**Laggan Community Council – Minutes**

**Meeting 1– 01/12/2023**

**Laggan Community Hall @18:00**

1. **Attendees Present:** KT, AG, CF, MK, CH, AT. Members of Public, Angus and Valerie McPherson, Hazel and David Narro.

Meeting declared quorate and in order to proceed.

1. **Proposal to co-opt:** Alistair Todd (AT) as an associate member of the Community Council. Proposed MK, Seconded CF.
2. **Approval of draft minutes of LCC Meeting 30 Monday 4th September 2023 – Proposed MK Seconded CH**
3. **Matters Arising**

* Primary School Mothballing – AG has communicated with A McMullen, School Inspector. Residents have been emailed in regard to school closure, and have been asked for comments. To date there have been none received in this regard.
* CNPA Beaver consultation. Recent meeting well attended. Concerns that the forthcoming release of beavers into the area would be without any consultation. However, CNPA have agreed to manage the project and will be implemental in the placement/release of beavers. Exclusion zones have been requested by this community. Three estates within the CNPA have expressed an interest in hosting beavers. Addendum 1 refers to LCC’s official response.

1. **SSE Renewables Community Investment (Benefit) :** Although a new panel has been elected locally we feel that a further ‘open meeting’ with Carole Masheter could be arranged to show the community what other areas are doing with their grants. There is the option to link SSE funding with other funding opportunities. One person has approached CM re apprenticeships and one group is in talks with CM. MK to contact CM for contacts at Spean Bridge panel, this might help give an insight into how to take our own panel forward.
2. **Financial Report –**

Bank account as reported at the last meeting 4th September £ 5,862.08

Since the last meeting 3 payments were made totalling £180

• Secretarial services £30

• Host World Ltd £90

• Jill Warner / Waterhaul £60 (part of CNPA grant for litter picking equipment)

Current bank balance stands at £5,682.08 – the following money is ringfenced:

1. £4,909.46 for SSE Micro Grants

2. £51.07 from CNPA for environmental / litter projects

The total amount ringfenced money is £4,960.53 meaning the amount available for the general use by the Community Council is £721.55

The Highland Grant for £438 is still pending.

The above remains unchanged from the last meeting.

1. **Statutory Items for Community Council to note and discuss**
2. Planning Applications update.
3. 2023/0267/DET Distillery application for land South East of Spey Dam permission granted
4. 22/06055/FUL Cluny Mill House permission granted
5. 23/04700/FUL Telecommunications mast Creag Dhu – LCC have requested an extension in order to formally respond to HC request. Thus far we have only received an automated reply. AG will formally respond. The main concerns are who will benefit from the placement of this mast and what is the justification for it. There are also concerns in respect of the sensitivity of the site; historical and natural.
6. 2023/0363/DET ATV tracks Coul Estate. Nothing further to report at this time
7. 23/05350/SCOP Melgarve Cluster Installation of overhead line 7.4 km cabling,access track, tree and vegetation clearance 16.7 km in length (9.7 UGC) overhead line connecting the Cloiche and Dell wind farms. We have emailed our response to the relevant parties, a copy of which is attached as addendum 2
8. 2022 Balgowan Planning Update. Planning for the proposed new build expires Spring 2024.
9. Community Housing. An email from a community member has been received in regard to using the school buildings in the development of additional local housing. AMc maintains that the recommendation is to build new. This subject remains open for further discussion. No further progress at this moment.
10. Ardverikie Pumped Storage Scheme Loch an H'Earba : update following public consultation on 21st November. Notes from consultation Nov 21st

1. Talks have started with SSE about substation and have identified 5 possible sites which were not disclosed. Gilkes are urging SSE to consult with CNPA at earliest opportunity. If planning permission for substation cannot be obtained the project cannot go ahead. Substation would be at least as big as Melgarve.

2. All cabling to be underground.

3. There would be several workers compounds built.

4. New access bridge to be built at Moy on A86

5. New path at Loch an h'Earba on northern shore and access will

continue throughout build.

6. Estimated to be 20 full time jobs when scheme operational.

7. Some informal chat about planning gain. This proposal remains at the consulting stage

* 1. Licencing Update – Nothing to report
  2. Roads – Nothing to report
  3. Report from Public Sector Agencies – Nothing to report.
  4. Highland Council

1. Public toilet. Should continue to operate for the next two years
2. Online training defib. Via R Jones, spring 2024
   1. Update on Active Travel/Connecting Laggan

Chris Yorke had prepared a document detailing the outcome of discussions with Transport Scotland. In it he detailed the aims of the Connecting Laggan project and a summary of discussions with Transport Scotland in particular the design restraints relevant to the A86.

The conclusion was that Transport Scotland would allow no changes to speed limits and no controlled crossing could be installed. As a result it is not possible to meet the Cycling by Design guidance and requires Sustrans to consider whether these remaining constraints are acceptable to allow the project to succeed. Chris is in communication with Sustrans to find out if it is possible to proceed with their funding despite not meeting the guidelines. So far their unofficial response has been positive but the discussions continue until a way forward can be agreed. Very slow progress.

1. **Village Amenity Group:** Christmas planter decorations have been installed. Regular checks needed to ensure all batteries continue to be fully operational. Trees for the church and the Hall to be delivered w/c 4 December.
2. **Tree felling Update :**

(i). Jahama Estate – First phase of timber uplift completed w/c 22 Nov. Harvesting currently on hold due to weather. A further 4000 tonnes will be harvested once operations recommence. Maximum of six loads per day and no overnight operations. LCC to contact Jahama for notification of this date.

(ii) Blackwood - All operations completed, signage removed and paths reinstated

1. FLS 10 year plan : Laggan Forest Trust advise of a forthcoming consultation event by FLS to take place 13 December at Laggan Village Hall.
2. **AOB –** Possibility of an additional bus service for the weekends. Cost benefit of school closure; could the savings be utilised to extend the bus service for the community.
3. **Proposed Dates of next meetings 22/01/24** Discussion needed at next meeting to diarise annual meeting arrangements
4. Residents may intimate other topics for the Community Council to discuss by contacting chairlcc@laggan.com or secretarylcc@laggan.com

Addendum 1

The Laggan Community Council would like to respond with the following comments on behalf of the local community regarding the potential reintroduction of beavers in our local area.

There is widespread concern that the physical damage to the land and the follow on economic loss suffered by the land owners will far outweigh any environmental/ecological benefits of beaver introduction in our area. In addition, such 'benefits' are unlikely to be a benefit to the landowner on whose property the beavers are either introduced or who subsequently migrate to post introduction in the area.

There was discussion at the meeting on having absolute 'Exclusion Zones' identified in advance of any introduction. This is something the community is in absolutely favour of as it will then give the landowners (and any landowners downstream) the assurance that any unsuitable areas would not become beaver habitat, and if beavers migrated into these areas then the Landowner could be assured of their timely removal.

With regard to the assurances that were provided that any beavers who became a pest would be removed, this process needs to be clearly clarified and all salient terms and timescales defined. There needs to be a clear process for landowners to follow should they need to activate this process and failure to adhere to any part of the process or timescales by the CNP/Beaver Trust should have penalties to reflect the physical damage, economic and consequential losses that those landowners (or the landowners downstream) may suffer either then or in the future due to the activities of the beavers during the time they were residing in the Exclusion Zone.

There was a vague reference to an informal compensation 'pot' that was being earmarked. In the opinion of the community this must be an absolute priority as they are being subjected to the unwelcome introduction of something which will have an impact on their property and livelihood without any ability to reject this and failure to provide compensation should they suffer damage or loss as a result is tantamount to a breach of their human rights namely Protocol 1, Article 1: Protection of Property " Every natural or legal person is entitled to the peaceful enjoyment of his possessions" Noted there is a pubic interest exception to this but it is the community's opinion that the public interest of beavers being reintroduced to an area they have not habited for many many years would not outweigh this right, especially without a clear ringfenced compensation pot as there is plenty evidence and data to support the losses that landowners have suffered from the damage caused from the reintroduction of beavers in the Tayside area.

Concern was expressed from the community that there was only to be 1 full time and possibly a part time person managing this process in the Cairngorms. The community would like to see what provisions are being made in the event that that person is ill or incapacitated or resigns. They need confidence that there is a firm procedure in place to be able to fulfil obligations set out the aforementioned timescales.

The community were informed that there are 3 landowners within the Caringorms who are keen to provide habitat for beavers on their land. In that case, could it not be an option if they must come to this area that they can be restricted to these areas by means of fencing and careful monitoring?

We look forward to your response to our community's concerns

Addendum 2

Request for Scoping opinion for proposed section 37 application for Melgarve Cluster project – Cloiche & Dell wind farm connections.

Ref : ECU00004850

On behalf of the Laggan Community we are providing our Scoping Opinion for the above.

We remain opposed to the current proposal due to its permanent actual & cumulative visual impacts on the area.

1. The universal objection of Laggan residents to the construction of more pylons has not been considered in the scoping document with the proposal largely unchanged from that presented at the Laggan public consultation event in February. At that time SSE representatives were made aware of our opposition to further pylons in the area with the opposition formalised in writing on the 21st February 2023. That opposition has evidently been ignored.

2. We note the scoping document proposes approx. 9km of cabling is installed underground, all in a location which is invisible to anyone visiting the glen. The cabling then changes to overground at precisely the point where it would become visible as it descends to Melgarve substation. That only makes sense if cost alone is considered & we maintain far greater importance should be given to the visual impact of the proposal.

3. In support of the above we do not consider sufficient consideration has been given to the close proximity of Wild Land area 19, the Cairngorm National Park, the Upper Spey river catchment area & the very popular mountains of Geal Charn & Carn Liath all of which lie within 3 miles of the proposed development.

4. When considering alternatives to the current proposal we believe the scoping document should be based on an amended proposal of either:

• Fully undergrounding throughout the length of the connection

• Alternative routing west through Glen Doe which already contains multiple developments.

We fully recognise that both of the above options would likely be more costly but suggest the additional costs would be relatively minor expressed as a % of the total project cost involved in developing the Cloiche & Dell Wind Farms. Moreover, the additional costs would be insignificant in comparison to the lifetime revenue stream once Cloiche & Dell wind farms start supplying electricity.

5. The scoping document should include due consideration to previous planning decisions relating to the Stronelairg Windfarm & separately the refusal to permit the proposed Glen Shirra windfarm. In both instances the visual impact on what is a wild remote Highland glen were causative reasons for design mitigations & in the case of Glen Shirra for its eventual refusal.

6. We are particularly concerned that should more pylons be erected in the same general area as the Beauly Denny line, the cumulative effects will be to further erode the visual attraction of the glen which is much loved by tourists & local residents alike. The scoping document should therefore give consideration to the locally important economic driver of tourism which will inevitably be negatively impacted by the proposal.

7. In terms of visual reference points the Scoping Document should include additional visualisations not just those from the Garva Bridge car park, which lies below the sightline of much of the proposal, or from the rarely climbed summit of Meall na h- Aisre, where the 360 deg view is already much blighted by the proximity of existing windfarm infrastructure. Additional visualisations should therefore be created for all the high points along the road between Sherrabeg to a point immediately before reaching Melgarve. Additionally, the ascent of the Munro, Geal Charn, (Grid ref NN562987) is extremely popular & a major reason for visitors to Garva Bridge. Hence visualisations are necessary from a number of points on the ascent track to the summit. Similarly, Carn Dubh (NN513925) is also a popular hill often used on the ascent of the Munro Carn Liath & so should have a visualisation created from its summit.

8. Finally, we note the landowner for the area, Jahama Estates, is opposed to further above ground pylons. This should also be considered within the Scoping Document.