Yes, officers should be able to advise the community council if they will be unable to attend, in advance if possible. Where time permits a report will be provided instead.

Q. Is Alness Police Station to be pulled down?

A. No, the costs of demolition and of refurbishment are being drawn up, but for info only at this stage and to allow a quick response should funding become available;?

Q. Why is this being considered when the building is not very old?

A. There are a number of issues with the building and Police Scotland needs to look at the most cost effective solution.

### **3. Highland Council Planning Policy on Wind Farms**

Scott Dalgarno outlined the current review of Wind Farm Planning Policy and noted how keen the Service was to have public views/comments feeding into the policy and guidance.

David Cowie then provided a detailed run through of the national context within which the Council must revise its onshore wind energy supplementary guidance, with particular focus on the Scottish Planning Policy and the approach it sets out for the preparation of Spatial Frameworks for wind energy development. It was noted the consultation period on the Council's Consultation Paper opened on 16<sup>th</sup> March 2015 and runs until 11th May 2015.

Following the presentation the following questions/comments were raised:

Q. How will those who do not have a computer know about the consultation?

A. An advert has been placed in the press, an initial press release issued and word being spread via social media. Emails and letters are being sent to notify a wide range of organisations, businesses, groups and individuals. Further news stories will be issued and officers are attending a number of ward forum meetings, such as this one, to engage with communities. Anyone without access to a computer can request a paper copy of the Consultation Paper. Further suggestions of ways to get the information out are welcomed.

Comment: Community Councils should have been notified *before* the consultation period started to ensure they have maximum response time.

Q. What is the minimum distance from community boundaries set out in the framework?

A. The Council is proposing applying the full 2km as the community separation distance in the Spatial Framework. However under Scottish Planning Policy approach it would be possible to set a much lower distance or even 0km. It should be noted that this separation distance relates only to settlement boundaries shown on the development plan, it will not come into play for every community.

Q. What size of community triggers the 2k separation distance?

A. Settlements defined in the local development plan with a development boundary trigger this separation – these will be settlements where specific sites have been identified for development and the boundary includes the sites designated for such development.

Q. To what extent is community benefit considered in decision making?

A. Community Benefit is voluntary and does not form any part of the Planning application decision – only measures proposed by the applicant that are directly to address planning concerns of the development proposals can be considered.

Comment – Developments delivered so far have all been under the system which includes incentives via Renewable Obligations. From a developer perspective, as subsidies dwindle to zero developers will increasingly have to focus on developments of scale on the windiest sites. In this context SNH's mapping of Carbon Rich Soils, Deep Peat and Priority Peatland Habitat (CPP) areas is a matter of concern to developers.

Response – The mapping of wild land was finalised by SNH last year, so the boundaries of the wild land areas are already final. However SNH's CPP mapping is not yet finalised, consultation on the draft map having closed on 13 March 2015.

Q. How can people be confident their views will be fully considered?

A. The aim is to be very clear in the consultation what aspects are open for change in the light of views, and which aspects are already set e.g. in National policy. When a report is taken to Committee after the consultation period, detailed information on views put forward will be included.

Q. If so much is already defined and can't be changed what decision role is left for members?

A. This consultation is part of the preparation of guidance and policy. When applications are considered members will weigh up the different factors, criteria and material considerations in the context of the guidance and policy before coming to their decision.

Comment: SNH are mapping CPP areas. If these soils are disturbed carbon is released into the atmosphere - it is therefore important not to disturb carbon rich soil.

Q. Where is the mention of the cluster and space approach in National Policy?

A. The proposal for a cluster and space approach is Highland Council's suggestion of a planning mechanism that might enable support to be given to further appropriate wind energy proposals, while safeguarding important areas and limiting the cumulative impacts of wind energy developments in the area.

Q. Why is the council not lobbying for a moratorium on wind farms?

A. The council considers all aspects of wind farms, including views for as well as against.

Q. Wind farms have a life span and also as wind farms become less economic they may be superseded by other technologies. Are developers required to ensure funds for decommissioning are in place?

A. Yes, this is covered in planning approvals through a bond or similar requirement. Officers present did not have specific information as to how the costs of implementing restoration requirements were calculated. The current consultation does seek views on the Council's suggested approach to providing guidance on restoration requirements.

Q. Developers put in applications for large developments which are in very close proximity to but not within designated sites such as SSSIs. Is this not a concern, given that impacts could be significant?

A. Any impact on the designated site will be considered as part of decision making process even if the proposed development is not actually within the designated site and we make this clear in our guidance.

Comment – the final document needs to be something that can be used. The spatial framework still leaves a lot of uncertainty so the policies behind the mapping are key.

#### **4. Community Resilience**

A short update was given on what is meant by community resilience and how communities can be supported to be more resilient. It was noted that community resilience is simply communities working together to support people in difficult situations such as the recent bad weather and there are already good local examples of community resilience.

After discussion it was agreed that there would be local benefit in community councils and potentially other interested community groups coming together to discuss examples of community plans, use of newsletter etc so that communities can then consider how best to support community resilience in their own area. Noted SSE was keen to attend such a meeting and could provide support both in terms of funding but also information to previously identified key people during power outages when these occur.

**Action** - Helen Ross to email out to Cromarty Firth and Tain & Easter ross Community Councils with date for proposed Community Resilience meeting.