

**Meeting of the Kirkhill & Bunchrew Community Council**

**Minute of Meeting, 7:30pm, Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> February 2025**

**Community Councillors present:**

All: Éamon Doorley, Cameron Kemp, Inglis Lyon, Jayne Macmillan, Judith Rumbold and Lindsey Stout.

**In attendance:**

Jane Slaughter

The meeting was held in person at Kirkhill Community Centre.

<p><b>1. Apologies</b></p> <p>Councillor Emma Knox, Councillor David Fraser, George Hogg.</p>	
<p><b>2. Minute of Last Meeting: 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025</b></p> <p>The minutes of January's meeting were agreed; Inglis Lyon proposed and Judith Rumbold seconded their acceptance, pending corrections.</p>	
<p><b>3. Matters Arising, Minutes of Meeting of 14<sup>th</sup> January 2025:</b></p> <p><b>Improvements to Bus Shelter/Bus Shelter Noticeboard</b></p> <p>Inglis Lyon had written to HiTrans about improving Kirkhill Bus Shelter and its noticeboard and has received a response that his email was received.</p> <p><b>Reelig Glen Consultation, Forestry &amp; Land Scotland</b></p> <p>Cameron Kemp said that he had no comments to add to the consultation. Lindsey Stout said that, although the public consultation had now closed, she would write on behalf of the Community Council in support of Forestry and Land Scotland's thorough and detailed Land Management Plan for Reeling Glen and also to highlight Aird Community Trust's valuable comments and action points, enabling minor revisions of the Land Management Plan after consultation with members of ACT's Woodland Group.</p> <p><b>Visitor Levy Consultation, The Highland Council, extended to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025</b>  <a href="https://www.highland.gov.uk/visitorlevyconsultation">https://www.highland.gov.uk/visitorlevyconsultation</a></p> <p>Jane Slaughter attended the meeting to discuss the Visitor Levy and ask if we had submitted a response to the consultation yet. She was a Board Director for Visit Loch Ness for two terms and is currently a Board Director for The Association of Scotland's Self-caterers and a member of the Highlands Hotel Association. She lives in Clunes and operates a short-term let in her garden. Her garden let is not a second home. Jane said that most owners of short-term lets in the Highlands are women and that this is their income. Most of these are not houses which could be made available to locals, but properties in their own grounds. Most self-catering let owners are not absentee landlords.</p>	<p><b>Secretary</b></p>

Jane said that hospitality organisations are not against the levy but are concerned about the implications and the processes. The whole process is being rushed and there should be a postponement, so that processes can be fine-tuned. There needs to be more consideration and consultation with business owners. The implementation of the Visitor Levy is not working well. Every Council across Scotland has been asked to implement the levy and each is doing it differently. Highland Council has come up with 5% but has no reasoning for choosing this amount but seems to have followed Edinburgh, which Visitor Levy has exemptions and seems to be more thought-out.

Cameron Kemp asked Jane Slaughter to email the Community Council with the bullet points she read out to add into the minutes. They are appended below:

“Overall, many tourism organisations and destination management organisations do not want this Levy. But it has been passed by the Scottish Government, so we are now calling for a halt to proceedings so considerations can be given and everything looked at more carefully.

Also worth remembering that the Community Council can complete the consultation and your response carries extra weight but we need to encourage individuals to respond, and they can respond as BOTH a business and resident to our own area, or an area that they may visit.

**KEY POINTS:**

- Businesses become tax collectors and are taxed on the tax. Some will be pushed over the V.A.T. threshold and as a result will likely close.
- Highland Council is currently not considering any exemptions (i.e. visiting hospital).
- 5% - is this a meaningful amount?
- What about campervans, motorhomes, cruise ships? They are currently not included.
- How will this be enforced?
- Consider how much it costs Highland Council to implement, yet business owners get nothing to collect it.
- How do we ensure Highland Council spends it where they say they will?
- Overall, please don't compare the Highlands with Edinburgh.
- We are already an expensive destination, don't compare to Europe where they have lower tax already.

The visitor levy is the last thing the self-catering sector needs at this time. The industry has come through a pandemic, only to be squeezed by a cost-of-living crisis. Moreover, there are still significant costs associated with short-term let licensing and planning.

A visitor levy will impact ordinary families in Scotland and the rest of the U.K. when holidaying. Those seeing family or friends in other parts of the country (for instance, those visiting someone they know in hospital and opting to stay in a hotel, B&B or short-term let), may feel aggrieved at this extra charge when they have already contributed financially to local government. It must not be forgotten that around 70% of tourism in Scotland historically comes from domestic visitors.

Tourism accommodation providers must not be used as unpaid tax collectors. While there are financial challenges affecting local government across Scotland, this cannot be used as a quick fix or existing Council services and as a revenue raiser for general spend. Any monies raised must be for tourism-related infrastructure only, showing the sector-specific nature of occupancy taxes.

The visitor levy will increase the administrative burden for small and microbusinesses like self-

<p>catering in Scotland.</p> <p>The proposed levy risks the competitiveness of the tourism industry and ignores that tourists already make a substantial contribution to the local economy. It is true many European markets and cities have levies in place but they do not have our levels of V.A.T. A new levy here would be in addition to V.A.T., whereas in 25 EU countries a discounted V.A.T. is applied.</p> <p>If introduced, all forms of accommodation should be subject to it. There must be a level playing field. Moreover, Councils should lobby the Scottish Government to ensure that cruise ships, campervans etc. make their contribution to this levy as soon as practically possible.”</p> <p>Jane asked for our general thoughts. Éamon Doorley said that he travels all the time for his work and that his concern would be how it is administered. Transparency is an issue and he is concerned about business owners collecting taxes at source for the government and the additional pressure this will put on them.</p> <p>Lindsey Stout said that campervans already park in laybys and passing places and contribute to damage of road edges and soft verges. Will Visitor Levy money be used to repair this damage but campervan owners be exempt from contributing to the Visitor Levy - is this fair? Will there be an increase in mobile camping vehicles? Campsites will implement the Visitor Levy; will more people wild camp, causing more issues in the countryside and a reduction of business for campsites?</p> <p>Jane Slaughter urged the Community Council and individuals in the community to fill in the consultation. Highland Council has said that they will take responses into consideration in developing the Visitor Levy, so potential pitfalls must be highlighted before the tax is brought in. Highland Council has extended the consultation to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025. Cameron Kemp spoke for the Community Council in saying that we could highlight these points in our response.</p> <p>Inglis Lyon said that he would pull together responses from Kiltarlity, Kilmorack and Strathglass Community Councils and send Jane’s email on to them for information. Inglis Lyon will then fill in the consultation on Kirkhill &amp; Bunchrew Community Council’s behalf before 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.</p>	<p>Inglis Lyon</p>
<p><b>4. SSEN/Community Interaction</b></p> <p>Councillor Helen Crawford has now heard back from S.S.E.N. Cameron Kemp circulated the response to four Community Councils and will seek a collective response for further action.</p> <p>One of the five Community Councils had comments to make on the minutes of meeting with Kate Forbes, M.S.P. and Deputy First Minister of Scotland, on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2025. Éamon Doorley said that she was well-briefed and the meeting was friendly and informal. She suggested some routes that could be followed. Cameron Kemp said that he will follow up on setting up a meeting with N.E.S.O., the National Energy Systems Operator.</p> <p>Éamon Doorley said that Kate Forbes did suggest that objections to wind farms will be more successful than objections to pylons because pylons will be part of the national grid infrastructure and wind farms not necessarily so. Cameron Kemp commented that everyone was quite robust in</p>	<p>Chair</p>

<p>what they asked and that Kate Forbes gave all the Community Council representatives present extra time to ask all the questions they had prepared.</p>	
<p>The Highland Council Budget and the possible removal of ring-fencing of money for Highland Council training for Community Councils regarding community representation and engagement with the power companies and operators. Cameron Kemp said that he emailed 64 Community Councils and is to write to the Ward Members. A standard letter, if shared between the Community Councils for all to use, would need to be carefully worded. Éamon Doorley said that he would be happy to draft it.</p>	<p>Chair/ Éamon Doorley</p>
<p>Cameron Kemp said that a response had been received from Alasdair Allan, Energy Minister and M.S.P. There had been no response from Jamie Stone M.P. Cameron Kemp is to share these letters with the Community Council.</p>	<p>Chair</p>
<p>Inglis Lyon queried whether we should draft some more questions for Highland Council. Cameron Kemp to action.</p>	<p>Chair</p>
<p><b>Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV pylon line</b></p>	
<p>A planning application for the Beauly to Blackhillock to New Deer to Peterhead 400kV pylon line will perhaps be made in April. Consultations are ongoing in Beauly and Kiltarlity. Kiltarlity Community Council has a GoFundMe page to raise money for an expert to write a robust objection. They will host a Public Meeting when the planning application goes live. Jayne Macmillan asked, do we want to pre-empt the planning application, hold a public meeting, to gather the community's views ready to inform our response to the planning application? Cameron Kemp replied that there are S.S.E.N. consultations on the 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> of February and we should wait for these to finish before organising a public meeting. Cameron Kemp said that we should invite representatives from the campaign group Communities B4 Power Companies to the public meeting. Éamon Doorley said that we should have fliers if we organise a public meeting and not rely on social media to advertise.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p>Cameron Kemp said that there is a growing trend towards using artificial intelligence to object to planning applications. Using an A.I. online tool, the writer can add their name, address and select five different objections. The A.I. tool then uses them to write a professional letter. Éamon Doorley and David Garvie are supportive of using A.I. The A.I. tool encourages people to object if they lack the confidence or language to write an objection themselves. Deeside Against Pylons have used A.I. to aid locals to write 1200 objections to the Kintore-Tealing 400kV OHL connection pylon line. Cameron Kemp said that Communities B4 Power Companies are looking to get an A.I. tool as well. Cameron Kemp said that many people are disenfranchised because they don't know how to object articulately. Jayne Macmillan said that we should have a printout of this available at the public meeting, so that people have the link as an opportunity to write their own letter.</p>	<p>All</p>
<p><b>Beauly B.E.S.S./Field Beauly planning application</b></p>	
<p>Éamon Doorley said that the Beauly B.E.S.S. (battery energy storage system) planning application was submitted on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2025. The deadline is 16<sup>th</sup> March. Éamon Doorley said that he would put a</p>	<p>Chair/</p>



