

Contin Community Council Meeting

Date: 04 August 2026

Attendees

Name	Role / organisation, where noted
John Heathcote	Chair and Secretary, Contin Community Council
Andrew Higgins	SSEN Transmission – Snr PM
John Douglas	SSEN Transmission – Lead PM
Lucy Ibison	SSEN Transmission – Community Liaison Manager – Minute taker
Kevin Morrison	SSEN Transmission – Community Liaison Manager
Niall MacLeod	SSEN Transmission – Project Director
Greg Clarke	SSEN Transmission - Head of Corporate Affairs
Jimmie Ruggles-Brise	Community Council Member
Simon Bates	Jamestown resident and Treasurer of Community Council
Averil Milligan	Chair of Ben Wyvis Cycle group and part of the Strathpeffer Residents Association

1. Welcome and introductions

Attendees introduced themselves and the purpose of the meeting was noted as an opportunity to discuss the Western Isles HVDC Mainland Cable works in the Contin area, including the route change, forestry impacts, public access, Kinellan compound works, traffic management and future engagement with Contin Community Council.

2. Route change and background context

John Heathcote noted that the route change had only been identified to the Community Council at the meeting in December 2025.

Niall MacLeod explained that the original conceptual design had progressed through several stages of internal and external governance. While the original route worked on paper, it was not considered workable in practice once statutory requirements, public

safety, construction needs, landowner constraints and traffic impacts on the A835 were assessed. He explained that modelling of delays on the A835 did not support the original approach, so the decision was taken to move the route off-road and around the back of Contin.

It was noted that the A835 is an unavoidable part of the NC500 route and access to the northwest Highlands generally, but that it is considered unsafe for cycling currently because of its below-standard width for a trunk road, lack of verges, and a number of blind summits and bends. It was also noted that the usual Land's End to John O'Groats route goes through Evanton.

The Community Council advised that local priorities, including Moy Bridge and issues around Kinellan, should be considered as the project develops.

SSEN Transmission confirmed that the first section of works covers 38km from Fanellan to Inchbae, with six teams working across this section. John Heathcote requested a level one outline programme to give the Community Council and local communities better visibility of what to expect in each area. Niall MacLeod confirmed that this could be provided, while noting that the detail between key milestones remains more fluid.

3. SSEN's approach to minimising impacts on forestry

Niall MacLeod explained that a 40m swathe would normally be required, but this has been reduced to 30m and 25m where possible. A 40m swathe is still required in some areas, but the project has reduced the corridor wherever feasible. He noted that RTS and the internal project team have been working with Forestry and Land Scotland.

It was noted that discussions with Forestry and Land Scotland had resulted in an approximate 39% reduction in felling requirements. The project confirmed that required permits, licences, approvals and justifications are being managed as part of the works.

Greg Clarke explained that compensatory planting means that, where trees are felled, the project looks to replant with native species where possible, although this can depend on landowner circumstances. Niall MacLeod advised that the project has a commitment to deliver at least 10% biodiversity net gain and seeks to avoid ancient woodland where possible. He noted that this can influence movements in the cable route to avoid forestry or areas of specific significance.

Niall MacLeod noted that the project is working towards being able to transport power in early 2030.

A question was raised about whether other SSEN Transmission projects in the area could affect the wider programme. It was noted that some projects remain subject to consent or recommendation processes. SSEN Transmission advised that, where projects receive the necessary consents and are able to progress, project teams will work together to coordinate activity and avoid working in isolation.

4. Public access through the forest during WI HVDC Mainland Cable works

Andrew Higgins advised that he has been working with Phil Wait on core paths. Core path management plans have been developed to show how access to the forest and amenities will be managed. Where works may cross a core path, appropriate management measures will be put in place.

Avril Milligan asked whether a copy of the plan for maintaining access could be provided. It was agreed that a summary of the plan would be shared with the Community Council.

John Heathcote raised concern that a number of decisions appeared to have progressed without earlier input from the Community Council. Niall MacLeod explained that the project has been liaising with statutory bodies, while recognising that there may be an opportunity to better involve the Community Council as the project progresses.

The wider communications approach was discussed, including the Community Liaison Group, project updates and previous consultation events in 2025. John Heathcote noted that the June meeting was the first time Contin Community Council became aware that the project was coming to them. Greg Clarke explained that updates are available on the project website and are shared with the Community Council and confirmed that SSEN Transmission remains open to feedback on its approach.

John Heathcote asked whether there are plans showing the detailed route and how access barriers will be managed. Andrew Higgins explained that this is captured in the access management plan. Niall MacLeod said SSEN Transmission would pull together a small pack covering the key agreements with Phil Wait, and John Heathcote asked whether this could be provided digitally.

The forest track from Contin to Garve was discussed as a possible alternative route, but the Community Council noted that it has limited suitability for cycling because of the poor condition of some sections. It was noted that WWCT had been involved in a previous attempt to upgrade the track, but this did not proceed because WWCT's specification for an all-ability track was deemed by Forestry and Land Scotland to be inconsistent with use of the track as a haul road.

Post-meeting note: *Following the meeting, it was clarified that the organisation leading this work is the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust (WWCT). While The Highland Council is involved, WWCT is the lead organisation. Any funding discussed relates to support for work being led by WWCT to explore cycle route options.*

John Heathcote noted that parts of the existing track could potentially support cycle access, but other sections would need improvement. Niall MacLeod explained that the project needs to understand the required specification, what is possible and what cannot be delivered before any decisions can be made.

John Douglas noted that, near the railway crossing, leaving the haul road in place could be an option, but this would need to be fully assessed. Niall MacLeod said the project needs to understand whether the road standard required for project use could also support a possible legacy outcome.

Kevin Morrison said SSEN Transmission will link in with relevant local groups. Niall MacLeod advised that the project team will prepare terms of reference for the project manager role to clarify what is being asked of the role and which stakeholders need to be considered.

5. Kinellan compound works and traffic management through Contin

Simon Bates said he had not seen the latest plans for the compound and that further detail would be helpful, as the information currently available showed only a box on a map. Niall MacLeod explained that the compound has reduced in size and is now less than two hectares. Cable drums are being stored at Invergordon, which has reduced the amount of space required on site.

Andrew Higgins and Niall MacLeod advised that there is not yet a full plan showing where the offices will be located, but confirmed that an image or overview of the compound and access arrangements can be shared when available. Kevin Morrison noted that information is also shared on the project website.

SSEN Transmission noted that there will be no construction traffic coming through Strathpeffer or Jamestown. Simon Bates asked whether this would result in a significant amount of traffic coming through Muir of Ord, and John Douglas confirmed the route through Muir of Ord.

Simon Bates noted that his view is directly across to where the compound entrance is located. He also said he had expected more works to be taking place during the previous two weeks. Niall MacLeod explained that the Forestry and Land Scotland licence for installation of the access track was due to be issued on Wednesday.

John Heathcote noted that the Community Council had not seen planning for the access route. It was confirmed that existing access would be used for this compound. SSEN Transmission advised that the works form part of the wider project plan, with the business seeking to reduce impacts where possible.

Simon Bates asked whether a planning application was required for the compound. Niall MacLeod confirmed that it was not. Simon Bates also asked whether there would be any further tree removal. Andrew Higgins said that nothing is planned at this time, but this will continue to be reviewed. Niall MacLeod confirmed that no further felling is currently due in that area for the compound.

Andrew Higgins explained that a soft start is planned, including grass cutting and setting out, with more activity expected to become visible over the next few weeks. Niall MacLeod advised that works are expected to continue for six to eight weeks from the following week, with further activity expected to start in October.

A permanent power supply has been applied for. Niall MacLeod explained that Kinellan will be in place for the duration of the works, but that sections will be reinstated as soon as possible. Once the cable is installed, equipment can move on as the works are delivered as a linear process. It was noted that this section should be mostly complete between the middle to the end of 2029.

The Community Council queried the potential impact on the river from the cable. SSEN Transmission explained that the works start deep and then come out at a shallower angle, around five to ten metres below ground. It was noted that this is just to the west of Moy Bridge, on the Contin side. J R-B was content with this response and said he would feed this back to the community.

6. WI HVDC Mainland Cable engagement relating to Moy Bridge

The Community Council raised the condition and potential use of Moy Bridge. SSEN Transmission confirmed that the project will not currently use the Moy Bridge for project movements. It was also noted that any expenditure on infrastructure not required for the project would need to be justified to the regulator.

7. Community engagement requests and future approach

SSEN Transmission welcomed feedback on how communication and engagement could be improved. The Community Council advised that it had felt out of the loop on some decisions and noted that local knowledge could help inform future planning and engagement.

The Community Council requested that SSEN Transmission provide feedback when community queries are received, to support two-way communication. It was also agreed that Avril Milligan should be included in future project updates.

Existing Community Council communication routes were discussed, including the newsletter issued every two months and delivered through letterboxes. John Heathcote noted that this does not appear to be reaching people as effectively as hoped. Social media channels and other local communication routes were also discussed as possible ways to improve the flow of information to residents. It was also noted that the Community Council newsletter is externally funded. The Community Council asked that SSEN Transmission provide feedback when community queries are received, to support better two-way communication. SSEN Transmission thanked attendees for their feedback and noted the importance of keeping the Community Council informed.

8. Actions

No.	Action	Owner	Notes	Target date for completion
1	Share a summary of the access management plan, covering the key agreements with Phil Wait.	Niall MacLeod / Andrew Higgins	To include how access to the forest, amenities and core paths will be managed.	21 August 2026
2	Provide relevant information digitally where possible.	Niall MacLeod / Andrew Higgins	Requested by John Heathcote.	Ongoing
3	Share a detailed image or overview of the Kinellan compound and access arrangements.	Andrew Higgins / Kevin Morrison	To support Simon Bates' request for more detail on the compound layout and access arrangements.	28 August 2026
4	Provide an overview, rather than a specification, of the compound and platform works – level one plan.	Niall MacLeod / John Douglas	To include available detail on what will happen and when.	28 August 2026
5	Work up and share the general terms of reference for the Walk Wheel Cycle Trust project manager role linked to legacy and access track opportunities.	Niall MacLeod / SSEN Transmission	To help define the role, stakeholders and what may be possible.	18 September 2026
6	Link in with local groups on active travel, core paths and legacy opportunities.	Kevin Morrison / SSEN Transmission	To include relevant local expertise where appropriate.	Ongoing
8	Consider how SSEN Transmission can provide updates and feedback to	Kevin Morrison / SSEN Transmission	Linked to improving two-way communication with	Ongoing

No.	Action	Owner	Notes	Target date for completion
	Contin Community Council when community queries are received.		the Community Council.	