



Ardersier Community Liaison Group

Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: Monday 21st December 2020

Location: Meeting held via video call

Present:

Highland Council

- Cllr Trish Robertson (TR)

Ardersier and Petty Community Council

- Kevin Reid - Chair (KR)
- Christine Wood (CW)
- Janet Scorgie (JS)
- Shane Spence (SS)

Scottish Water (SW)

- Paul Sexton, General Manager – Alliance Management (PS)
- Gavin Steel, Corporate Affairs Manager (GSt)

Apologies:

Graeme Campbell, ESD



Community Liaison Group Objective

'The aim of the community liaison group is to minimise any negative impact and maximise the positive impact on the local community.'

The group will provide feedback and guidance on Scottish Water's programme of engagement and communication with the local community, elected representatives and other stakeholders throughout the construction element of the approved projects. This will facilitate feedback and enable informed debate that will help Scottish Water identify areas of concern, explore solutions, aid communication and progress the projects.'

Minutes

1. Welcome & introductions

KR welcomed members to the meeting.

GSt thanked members for agreeing to attend an extra meeting, especially in the run up to Christmas, to allow Scottish Water to provide an update on work it had been doing since the previous meeting on 25 November.

GSt sought confirmation from members that they would like the meeting to be minuted in the normal way. KR indicated that he thought this would be helpful so there was a record of the discussion.

GSt asked whether members wished to review the draft minutes of the meeting on 25 November now, or whether they would prefer to leave this until the next regular meeting of the CLG on Wednesday 27 January. (The draft minutes had been published already following the agreement via email of all members present.) KR suggested that formal review of the minutes be left until the January meeting and members were in agreement.

2. Scottish Water progress update on planning issue

GSt explained that Scottish Water and ESD had committed to reflect on the clear feedback from members of the CLG at the 25 November meeting and re-assess the options. This had involved significant work by the design team and further engagement with the suppliers of the equipment in question. They had wanted to get as far forward with understanding what might be possible so that CLG members could be given a meaningful update before Christmas – which was why the extra meeting had been proposed.



PS indicated that he wanted to make clear at the outset that Scottish Water accepts full responsibility for the situation that has arisen. He recognised that it had let the community down in this matter.

PS explained that the strength of the feedback at the previous meeting meant that Scottish Water felt it should try to give a further update before Christmas if at all possible. In light of the CLG's feedback, Scottish Water and ESD had been reviewing further technical options to address the structure heights. As he had explained previously, there are no easy options to resolve the situation – but he also recognised that the community feels strongly that compliance with the original planning consent is the only option it can accept.

PS noted that a lot of work had taken place with the suppliers involved over the last 2-3 weeks and he had what he hoped was relatively positive news with respect to the Picket Fence Thickener (PFT) tank structure. The suppliers of the PFT had identified an outline option to lower this structure by over 2 metres so that the maximum height would ordinarily be 9.7 metres AOD, which was the height indicated in the 2016 revision to Scottish Water's original planning consent. An access gantry would still be required, but the fixed base of this would be included in the 9.7m and work was taking place to allow for the handrails to be folded down when not in use for operational access, which was expected to be infrequent. (The handrails would be above the 9.7m height when they were in use.)

PS noted that, while Scottish Water is responsible for the situation that has arisen, it cannot compromise on the safety of its team so there was ongoing work to confirm that a system of work could be put in place to allow this arrangement to be managed safely.

PS added that Scottish Water would also paint the gantry and handrails to match the colour of the tank itself.

PS explained that it was Scottish Water's intention to modify its existing retrospective planning permission application to reflect this change, subject to agreement with the council's planning service.

PS hoped that members of the CLG would feel able to support this option, responding to the aspect of the work which had attracted most attention and had greatest potential visibility from the coastal path and the beach. He invited comment from members.

SS asked if the other structure would also be addressed. PS explained that he would move on to this.

PS continued that Scottish Water and ESD had also explored options to reduce the height of the Inlet Works, which had not yet been installed and is also part of the retrospective planning application. This structure would be



located on the side of the site nearest to the public road and furthest from the vantage points on the coastal path. Individual parts of the inlet works associated with specific pieces of equipment exceed the currently approved planning height and well as part of the handrailing.

PS explained that the height of the Inlet Works is crucial to the way the site has been designed to work under gravity. Scottish Water and ESD had explored the option of lowering it with their design team, but this would necessitate an additional pumping station within the site which would have to operate continuously. This is an additional point of failure on the works and increases the carbon impact of the site's operation over its whole life.

PS acknowledged that the Inlet Works will be visible from the public road, although as much as possible of the existing gorse screening will be retained and some additional tree planting is included in the landscaping plan. This would help over time and there may also be potential to increase the height of the existing bunding either side of the site entrance. The Inlet Works would be less visible from the coastal path and the beach and visualisations would be produced to show this.

PS outlined that, given the significant financial and carbon cost of lowering the inlet works, as well as the operational risk created, Scottish Water and ESD believed that the best available option for this structure was to provide further information to the Planning Committee and seek consent for the increase in height of the tallest parts of this structure; as well as for the third structure included within the application, an electricity substation, which is much lower.

PS noted that Scottish Water would explore whether the visual impact of the higher elements of the Inlet Works can be reduced via planting, alterations to bunding and the painting of the higher parts of the structure and provide visualisations to allow this to be properly understood.

PS recognised that the community may still not agree with the proposed approach outlined, which would not fully resolve the significant mistake that has been made. However, he hoped that substantial changes to the PFT, particularly to improve the appearance of the site from the coastal path, will go some way to reflect that Scottish Water had tried to listen and to go as far as it felt it could.

3. Feedback and discussion

SS thanked PS for his update and the efforts that had been made. He indicated that he thought community members would need to have a discussion amongst themselves, and get feedback from the wider community, before coming back with a response.



KR agreed. He felt what had been presented was quite positive, but part of the development would still be over the currently consented height so the public's feeling on this would need to be gauged.

KR also noted that he would want some assurance that the PFT handrail would be lowered every time that it was used. He noted that it was a metal structure and that there could be a risk in the future of it 'seizing up' and being left upright. He imagined that regular maintenance would be needed to ensure the mechanism involved continued to function properly.

PS indicated that he thought it would be possible to provide reassurance on this point.

SS asked about the timeframe for further discussion and feedback. He anticipated that Scottish Water would be looking for an answer quite quickly, but noted that it could take a bit of time over Christmas to get views back from the community.

GS noted that Scottish Water had been keen to update CLG members as early as possible, hence the timing of the meeting before the holiday period, but did not expect CLG members or others in the community to spend the festive period looking at this. He acknowledged that there was a time factor and that the intent of the planning committee had been for Scottish Water to bring requested information back to a meeting in early February 2021, for which papers would need to be submitted by early to mid January. He explained that the proposed revision to the PFT structure meant that Scottish Water was unlikely to be able to meet this date, including production of updated visualisations. Time was still quite challenging, but he anticipated that Scottish Water would seek agreement from the planners to work towards the planning committee's March meeting instead. If it was possible for community members to feed back as early as possible in January, that would allow progress to be made.

GS also indicated that Scottish Water did not feel this week was the best timing for it to issue a communication beyond the CLG, but it could consider providing an update in its own words in early January if it was felt this would be helpful.

KR noted that the Community Council had a planned meeting on Wednesday 6 January which would allow attendees at that to be engaged. KR noted that he could also try to follow up with residents who had participated in the previous meeting.

KR anticipated that the main area of concern was likely to be the Inlet Works, given this was still proposed to be higher than the current consent, so he was keen to see what people's thoughts were.



PS indicated that he had wanted to find a solution to this, but to date efforts to find a feasible option had not been successful, whereas the work on the PFT had been much more productive. There was understanding of what would have to be done to reduce the height of the Inlet Works, but the consequences were significant both in terms of construction and operation of the site, as he had outlined.

SS sought clarification on whether the site was gravity fed.

PS explained that the process within the WWTW site had been designed to be gravity fed as it was currently proposed. This made good sense for reliable and efficient operation, as well as reduced carbon footprint, but made the relative height of the Inlet Works critical.

SS asked if some form of booster pump could be used to supplement gravity.

PS noted that this was effectively what an 'inter-stage pumping station' would do, but explained that this was not a small piece of equipment to install and operate. However, a further pumping station within the site would be the solution if the site was not able to work under gravity.

GS reiterated that Scottish Water fully recognised its responsibility for getting into the current situation and that it now needed to find a way forward with limited options available. In the case of the Inlet Works, it had not been able to find a way to resolve its commitment to the community by lowering the structure without consequences that would impact on the efficient and smooth operation of the site throughout its lifetime. It acknowledged the structure would have some visual impact, which landscaping would seek to mitigate, as well as the community's legitimate feelings about what had happened in the design process, but felt it had to look for a balanced way forward.

SS asked if it would be possible, without going into technical detail, to have a summary of the consideration of the two options so that they could be compared and contrasted. He was keen to have an idea of what the implications of an additional pumping station be in terms of cost, energy and other considerations.

PS indicated that while precise costings had not been produced, it would be possible to provide some bullet points to expand on this. He noted it involved quite a big excavation, some sheet-piling work, drainage, realignment of the roadway, relocation of the Inlet Works itself, a shaft for the pumping station. It was not an easy job in construction terms and then the operational impacts were additional across the whole life of the site. He that he was still exploring whether any alterations to the structure itself might provide some additional mitigation, but he did not think these would resolve the height issue completely.



Action 1: Scottish Water to provide note outlining its deliberations and decision-making in non-technical terms.

CW asked if a pumping station would create a noise issue as there were people living quite near to the site.

PS thought noise impact would be relatively modest as the pumping station would be predominantly underground. However, he acknowledged that it would need to operate all the time so it was something that would need to be considered if this option was taken further.

TR stated that she was pleased that Scottish Water was now taking the matter seriously, as she would have liked to have seen at an earlier stage. She recognised that something was now being done in response to the community's concerns.

PS acknowledged this and that the situation where remedial action was required should not have arisen.

4. Any other business

SS noted that he walked past the site every day and had just noticed the planting taking place on the top of the bund. While he was not expert in these matters, he was unsure whether trees planted on top of the bund would survive. The location was very exposed to gales and he was keen to double check that Scottish Water had the right advice about this.

PS explained that Graeme had been monitoring the planting and he understood the contract was with a competent landscape contractor, who would have an obligation to ensure the planting established successfully. If the planting wasn't successful, they would be required to return and remedy this.

TR noted that the winter months were the right time of year for this kind of planting to be taking place, but that positioning with regard to the wind was much less certain and time would tell.

GS recognised that it was a challenging and exposed location, as some of the existing trees and vegetation reflected. He thought that the wider planting scheme may seek to give some shelter to the trees, albeit the highest elements would be exposed to the wind. He indicated that he would follow up with colleagues with knowledge of the landscaping and planting scheme.



SS noted that he just wanted to make the observation that it was a very exposed and windy location for trees. Ultimately, he was interested in getting the height required to provide screening.

5. Future meetings

PS wished everyone a safe and happy Christmas.

KR thanked Scottish Water for the update and agreed to feed back after the Community Council's discussion on 6th January.

GS asked if it would be helpful, also picking SS's request in relation to the Inlet Works decision-making, if Scottish Water provided a written note to provide a starting point for the Community Council's discussion.

KR indicated that this would be helpful, particularly if diagrams could be included to show what had been achieved and what hadn't been achieved in terms of the heights of the structures.

(See Action 1 above.)

As previously agreed, the regular meetings of the CLG during 2021 would take place on the dates and times below:

- Wednesday 27th January, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 31st March, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 26th May, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 28th July, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 29th September, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 24th November, 5:30pm

Suitable arrangements and frequency for meetings would be kept under review as the year progressed.