

Scottish Water Gairloch Stakeholder Group

Meeting Minutes

Date of Meeting: Tuesday 10 December 2019, 6pm

Location: Celt Room, Gairloch Community Hall

Present:

Gairloch Community Representatives	Karen Buchanan (KB) Alex Gray (AG) John Port (JP)
Scottish Water	Kevin Clifton (KC) Gavin Steel (GS)

Apologies:

Paul Griffiths (SEPA), Alan Thomson, Iain Jones, James Wiseman (Scottish Water)

Minutes

1. Welcome

Gavin Steel welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked them for attending on a stormy December evening. The apologies received were noted.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 4th September 2019

GS noted that the minutes of the previous meeting had been circulated by email and asked if there were any comments or amendments. The members present indicated they were content with the minutes.

3. Matters arising

John Port noted the discussion at the previous meeting about sampling at Sand Beach and concern that the sampling point being used was located some distance from the river and from the houses at Big Sand.

GS explained that he had understood from Paul Griffiths' explanation at the previous meeting that, while the bathing water sampling point was used to assess the designated bathing water on a consistent basis, SEPA had also been sampling nearer to the Sand River and more recently also from closer to the Youth Hostel to check for any variation there.

Higher bacteria levels had been identified from the watercourse this year than previously and this was being followed up further by SEPA to investigate the origin. GS understood that SEPA would carry out a DNA-based follow-up test to identify whether the source of any issue was human or animal. This could guide follow-up investigation if required. PG had advised at the previous meeting that there was a backlog of work at SEPA's laboratory, but GS said he would request an update either via email or at the next meeting.

Alex Gray asked what steps could be taken if water quality was being influenced by diffuse / animal sources. GS indicated that he was aware there was work SEPA had carried out in some catchments, including the River Nairn, to investigate current practice and promote best practice with farmers and land managers. KC noted that he thought this kind of work would generally be prioritised dependent on the severity of the problem and risk to bathing waters or other designations, rather than being undertaken routinely.

Action 1: GS to contact Paul Griffiths to request an update on the additional monitoring carried out of the Sand River.

4. SEPA Update

GS indicated that Paul Griffiths had confirmed via email that arrangements were in place for microbiology sampling to continue over this coming winter.

PG had advised that there was little to add to his September update. The 2019 bathing water classifications, which give beaches their status for 2020, remain in draft and have yet to be signed off by Scottish Government and the EU. PG remained confident across the final set of results that both Gairloch beaches were set to maintain their Excellent classification.

Questions

There were no questions, other than the issue raised under Matters Arising above.

5. Scottish Water Project Update

GS gave apologies that no member of the project team had been able to attend the meeting and circulated some photos that had been supplied showing the site after the completion of back-filling around the new equipment. There were also photos showing the outfall installation taking place in good weather conditions and favourable tides at the end of October.

The project manager James Wiseman had advised that the outfall extension had gone smoothly, with no unforeseen difficulties or downtime due to weather.

As had been confirmed by email before the meeting, the new treatment process had been scheduled to be made operational on the day of the meeting (10 December 2019). GS advised that he had not received an update from the site before the meeting, but that he would circulate confirmation of the situation via email as soon as possible.

It was expected that some further work would take place after the holidays, including decommissioning of the membrane plant and reinstatement work around the site. There was also work to reinstate the temporary access to the foreshore which had been used for the outfall extension.

Action 2: GS to provide email update to stakeholder group members on the scheduled work to put the new treatment process into operation.

Questions

Alex Gray asked how deep the end of the extended outfall was below the sea surface, noting that he understood this would vary with the tide.

KC indicated that he would need to check and confirm, but his best recollection was that it might be 1.9 metres below Mean Low Water Springs.

Action 3: Scottish Water to confirm depth of extended WWTW outfall.

AG asked if the tanks were pre-filled with water before turn of flows took place.

KC explained that there had been a phase of wet commissioning before turn of flows when final effluent from the existing WWTW had been run through the new treatment process. The tanks would therefore not be empty as they started to receive untreated flows from the Gairloch network.

AG asked if the pumping station at Lonemore was switched off during the change over and whether this had potential to cause spills.

KC confirmed that there is a SEPA process to allow this kind of work to take place and that flows would not be pumped forward to the WWTW from Lonemore while the work to divert flows was carried out. The weather conditions meant that there were high flows in the network, but also that the waste water would be very dilute. The storm tanks at Lonemore would fill up and spill if they reached their full capacity, with pumping to the WWTW being resumed as soon as it was safe to do so.

AG asked about the collars shown in the photographs on pipework between the septic tanks, disk filer and UV chambers and their purpose.

KC explained that the pipes are lagged and that the large collars are joints in the lagging rather than in the pipework itself.

AG asked about the timescale for decommissioning of the membrane plant.

KC indicated that he was unsure, but did not expect it to take longer than a month or two. Some of the components would be retained by Scottish Water for possible re-use at membrane plants that currently remain operational such as Cromarty.

AG asked whether decommissioning released space within the building.

KC did not think so to any significant degree, with the layout of the useful space within the building remaining largely unchanged. The membranes themselves would be taken away and disposed of as they were towards the end of the operational lifespan. The tanks would be cleaned and filled in to remove a future hazard.

AG asked if the operation and intensity of the UV would be flow dependent.

KC explained that the flow through the UV was expected to be constant at 8 litres per second whenever Lonemore pumping station operates. The UV lamps would operate whenever there was a flow, but not when Lonemore was not pumping and there was therefore no effluent to disinfect.

6. Communication review

GS reflected that members had been continuing to keep Gairloch Community Council updated about the Group's work, but he thought (and AG confirmed) the final Community Council meeting of 2019 had recently taken place.

GS explained that Scottish Water would normally issue a postcard to customers at the conclusion of a significant construction project and would propose to do this early in the new year, including a reminder about the 2 year pilot period for the new treatment process. Other communications would be issued to media and stakeholders around the same time.

Karen Buchanan asked if Scottish Water would be seeking to issue communications widely and highlight the novel aspect of the treatment process now in place for Gairloch.

GS explained that he thought at this stage the intention of communication would be primarily to update local stakeholders and media outlets who had taken an interest in the story, also noting that the pilot period was beginning and that work with the stakeholder group would be continuing.

AG noted that the last 2019 edition of the Gairloch and District Times had also recently come out and there was then a longer than usual gap over the holiday period. Two Lochs Radio had broadcast a brief update based upon the information provided by email the previous week.

Members were content that Scottish Water proceed with wider communications in the new year and asked that these be shared with the group as in previous cases.

Action 4: Scottish Water to prepare postcard and other communications for distribution once turn of flows and final commissioning were complete.

7. Any other business

KC noted that Openreach had been working on the new telecoms system for Pumping Stations on the Gairloch network, with a mixture of phoneline and mobile phone being used. The previous radio system would no longer be used as it was old technology and increasingly difficult to maintain.

KC also confirmed that repairs had been completed at the pier and that indications to date were that this had stemmed ingress of saline at this location. There was still a lot of saline entering the system at high tides and further investigation was scheduled for Monday (16 Dec) with a possible area of focus being the Glebe area. KC noted that there had been foaming at the WWTW resulting from the saline.

AG asked what impact saline would have on the new treatment process.

KC explained the new treatment process is much more resilient to saline, but it remained important for Scottish Water to keep on top of this in order to manage the network effectively and keep long term operational costs sustainable.

8. Date of next meeting

After discussion it was agreed that the next meeting should be provisionally scheduled for **Wednesday 22nd April at 7pm**. KB noted that the new museum now has a meeting room and it was agreed to hold the next meeting there.

Members noted that it was important for SEPA to be able to attend the next meeting and asked that the date be reconsidered if 22nd April was not suitable for a SEPA representative.

Action 5: Scottish Water to confirm suitability of 22nd April for the Group's first meeting in 2020.