

Stornoway Community Council

Minute of Meeting held in the Newton Ward Community Rooms, Stornoway
on Thu 10 Apr 2025 at 7:00 pm

Present	Kenneth Burns (Vice Chair)	Mike Macleod (Secretary)
	Betty Jappy	Ian Minty
	Cameron Thompson	Cllr Angus McCormack
	Cllr George Murray	
In Attendance	Colin Bell (Project Lead, SSEN)	Kevin Morrison (Community Liaison Manager, SSEN)

9 members of the public attended in person

Apologies	1	Robert Doig	Josh Gibbens
		Janet Macdonald	Morag Smith
		Cllr Duncan Macinnes	Cllr Rae Mackenzie
		Cllr Frances Murray	Cllr Gordon Murray
		Kaleigh Macleod	

SSEN HVDC Convertor Station Development	2	The Vice-Chair welcomed Mr Colin Bell and Mr Kevin Morrison of SSEN to the meeting and invited them to give a brief presentation.	
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Colin Bell (CB) thanked the Community Council for inviting them. He had started as the Project Lead two years ago, just as site location was being examined. SSEN reconsidered the site and from February 2024 they have been working on the basis this would be near Macaulay Farm. Planning Permission in Principle has been applied for and details are available online on the CNES website, but this is still an outline. There is an explanation of earthworks, drainage, the Environmental Impact Report, which looks to explain the impact the development will have. The Plans are not finalised – CNES will go to consultees including SEPA, etc. SSEN will meantime work to finalise plans. Once asked by CNES, SSEN will provide the final details, address aspects of how to manage the construction process., and will continue to take feedback on board. The Planning Application was sent in February. There are concerns around Visual Amenity, Traffic Management, Logistics, Housing for Workers. It is accepted these are valid concerns.

Kevin Morrison (KM) explained that he has been involved in consultations as well as visiting individual residents. His job is to take feedback and concerns to the relevant people in SSEN. There will be a continuing relationship with the Community Liaison side.

The Vice Chair invited the audience to ask questions.

Q – Housing – how many properties have you purchased? CB – Zero houses have been purchased. There will be 300-400 workers on site at peak. Our contractors are aiming to maximise the percentage of locally-resident workforce. At the same time we cannot just turn up with 200 workers – we have to consider accommodation. We don't want to build a workers camp – we want to build housing that will be needed. We don't want to impact hotel capacity at the peak of the tourist season – but recognise that using hotels in winter will be a possibility.

- 2 Colin Bell (CB) went on to say that SSEN did not want to inflate house prices, they will be taking a mixed approach to housing. The plan is to have only a relatively small workers village – around 50 or so. It is HHP or others who will submit any planning applications for housing. Perhaps properties currently used for Air BnB could move to long-term rental. There was also a logistics element – SSEN didn't want to take up local capacity on ferries or airlines.

Q - Referencing the Shetland Oil Deal from the 1970s, what contribution is SSEN going to give to the community? CB - SSEN is regulated by Ofgem. We are discussing with other transmission owners how Community Benefit plans can be set up. Work is being done in the background now. The work we do is as an enabler for windfarms to connect to the grid. At present windfarms have to commit to £5,000 per megawatt annually. For transmission operators the guidance was published two weeks ago - £530,000 for a substation, £200,00 per km of overhead line. SSEN is committing £100m in Community Benefit to the North of Scotland area. There is discussion on distribution of the money.

Councillor George Murray - Give us cheap electricity - it would be a good selling point! CB - SSEN as a transmission project cannot control this but can take feedback back, SSEN can influence things to an extent.

Q - The Community Benefit level of £5,000 per megawatt has not been increased in last eleven years or more - Kevin Morrison (KM) stated that he had been talking with the SSEN Community Benefit Team - 50% will go to a regional fund and 50% to be decided at a local level. There is a dedicated Social Value Team - how can we use more local businesses - work with contractors.

KM - As regards Accommodation - he sits on the workforce accommodation committee. Buying properties is not on the agenda at all. SSEN will not be building houses themselves. Our aim is to support building houses in return for becoming a tenant.

Q - Melbost West is a natural development but ground still has to be broken, and the clock is ticking. CB - The clock is indeed ticking - in the first year or two RJ Macleod will do the earthworks phase - peak in staff numbers is when buildings are erected - peak will be around 2028.

Q - How big is the site? CB - There is a large footprint of the site which is required for drainage. The red-line site boundary is 200 hectares - much of this is required for peat reclamation. 300,000 cubic metres of peat and 150,000 cubic metres of rock will have to be moved. KB - the cement base for the buildings will be 570 metres by 310 metres.

Q - Is there a specific group in the Council looking at all that will be needed - health service, dentistry, education? Cllr George Murray said yes, we are looking for a new planning officer. CB - we recognise the impact of having all these people. Balfour Beatty will have the bulk of the workforce on site - will have provision themselves. Councillor Angus McCormack said that within CNES there is a committee to look at everything together, working since 2022. There is a similar committee at officer level. We are looking for additional members of staff to assist us. Individual Councillors cannot say they are for or against a development, since Councillors are the planning authority. We don't hear much from SSEN or developers about going outside Stornoway. There would be benefits of getting housing in rural areas.

- 2 The Vice Chair said something seems to be seriously lacking in strategy. A member of the public stated that there was a ridiculous situation of £700 million coming in from Scotwind but nothing coming to the community here. Cllr Angus McCormack stated that these are huge developments – people are really worried – want to see what's in it for them. The member of the public said that the Stornoway Trust has been talking to developers for 22 years. They plan to buy 20% of the Lewis Wind Farm development but will not be able to do this until 2035 and will have to go round the money markets to get someone to lend them the money. Charlie Nicolson referred to the Poverty Action Group – the pressures the community is under. Kevin Morrison (KM) said they will take the feedback back.

Cllr Angus McCormack said we already have Zonal Pricing – London pays the least and we pay the most!

Q – Housing – Colin Bell (CB) said that renovation existing housing was part of the mix of solutions SSEN is looking at.

Q – As regards the Traffic Management Plan – CB said there are lots of ongoing discussions. We recognise the need for transport via sea freight. Some specialist equipment will come on a dedicated freighter to the Deep Water Port. SSEN does not want to impact the ferry service. We are working with the Scottish Government and Transport Scotland – there are many moving parts, and very senior discussions are ongoing currently. For stuff that can be road-transported – we would maximise use of a night-time freight-ferry. A member of the public said that years ago we were consulted and said we wanted two ferries for the Stornoway-Ullapool route – but we ended up getting one large one. CB – For staff rotation – two weeks on, two weeks off – we don't want workers arriving with their own personal cars. At same time we have to be mindful of impact in Ullapool from parked cars.

Ian Minty said he appreciated the frankness from the two SSEN representatives here. Cllr Angus McCormack said discussions on Community Benefit were already happening. He referred to a letter on renewables – a very long letter – which appeared in this week's Gazette. This misrepresents the Comhairle's position. The Scottish Government has to get stuck in and help us.

The Vice Chair stated that having two ferries instead of one large ferry would help. We were not listened to in the discussion about that – lots of examples of our not being listened to. We are discussing something here which will radically change our community. Your position as Councillors should be to make people's voices heard.

**** Cllr George Murray left the meeting.*

Cllr Angus McCormack stated that he had attended the meeting on ferry replacements back in 2004 – we never ever got a letter explaining why we ended up with one.

Regarding lifespan of renewables projects – Cllr McCormack said there had to be an end of life decommissioning plan. For windfarms they will replace the turbines. But in forty years time they will all have to be replaced around the same time.

**** Cllr Angus McCormack left the meeting.*

**SSEN HVDC
Converter Station
Development
(contd.)**

- 2 Q - The suggestion of taking rock from the excavation and using it to fill in the space between No 1 and No 2 piers to create parking was raised. Colin Bell (CB) said he will get their contract partners to discuss. Kevin Morrison (KM) said that he was appreciative of the effort people were making to liaise with SSEN – it's our community as well – if there is something we can change, we will. It may look like nothing is happening at SSEN but there is. The Major Development Forum – work is being done. It will always be possible to contact him.

Q - The Viking Windfarm in Shetland was raised – SSEN would have needed a HVDC Station there as well? CB confirmed this was correct. There had been a lot of work done there, and we used that as a template.

There being no further questions, Colin Bell and Kevin Morrison left the meeting.

A member of the public suggested a meeting in the Town Hall would have been better suited to a matter of this importance. Another member of the public said the deal Shetland got will never be replicated. They are still sitting on £400m after spending £370m over the years on community benefit. There is not going to be one Community Benefit scheme for the Western Isles. The Vice Chair said small communities are always exploited, we have to make our voice very loud.

Another member of the public suggested we should put pressure on our MSP to appear in front of the Council every two months. Charlie Nicolson said the scheme to infill at Bayhead have been agreed by the Scottish Government, funding was available – but the two partners could not agree. Parking is desperately needed in town

The Vice Chair stated that the SSEN development was going to be the largest building development ever on the island.

The members then proceeded to vote on the proposed response as set out in the discussion paper which had been circulated previously – Cameron Thompson and the Secretary voted in favour, the Vice-Chair and Ian Minty against, and Betty Jappy abstained. On the vote being tied at 2-2, the Secretary mentioned that Morag Smith had emailed him to say she was happy to support the line taken in the document. The meeting accepted this as a vote in favour of the discussion paper, and it was agreed the decision was 3 to 2 in favour.

It was agreed to try and hold a formal meeting with all the Stornoway Councillors and perhaps they could bring along a Chief Officer, ideally John Cunningham.

Close

- 3 The Vice Chair thanked everyone for attending, for their contributions, and their forbearance, and closed the meeting.