

Minutes of Community meeting with SSEN and Murphy Group

Tuesday, 19thnd August 2025

At Brora Community Centre

Present: Becky Clay BC (Chair), Gina Stewart GS (Secretary), Peter Fassen de Heer PFDH (Treasurer), Russell Rekhy RR, Dawn DeHavilland DDH (Minute Secretary)

SSEN & Murphy Group: Martin Goodwin MG (SSEN Community Liaison Manager), Sandy Cameron SC (SSEN Senior Project Manager), Kate Melling KM (Murphy Group Overhead Line Manager), David Ellis DE (SSEN Trainee Project Manager)

Also Attending: 44 members of public (Approximately)

Apologies: David Andrews DA (Vice Chair), Robbie MacLennan RM, Ruwan Uduwera-Perera RUP & Richard Gale RC (Highland Councillor)

Welcome: The Chair welcomed SSEN, Murphy Group & community members to the meeting.

Becky BC passed over to Peter PFDH who thanked everyone for attending & advised this was an opportunity to ask questions of SSEN & The Murphy Group, regarding what is happening now & moving forward, understanding is a crucial first step.

Martin MG SSEN told the group he has been working in the area for several years & is keen to have clear channels of communication, being the community liaison officer, he will supply his direct email & a generic email to enable community members to contact him.

Kate Melling KM Murphy Group told the group she is overhead line manager working on the geotechnical investigation (GI)

David Ellis DE SSEN Trainee Project Manager will take questions about current GI works.

Sandy Cameron SC SSEN Senior Project Manager been in post for two months working with Kate on the GI.

Regarding questions from the public Martin advised due to the submission of the Section 37 application to the Scottish Government's Energy Consents Unit (ECU), he would not be able to comment on alignment, technology or track, in due course statutory notices will be published in both national & local papers.

Alongside the statutory notifications, the Section 37 application will be available on the ECU Website. No dates as to when this will happen at present.

Peter PFDH advised if anyone was unsure about whether a question could be asked to ask anyway & SSEN & or Murphy Group will advise what category the enquiry belongs to.

From the Floor: What is the new line needed for, as all energy being produced at present is being transmitted?

Response: Martin MG SSEN Windfarms in Orkney & Caithness are presently driving the need to utilise their capacity, in addition more capacity will be required in the future.

From the Floor: Where does Peterhead fit into the scheme & why can't the line be submersed?

Response: Martin MG SSEN Extensive studies confirmed the need for a new 400kV connection between Beaulieu and Peterhead to meet the Pathway 2030 targets. Submersibles are not being used because of existing substations, the complexities of onshore wind farms primarily utilizing alternating current (AC) for electricity transmission, while offshore wind farms often employ high-voltage direct current (HVDC) for long-distance transmission. Offshore in addition needs convertor stations. Pathway 2030 national systems operator both on & offshore solutions for Beaulieu to Peterhead 400kV connection.

From the Floor: Doll resident, can the route that will be used to transfer the infrastructure & aggregate etc be confirmed? Doll is not at all suitable for the type of vehicles that will be required. Will the planning application show the specific route through Doll?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group the specifics will be covered in the planning application & if there are constraints imposed by the Highland Council these will be adhered to. The route will be from the A9 through Doll, the actual route was not known by Kate KM.

Sandy Cameron SC SSEN showed some members of the community a map of the area, upon inspection residents of Doll noted the map was out of date & not fit for purpose. Sandy SC confirmed the route would be the first exit on the A9 when travelling north.

From the Floor: How are the residents of Doll going to be protected i.e. their utility services & properties? Are SSEN & The Murphy Group aware that roads through Doll are only three meters wide with no pavements & multiple blind bends, residents walking from young children to the elderly along with the infirm? It will become a very dangerous road.

Response: Martin MG SSEN when planning has been submitted these are all issues that can be lodged with the Highland Council.

From the Floor: What size & how many vehicles are expected to travel through Doll?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group at present this is not known, it will be dependent upon the constraints imposed by the Highland Council.

From the Floor: Regarding the Murphy compound next to the recycling centre, what is the space used for? Why are there two canteens?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group the canteens are welfare units where employees working with GI can take tea & comfort breaks, they are not permanent structures.

From the Floor: How many employees are based at the compound?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group at present forty, however this is not full time as it depends upon the requirements of GI work on any given day.

From the Floor: Why was the planning application put in retrospectively? This left the community feeling very let down as they have been promised transparency during this process.

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group it was due to the nature of the area being used on a temporary basis as all the structures on the site can be towed away at the end of the project.

From the Floor: The site entrance is extremely busy & noisy seven days a week with heavy vehicles, obviously living close to a recycling centre residents are used to a certain amount of traffic & noise, however it has now become unbearable, no checks have been made with the residents as to what their views are. What will happen regarding property prices because of the dreadful impact of the compound? Residents feel they are being given zero consideration. When will they be moving out?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group GI will be finished at the compound at the end of the spring 2026.

From Diana Royce: Why does the planning application which is full of errors state an end date of October 2026?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group the timeline has been reassessed since planning and brought forward.

From the Floor: What will happen to the site at the end of the project?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group the site will be left as it is.

From the Floor: Regarding Achrimsdale not all of the residents received notification about the commencement of the works in the immediate vicinity, the very narrow lane is now subject to low loaders, heavy machinery, 4X4 vehicles & vans from a myriad of different companies, this starts as early as 6.30 a.m. & 7 a.m. on Sundays, a resident called the telephone number on the letter and was connected to SSEN in Plymouth whose staff had no understanding of the Highlands & crofting, no contact back was made as promised, still waiting for contact from Martin Goodwin. On July 29th a transport vehicle carrying huge machinery parked in the very narrow lane, mats were placed on the lane surface when the driver was questioned residents were told it was to protect the surface from damage, residents advised the lane was too narrow for the machinery to be offloaded, after several attempts the driver agreed & left. Residents have not had any community engagement, more than once walls & property have been damaged.

Response: Martin MG SSEN asked for a private meeting with the affected residents & apologised for the lack of communication.

From the Floor: Emails have been sent to Martin Goodwin but returned stating email not recognised, the emails have photographs showing residents cars being blocked in by SSEN / contractor vehicles.

Response: Martin MG SSEN will investigate this & speak to individual residents following the meeting.

From the Floor: Was a risk assessment carried out before delivery?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group the Achrimsdale road was chosen as it is the most suitable route for construction and operational traffic accessing the site, apologies that steps in the process were missed.

From the Floor: Why didn't anyone speak to the residents?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group that is normal practice, unfortunately it was not carried out in Achrimsdale, this is something separate from the planning as it's for the GI work.

From the Floor: Where is the 80 meter crane going to be located?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group it will depend on the area, at this time no details are available.

From the Floor: Can the risk assessment be shared with residents?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group risk assessments are shared with employees & contractors, they cannot be shared with the residents at this time.

Response: David Ellis DE SSEN onsite & individual reminders are given to employees & contractors moving forward these will be carried out on a more regular basis.

From the Floor: Traffic is now increased along East Clyne, it was felt this is due to the GI staff using it as a short cut as no residents have been informed this is an official route.

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group this will be investigated as Kate KM is not aware this is happening.

From the Floor: When can the public raise objections?

Response: Martin MG SSEN Section 37 application has been submitted for determination by the ECU there will be an opportunity to make formal representations via the ECU online portal, as well as by email and post.

From the Floor: Carol Rock is an area of natural beauty, used by locals & visitors, why is it not possible to underground the cable?

Response: Martin MG SSEN a DC converter substation would need to be installed, the terrain is complex with technical difficulties & the cost.

From the Floor: Various examples were given of areas with similar or more challenging terrain where underground cables have been used successfully, such as Wales, Skye & the Cairngorms.

Response: Martin MG SSEN advised representations should be made to the ECU, Jamie Stone has already received information from residents in the area.

From the Floor: A local resident using props such a cycling helmet, this is a beautiful crofting area, the roads are used by walkers, horse riders, cyclists, tricycles even skiing when the weather allows. Whilst out cycling a resident who has hearing issues & heart complications & his wife has multiple sclerosis on the road near to Balancoil a Murphy vehicle came around the bend causing distress to the cyclists, it was felt that the driver rather than dealing with the matter in a courteous way caused harm by sounding his horn & which had the effect of one of the cyclists falling into a ditch. The panel were asked if they could recite rule 163 of the Highway Code?

Response: Sandy SC SSEN a cyclist himself did not know the specifics, David DE SSEN did not, Kate KM Murphy Group did not & Martin MG SSEN believed it was overtaking. Becky BC (Chair) passed photographs from the resident to the panel and some of the residents (See Appendix 1)

From the Floor: The resident advised the code states "give motorcyclists, cyclists and horse riders and horse drawn vehicles at least as much room as you would when overtaking a car & to leave at least 1.5 metres when overtaking cyclists at speeds of up to 30mph, and give them more space when overtaking at higher speeds. What is going to be done to ensure it doesn't happen again?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group vehicles do have sensors to alert proximity, however she does not know of a system that would produce rapid braking. Kate KM will ensure ongoing training will be given to drivers.

From the Floor: Thanks was given to SSEN & The Murphy Group for attending given the passionate feelings of residents. Going forward it is hoped to develop a good working relationship with The Murphy Group & a Village Charter can be produced, it is paramount to have effective channels of communication with residents & BCC. Are there plans to purchase land in the Backies Golspie?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group no plans to purchase land, when land is required, it is leased rather than purchased.

From the Floor: Worker's accommodation what is happening.

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group no details yet, this will be looked at in the next twelve months.

From the Floor: How many vehicles a day will be travelling through Doll?

Response: Kate KM Murphy Group no details yet it will depend upon the planning constraints, GI & Pylon size.

From the Floor: What is the process for residents near Carol Rock with private water supplies?

Response: David DE SSEN A risk assessment has been undertaken to identify private water supplies which have the potential to be affected by the works & protection measures will be implemented as required when construction work begins.

From the Floor: Diana DR Felt the project was not off to a good start. Loch Dubh has been drained of half of its water & it is not filling back up, SSEN have not supervised the project effectively, putting in retrospective planning is bad form.

Response: Martin MG SSEN expressed disappointment on the errors that have happened. David DE SSEN the Loch has proved challenging due to unexpected weather conditions, all efforts will be made to restore the Loch area will be made when the work has been completed.

Closing: Becky BC (Chair) called the meeting to a close due to time constraints. Beck BC (Chair) thanked SSEN & The Murphy Group for attending.

Follow on meeting Monthly BBC Business