



## **Ardersier Community Liaison Group**

### **Meeting Minutes**

**Date of Meeting:** Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup> January 2021

**Location:** Meeting held via video call

**Present:**

Highland Council

- Cllr Trish Robertson (TR)
- Cllr Glynis Sinclair (GSi)

Ardersier and Petty Community Council

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

Scottish Water (SW)

- Paul Sexton, General Manager – Alliance Management (PS)
- Graeme Campbell – Project Manager, ESD (GC)
- Gavin Steel, Corporate Affairs Manager (GSt)



## 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 apologised that he was having poor network connectivity issues which meant there might be breaks in the audio when he was speaking. He asked members to let him know if this was causing a problem and he or his colleagues would try to fill in any gaps.

### 1. Review of previous minutes and actions

KR noted that there were two sets of previous minutes and actions to be reviewed, starting with the previous regular meeting on 25<sup>th</sup> November.

*Action 1: Scottish Water to confirm in writing the date at which the height of the tank was known and understood to be higher than allowed by the site's planning consent.*

GSt explained that minutes of previous meetings reflected the findings of Scottish Water's initial investigation – that changes to the height had come about through engineering-led decisions. There appeared to have been a misunderstanding in communication about this between the design team and Scottish Water's planning adviser, which resulted in the significance of the height change to the planning consent and the community not being understood. A full investigation was being carried out which would enable the timeline to be confirmed with confidence.

GSi asked if PS was still going to email the information to her separately or if this would have to await Scottish Water's internal review.



PS apologised if he had not been clear on this previously or had missed a commitment. He stressed that Scottish Water wanted to be thorough and ensure that all appropriate learning was picked up. There was an internal, specialised team within Scottish Water which would do this. He noted that the initial finding was that there had been some communication about the height of the structures fairly early in the project, but there had been misunderstanding which meant the significance of the issue was only appreciated much too late.

GSI asked if an external review should be carried out.

PS noted that this had been discussed at a previous meeting. He explained that Scottish Water had an internal audit function that had autonomy to make sure it got to the bottom of issues. He assured GSI it would not be a question of Scottish Water 'marking its own homework'. He suggested that Scottish Water concludes what it is going to do and shares the findings in the first instance.

GSI stressed the importance of understanding how the mistake was made, which she felt was flagrant from the village's perspective and wouldn't have been picked up without the intervention of residents and councillors.

PS indicated that he strongly wished to ensure the root cause of the issue was fully understood as he did not wish to see a repeat of a similar situation anywhere else in the country.

**Action 1:** Scottish Water to share findings of its investigation of the planning non-compliance with CLG once they are available.

*Action 2: Scottish Water to confirm whether a General Arrangement drawing can be shared to reflect potential future phases / additional treatment capacity.*

KR noted this hadn't been shared yet.

PS apologised that this hadn't been circulated. He understood there had been a drawing shared much earlier in the project and this was being reviewed to ensure it remained up-to-date with the final layout of the current project. He committed to ensure this was provided as soon as possible. He noted it was a very high level impression of the footprint of future phases within the site and no more than that.

**Action 2:** Scottish Water to share General Arrangement drawing reflecting potential future phases to provide additional treatment capacity when it is required.



GSi questioned whether Scottish Water could be considering future phases when what is on site already might have to be altered. She could not understand why Scottish Water was going further with more plans.

PS explained that Scottish Water was not going further with any work on future phases. The action had been a response to a request from the community and related to longer term future plans which had been published earlier in the project's development and were expected to be many years ahead, if and when significant further development went ahead within the catchment. He noted that all potential future phases were within the existing boundary of the site and his recollection was that the next phase would be on the site of the existing operational WWTW, which would be decommissioned following completion of the current project.

GSi noted that she hoped any future proposals would be low level.

PS explained that detailed design of future phases had not happened but that the point was noted and was likely to be a key consideration in any future planning applications for the site.

GSi sought confirmation of the extent of Scottish Water's land ownership.

GC explained that he understood Scottish Water's land ownership was relatively limited beyond the existing boundary fence and landscaping. It had been agreed that there would be no future development of the site beyond this. The existing trees to the south of the site and the main landscaping / planting elements now being established would remain in place to screen the current site and any future phases.

*Action 3: Scottish Water and ESD to consider the CLG's feedback on the planning application and provide an update on their proposed next steps.*

KR noted that this had been done via the extra meeting held on 21<sup>st</sup> December.

*Action 4: Scottish Water and ESD to advise CLG members when dates are known for work on the site's power supply.*

GC noted that the date for this work was still not confirmed. Wayleaves had been issued to Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks (SSEN) for comment. Subject to SSEN approval, he thought the date was likely to be in April 2021.



*Action 5: Scottish Water to review whether a meeting in person can take place and on what basis.*

KR noted that it seemed clear this couldn't happen at the present time with the return to lockdown and GSt acknowledged this.

*Action 6: CLG to consider at future meeting whether production of a further newsletter would be helpful following the outcome of the planning process.*

KR noted that this would remain open to be revisited at a later date.

**Action 3: CLG to consider at future meeting whether production of a further newsletter would be helpful following the outcome of the planning process.**

KR noted that draft minutes had been circulated via email previously and agreed by members present.

KR moved on to the draft minutes of the extra meeting which had been held to review progress on 21<sup>st</sup> December 2020.

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

PS noted that this had been done via a note to Ardersier and Petty Community Council ahead of its meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> January, which he understood had also been circulated via the Community Council's facebook page.

TR noted that on the diagrams provided, the Inlet Works was higher than the structure that was the focus of complaints. KR confirmed the feedback from the Community Council's discussion had been relayed to Scottish Water and TR hoped there would be a response to this point.

PS indicated that he would address this in his progress update on the planning issue. GSt apologised that the numerical height of the highest part of the Inlet Works had not been indicated on the elevation used in the note, but this had been clarified by email. He acknowledged the difference was minor, but noted that the highest part of the structure was previously proposed to be slightly lower than the Picket Fence Thickener tank as it was currently built.

KR asked if members who had attended the 21<sup>st</sup> December meeting were content with the minutes and they were approved.



## **2. Scottish Water progress update on planning issue**

PS recapped the positive news that was shared on Monday 21<sup>st</sup> December that Scottish Water had worked with its supplier to identify a way to reduce the structure of the Picket Fence Thickener to the 9.7m AOD height. This would involve some shortening of the structure itself and the use of a folding handrail. There were some ongoing operational checks, but design work was moving on and he was positive that the proposed option would work. He hoped that this was good news.

PS noted that there had been quite a lengthy conversation about the Inlet Works at the same meeting and the difficulty of lowering this – partly because of civil engineering and mechanical changes required, but also because it would prevent the WWTW as a whole operating via gravity. A reasonably significant additional pumping station would then be required with an ongoing impact on the site's operation in terms of risk, cost and carbon emissions.

PS reflected that the Community Council's feedback had been positive about the progress in relation to the Picket Fence Thickener but had expressed disappointment about the position with the Inlet Works. He reflected that work had focused in on the highest part of the Inlet Works which was referred to as the bypass screen.

PS talked members through the elevation of the Inlet Works provided in the update note to the Community Council, highlighting that it is a slightly different type of structure from the PFT, with the highest parts being the screens. These look like steel tubes which stick up above the main structure compared with the PFT which is more solid and uniform in its height.

PS explained that Scottish Water had spent time further exploring opportunities to lower these higher parts of the structure without loss of gravity flow. A gain had been achieved with the supplier by replacing the bypass screen, which had originally been higher, with a unit of similar height to the other screens. This had some implications, but he was content that these could be managed – and this brought the highest parts of the structure close to 11 metres AOD.

PS appreciated this was not the height the community wanted to see, but hoped that members would see the nature of the higher parts was not bulky. Scottish Water had made efforts to find any further improvement, but did not think there was any further opportunity without lowering the structure in its entirety which would have significant adverse consequences.

GSi asked if PS could explain the consequences both of lowering the Inlet Works and of lowering the PFT which she felt was far too high.



PS reiterated that a solution had been identified for the Picket Fence Thickener Tank which would lower it to the 9.7 metres AOD in the original planning consent. This would be done by shortening the tank structure a bit while ensuring that it would still function. The roof of the tank would be made flat and a collapsible handrail used which would only have to be erected a few times a year for maintenance purposes. He noted that the stainless steel gantry would also be painted in the same colour as the tank.

GSi indicated that it would be helpful if the change in height was given as a number.

PS explained that the current height of the PFT was marginally over 12 metres AOD and the proposed revision, with the handrail folded down, would bring it to 9.7 metres AOD which was the height indicated in the planning consent. This was equivalent to 5 metres from ground level at the site.

GSi said that she felt it would be helpful once heights were confirmed if Scottish Water would display the information at the site and in the village so that residents could understand what improvement was being proposed. She thought that people being able to see the reduction in height would help.

PS indicated that Scottish Water had provided the briefing note for the Community Council with this in mind, but would be happy to provide something in the form of posters for display if that would be helpful.

GSi sought the views of other members. TR and KR agreed that something like this would be useful.

JS asked if Scottish Water could engage directly on the Ardersier Community Forum facebook page. She indicated that the page was managed by various residents and was monitored to avoid discussion getting out of hand.

GSi felt that members of the CLG had a huge responsibility and she was not comfortable taking a view without input from the wider community. She wanted to see public consultation rather than just with the CLG and the Community Council.

GSt undertook to have a look at what could be done. He thought the facebook group referred to was a closed one, so Scottish Water didn't see what was posted within it currently. JS thought that access could be given if the right person was approached. GSt noted that it was difficult for Scottish Water to sustain involvement in community facebook groups generally, but it had a facebook page of its own and a range of other options that enabled questions or concerns to be raised with it where residents wished to do so.



JS reflected that she was keen for there to be a route for the community to raise questions directly so that Scottish Water could answer them. GSi said she thought this was what the Planning Committee had been hoping would happen.

KR noted that he had put the Community Council update note up on the Community Council's facebook page and on the Ardersier Community Support page, but he was not a member of the Ardersier Community Forum page so was not aware of what was discussed there.

PS felt that he felt the briefing note gave a fairly good summary of what was proposed.

GSi felt that it was hard for people to understand the information unless they were engineers and that people wanted simpler information, focused on the heights of the structures.

PS noted that the visualisations that were currently being produced would make the height and appearance of the proposed structures easier for people to understand. The production of these took some time and the design revisions had to be developed first so that visualisations could be produced. This was now underway with a company that specialised in this work, but he understood it would take around 3 weeks.

PS also hoped that the visualisations would make it easier for people to appreciate what the Inlet Works was and the nature of the elements that are higher than the solid structure. GC noted that there was an existing Inlet Works at the operational WWTW which was very similar in form.

PS indicated that Scottish Water felt it had gone as far as it could with the effort to modify the design in response to the feedback from the CLG and Community Council.

PS returned to GSi's earlier question about what would need to be done to lower the whole structure of the Inlet Works to the already consented height. This had also been discussed at the December meeting.

Ps explained that the only option to make it lower was to sink the whole structure by excavating an area of ground, redoing the foundations and moving surrounding pipework. This could technically be done, but the key issue was breaking the gravity flow within the works and requiring a pumping station.

GSi felt this reflected how significant the mistake in the design of the project had been in order to put Scottish Water in this position.



PS acknowledged this and that the investigation would identify how this came about. He felt that logical decisions had been taken from an engineering perspective and that making the process work via gravity was the right thing to do in several ways, but the planning and community significance of the change had not been understood as it should have been.

PS explained that the revised designs with visualisations and supporting information were currently what Scottish Water felt would form the basis of an amendment to the planning application which had previously been deferred.

PS indicated that Scottish Water was happy to engage with the community and circulate the draft planning drawings. There was not a great deal more it could do beyond producing the visualisations, which it was doing. He thought the next step was for Scottish Water to submit the revised proposals to the council, which would move the process forward and make the information widely available in a formal way.

GSi raised concern that if there was not community engagement before revisions went forward to planning that the application would fail again. She wanted the community to be consulted before revised drawings went back in to planning.

PS noted that there had been effort via the briefing note to engage the wider community, although there had been some further improvement in the position following the Community Council's feedback. He asked if there had been any other particular feedback from the wider circulation of the note.

KR indicated that there had not really been further feedback via the facebook page.

GSt suggested that Scottish Water could pursue some of the suggestions members had made in parallel with the planning process, so that people could understand what was now proposed as clearly as possible.

GSi reiterated that displaying drawings on the fence around the WWTW and in the village would be helpful.

GSt, PS and GC all agreed that this could be done.

GSi stressed that the heights should be made very clear.

JS asked if a contact would be included so that people could respond to Scottish Water and there could be two way communication.

GSt gave assurance that contact details would be included to ensure people were able to provide feedback. He reflected that it was important to be clear



that residents had the option to feedback to Scottish Water, but could also submit representations to the council via the planning process if they wished.

PS suggested that providing feedback via the planning process might be the best and clearest way for people to make comments.

GSi disagreed and felt that Scottish Water had been asked to consult with the community to the best of its ability. TR agreed that she felt this was the expectation. GSi indicated that the ward members would otherwise feel the consultation had not been thorough enough.

GSt noted that the other factor which had been under consideration was the dates of Planning Committees and timescales for submissions. TR noted that it wouldn't be considered by the February committee which was a week away. GSt agreed and said that he understood there were further meetings in early March and late April.

GSi indicated that she did not think the March meeting would be feasible as there was too much to do.

GSt noted that Scottish Water had thus far been trying to work towards the March date, recognising that the original minute had asked it to target February - but it had become clear this would not allow sufficient time. He thought that Scottish Water could consider whether April was appropriate and noted that an extra meeting of the CLG may be needed

TR thought that if plans could be displayed in the next week, an effort could be made to get people to respond as soon as possible. This could give clarity on whether March or April was more realistic.

PS explained that he understood the timescale was more constrained as the planners required time to review the submissions and time also had to be allowed for the advertising process that the council carried out over a couple of weeks.

PS committed that Scottish Water would give this consideration and aim to get drawings displayed quickly.

JS noted from a practical perspective that the coastal path and routes past the site were likely to be very slippery currently as they were not gritted, so it would be important for information also to be displayed in the village.

GSt acknowledged this and said the information could certainly be made available in the village too – but it might be possible to use larger format at the site and perhaps A4 posters in the village.



CW said she thought there were noticeboards at the War Memorial Hall, the Boatshed and the dolphins, but the PACE Café was currently closed. KR felt that towards the shop may be best. CW said it was important for information to be displayed outside as people should not be encouraged to go into buildings under the current circumstances.

**Action 4: Scottish Water to arrange for information on the design changes in response to the planning issue to be displayed at the site and in the village as quickly as possible, with opportunity for residents to feed back.**

### **3. Scottish Water progress update on planning issue**

GC explained that the main work on site over the last 4 to 5 weeks had been the electrical team carrying out cable pulling. This was expected to continue until around the end of February.

GC noted that significant planting had been carried out on and around the bund on the seaward side of the site and the side nearest the football pitches. Planting had not yet happened from the roadside into the works, where the site's temporary compound was still set up. Plants for that area had been trenched and would be transplanted once the compound was removed.

GC noted there was still some planting to be done, but hoped members would notice a fair difference. The plants had been supplied by Munro's Nursery in the Black Isle.

Most other work that could currently take place was complete apart from final cables and wiring.

### **4. Feedback and discussion**

GSI raised concern about the explosion that had taken place at Avonmouth. There had been discussion at the November meeting about the bund, which she had understood was there to hide the plant from view, but she now wondered if it was required because of explosion risk. She asked for confirmation of what chemicals are stored on site and for more information about the bund.

GC explained that no chemicals would be used in the treatment process. The original plant designed around 2009 or 2010 had included a sludge thickening building. This was the element that had been removed and replaced by the Picket Fence Thickener in the course of the design's development. The originally proposed building would have included a poly-dosing unit, which would have used a polymer – a non-toxic product which was used as a



coagulant. The Picket Fence Thickener option had provided a non-chemical alternative process. In this instance, the bunds and the planting were purely for landscape and visual reasons, as required by the planning consent.

GC added that there was a process to review and identify any potential conflict arising from gases and electrical equipment. The only areas of potential risk within the site at Ardersier were the Picket Fence Thickener and the sludge holding tank. These were vented with an odour control system to allow gases to be diffused after odour extraction.

PS noted that the tragedy at Avonmouth had been felt across the water industry. He explained that Avonmouth was a digestion facility where methane was made for use to generate heat and power. This process would not take place at Ardersier, where sludge would only be thickened and stored for transport to a different site.

PS recognised that bunding could sometimes be required for different purposes, but in the case of Ardersier its only purpose was to provide visual screening.

GSI indicated that a resident had raised concerns about the site's Odour Management Plan and requested an update.

GC noted that an Odour Management Plan had been required as a planning condition and was in place. This would be monitored by The Highland Council's Environmental Health Service.

GSI indicated that she had spoken to Environmental Health officials and believed that an updated Odour Management Plan was required as soon as possible.

PS explained that most Waste Water Treatment Works have Odour Management Plans and working with these was normal practice for Scottish Water. PS noted that the removal of the sludge presses from the design, while had been part of the design change linked with the planning error, was positive in removing a potential cause of odour nuisance as well as reflecting an option that was better for the environment more broadly by avoiding use of chemicals.

TR noted that any activity at all at the site was resulting in a great deal of correspondence on facebook. She added that there had been a report recently of two larger than normal tankers being escorted through the village. She was aware that escorted traffic was supposed to come via the C1005.

GC sought clarification. He explained that Scottish Water operated the tankers and these were not escorted. JS added that she saw the escort



vehicles passing through the village regularly, but did not think they were escorting the tankers. She noted that she had seen double tankers recently.

GC thought any escort vehicles seen accompanying tankers through the village were likely to have been a coincidence. He confirmed that Scottish Water did use tow-along tankers at times and thought this depended on capacity and the other sites they had been visiting.

TR stressed that anything that appeared out of the ordinary is being picked up on and being regarded negatively.

GC noted that there may not be much more construction HGV attendance now, so the escort system was likely to be used infrequently.

JS indicated that someone had asked recently if Scottish Water had bought the MoD playing fields. She thought this was possibly just a rumour. TR did not think the playing fields were for sale.

GC indicated that there was no intention by Scottish Water to purchase or develop upon the playing fields.

## **5. Future meetings**

KR asked for confirmation of the next meeting.

GSt confirmed the next scheduled meeting was planned for Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> March at 5:30pm. He noted that an additional meeting could be considered, but there could be communication by email to agree whether this was required.

Remaining scheduled meetings for 2021 were:

- Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> March, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> May, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> July, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 29<sup>th</sup> September, 5:30pm
- Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> November, 5:30pm

KR noted that if Scottish Water could provide information to be displayed, members of the CLG would be happy to help circulate it online and invite feedback. GSt welcomed this and indicated that he would take up the offer.