

Chairman's Report 2025/26 **31st May 2026**

As I reported last year being an elected Community Councillor today in the rural West Highlands is not easy. Increasingly our Volunteers are being asked to contribute to more consultations from Local and Central Government, and our workload is increasing year on year but our grant from Highland Council remains the same at £605 per annum. Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry are extremely fortunate to have nine committed and dedicated Volunteers and an associate member who give of their time, knowledge, experience and skills to ensure their fellow residents have a voice on many of the problems and issues that beset our lives locally. I praise each and every one, for their endeavour and commitment over what has been an extremely stressful year.

Endeavouring to seek explanations and solutions to issues affecting our residents are often stuck in the overly bureaucratic local or national government process. So we regularly experience frustration and impatience when our correspondence is subject to interminable delay for no seemingly plausible reason. Irrespective of who the recipient is it is not unusual for us to have to send one or two or even more reminders to secure a reply and that inevitably impacts on our ability to secure a positive result.

Both SSE Renewables and Gilkes Energy the developers of the two consented Pumped Storage Schemes Coire Glas and EARBA are in active negotiations with OFGEM regarding Cap and Floor Payments for the electricity generated. We have attended and regularly contributed to each quarterly meeting of both the Coire Glas Liaison Group and EARBA Community Alliance. Both have agreed to pay Community Benefit if the construction goes ahead although no amount has been agreed. Mucomir Power Station will need to undergo significant upgrade and a planning application will be published in late 2026.

Our neighbouring Community Council Glengarry and ourselves are unhappy with SSE Renewables endeavouring to persuade Highland Council Planners to amend or vary the consent conditions using delegated powers. Given many of the conditions were approved by Scottish Ministers at the request of the very same Planners it seems strange and we will continue to campaign against such procedures.
FEARNA a joint SSE Renewables and Gilkes Energy venture failed to get Highland Council approval following both Glengarry and ourselves objecting so we await Energy Consents next move.

Living as we do in some of Scotland's most beautiful scenery and wild land, and in the iconic Parallel Roads of Lochaber brings us certain responsibilities to ensure that this national asset is not damaged or over exploited. At the same time there is a perceived need to host an increasing number of tourists visiting the area so a careful balance is required when considering our response to Planning Applications. We get 14

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days following publication of an application to consider it, visit the site, flag it up if necessary, consult with Community Council, research the Local Development Plan, National Planning Framework 4 and other Planning Documents, prepare a written submission, circulate it for approval then submit it if approved. The Developer invariably employs a professional has access to pre planning advice from the Council, submits application and any subsequent amendments without time restraints. Is able to respond to any comments and more often that not is successful. If not it will go to the South Planning Committee, then to either the Planning Review Committee or the DPEA, and ultimately the Court of Session.

Planning is undoubtedly a Developer's Charter, and even on the rare occasion when unauthorised works are detected the Planners endeavour to resolve with minimal punitive action. A more robust response may have persuaded repeat perpetrators to refrain from such action but we have been involved in an increasing number of enforcement cases which are time consuming and stressful as the appeal process slowly grinds away.

This year I have waded through literally a mountain of reports, attended public information days, seminars and webinars, liaised with neighbouring community councillors, researched the various planning legislation, read 1,627 emails and replied to 669 in writing and countless more by telephone. Where necessary canvassed local opinion, travelled 860 miles on Community Council business and attended numerous online meetings.

We have achieved some success with resurfacing of both trunk roads and those adopted by Highland Council. Planning objections by us have invariably been upheld, and some Agencies do appreciate our input and amend their actions accordingly. We have also allocated £3100 to 8 recipients from the Stronelairg Windfarm Micro Grants.

Our community clearly maintains its confidence in our ability to get things done as the attendance at our meetings has increased as has the range of topics discussed and actioned. We don't do going away and some not all are beginning to realize that and listening to what we have to say. Whether we can persuade more to actively listen and co-operate may take longer but we are patient.

I am most grateful for the Spean Bridge Roy Bridge and Achnacarry SCIO for their support and publishing our Minutes on their Website together with any articles of local importance. Similarly to our many contributors including the community police officer who keep us informed about topics that affect us all. My thanks to our Highland Councillors particularly Councillors Grafton and Cameron who both endeavour to attend most meetings, and the Community Council Support Staff for their assistance and help. Kate Forbes MSP and Angus MacDonald MP have also assisted us during the year and their help and advice has been invaluable. We wish Kate Forbes all the best for the future. I would also like to thank Rik Eppens and Killiechonate Woodlands for the generous financial support to allow more outward engagement.

Given our past experience the coming year will bring its own challenges for us to tackle, but I am confident that we have the skills, knowledge and experience available to resolve most matters if only we can persuade the decision makers to listen and act.

John Fotheringham
Chairman
Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council

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