

## **Furnace Community Council**

### **Monthly Meeting**

**29/06/2023**

Present: Mark Boston (chair), Kenneth MacKellar, Louise MacKellar, Andy Henderson, Sharon MacInnes, Ruth Tott, Sarah Nixon, Peter Hogbin, Garret Corner and Caitlin Quinn.

- There was a presentation from Caitlin Quinn (community liaison manager from Scottish and Southern Electric Network transmission team).

Caitlin has been visiting local community groups to promote engagement and share information about ongoing projects in the area. She states that the power network for Argyll and Kintyre is over 60 years old and needs upgrading due to development and increased population density in the area. Demand on the network has drastically increased. Proposed works would see the replacement of the existing 132kv overhead power lines with an upgraded 275kv line between Dalmally, Creag Dhuhb and Inveraray.

Caitlin said that she had been sending emails about the proposed works –MB said that these have not been received, possibly due to them being sent to the wrong email address.

MB asked that hard copies of proposals be sent as PDFs received previously have been difficult to access/read.

Caitlin talked about her work visiting schools in Argyll and Bute as part of the developing young workforce scheme that operates in Scotland. This work is to promote jobs within the power industry and visits have taken place with children from primary age upwards.

SSEN has spent more than £7 million in the local economy on food and accommodation for the workforce (mainly sub-contractors) and is keen to get involved in the communities within the area. Work so far as involved a volunteer scheme for employees to support community groups and educational facilities. They have built a sand pit for MAKI pups and decorated a care home in lochgilthead. They have also supported the community hall in Tarbert by providing WiFi and screens in a bid to “future proof” the facility. They have also made donations of defibrillators and made donations to local food banks.

SM stated that Balfour Beatty had offered to upgrade the back hall but that this was never followed up. SSEN have a pot of money for community projects, but this is not in place just yet.

#### **Questions:**

KM asked if SSEN are linked with Drax and questions were asked by other attendees about who owned SSEN. Caitlin advised that the company is owned by shareholders, funded by the tax payer and

regulated by the government. She was not able to say who the major shareholders were as she did not have that information.

MB asked how many people were permanently employed by SSEN – there are 1294 employees Scotland wide as of March 2023.

AH asked what happened to the wind turbines at the end of their working life. Caitlin did not know.

MB stated that plans for decommission and “mopping up” are usually made during the planning process.

Caitlin stated that when the lines are dismantled, all waste is recycled.

MB suggested that the village could benefit from the community fund by getting support to replace the heating in the village hall.

### **Adoption of minutes from April meeting**

Proposed by SM, approved by PH.

### **Treasurer’s report**

PH advised that nothing much has changed. There is £99.19 in the virgin account which needs to be transferred to the main account. This requires a second signatory to action.

Balance: £3649.19 of which £1007.60 is from the wind farm micro grant fund.

### **Police report**

Communication from PS Matt Shaw – due to operational pressures, there is no report for June. He advises that data for June will be added to the report for July.

### **Roads update**

7 volunteers from the community and 3 staff from Bear Scotland performed a litter pick at Furnace bends on 23/06/2023. Despite the challenging environment and wet weather, it was a successful venture, and the area's appearance is much improved. Thanks to all involved. A report has been sent to the squeak, so hopefully this will be published.

A83 road signage. Unfortunately, there is no update, but it would seem that the signs have been returned to the manufacturer due to a problem with the sizes.

The outside area in front of the village hall has been successfully resurfaced. This was organized by the SCIO and the tar was generously supplied by Breedon. Thanks to all involved.

Following reports of vehicles speeding on Queen Elizabeth Drive, 20mph advisory stickers have not yet been placed on the lampposts in the area but it was pointed out that these are not very visible. It was suggested that this should be discussed with the local police officer.

There have been reports of sheep on the A83 and on Queen Elizabeth Drive. This is a cause for concern given the heavy traffic in the area and the potential for accidents. This has been reported to Police Scotland but, as yet, there has been no response. It was noted that the responsibility for the sheep lies with the farmer, not the landowner.

### **Micro grant applications**

There has been one application from the SCIO for a grant to replace the display unit on the front of the hall.

There was some discussion on the application form for the micro grant and the suitability of the questions asked. RT stated that the application form should not be a barrier to those seeking funds. Suggestion was made to change the wording of the question about why funding could not come from another source. This might be considered prohibitive, so it was suggested that it should be changed to ask how it would benefit the community as this is the main aim of the grants. A new form has been developed and will be trialed in processing the SCIOs request.

PH stated that as treasurer, he would like to see the financial details/records of any applications from organisations (this would not apply to applications from individuals) in the interests of transparency. With reference to the application from the SCIO, it is thought that the financial statements provided only covered the bar takings.

### **Furnace surgery closure**

A meeting took place on 19/06/2023 and was attended by representatives from the Lochgilphead medical practice, local councilors and Evan Beswick (head of the local health and social care partnership).

Several issues were raised including the responsibility and cost associated with the operation of the surgery and the suitability of the premises (especially in regard to the IT requirements). It was suggested by MB that none of the issues were insurmountable and that the community would benefit greatly from the re-establishment of the surgery.

Representatives from the medical practice were asked to provide information on how many patients from Furnace and Minard were seen at the Inveraray surgery to see whether this would prove the need for a surgery in the village.

### **Correspondence**

There has been a planning application to create vehicular access to a property at Allt Na Ceardaich

Letter received from Forestry and Land Scotland in response to an email raising concerns about the introduction of parking charges at FLS sites. They state:

- FLS appreciate the sensitivities over car parking charges which have been in operation at the most popular sites for over 20years.

- They incur annual costs of £13m across 300 destinations and car parking charges is important in ensuring their financial viability and the quality of Visitor experience which is under increased pressure due to usage and expectations.
- FLS have a nationally consistent planning approach which takes into consideration specific local circumstances to ensure that they have an equal spread of free & charging parks so that everyone can access a forest.
- Charges range from £1/hour to £3/day in their West region and an annual local pass (2 named vehicles from the same household) can be purchased for £40 per annum.

West Loch Fyne Community Council have asked if FCC would like to be involved in the development of a survey to gather local opinion on the monopoly of the Co-Op in mid Argyll. There is concern about the pricing in the stores and the lack of alternatives available. It is common for people in the area to travel considerable distances to find cheaper supermarkets, but this is not an option for people with limited income and no transport.

One local councillor has indicated that they would not consider licensing an additional outlet for several reasons:

- 1) fragile small local businesses
- 2) lack of footfall
- 3) lack of requirement (by the population)
- 4) no approach from any alternative stores

Would the community be interested in raising concerns about this? A survey would gather information on how many people travel to shop elsewhere, why they do this, how often etc.

The local school remains closed due to issues with staffing. Children on the Furnace school register are being transported to Inveraray primary at present, and this is likely to be the case after the summer break also.

### **Any other competent business**

AH asks who will attend the meeting regarding the An Suidhe wind farm community grants. Two residents from the village are needed to attend, and so far no one has come forward. AH said that she would attend if no one else was available. A post has been shared on social media regarding the meeting and this will be re-shared in the hope of finding volunteers.

The next meeting is scheduled for 27/07/2023 at 6:30pm in the village hall.

Councillor Dougie Philand will be in attendance.