

CARR-BRIDGE & VICINITY COMMUNITY COUNCIL
Minutes of public meeting regarding Tom nan Clach Windfarm, held on
Wednesday 9th September 2009, in the Village Hall at 7.30 pm

Present: Scott Bruce, Chairman
In Attendance: See attached list (67 attendees)

Scott Bruce (SB) opened the meeting at 7.45 pm and suggested that as he recognised that most present were likely to be against the proposed development, could he see if there were any in the hall who were for it. Of those present two people said they were for the development and one was not sure and was prepared to listen to what was going to be said.

SB also said that he had been advised that the photomontages included with the planning application were inaccurate. The visual impact photographs were likely to be unreliable and show the turbines in a better light than would be in reality.

In answer to a subsequent question of the role of the community council with regard to this matter SB advised that the community council was a statutory consultee on such planning applications..

The following is a summary of the points which were raised by those present:

Planning application

- Limits

It was important to recognise that the Tom Nan Clach application was within the limits of size which allowed the application to be decided by the Highland Council. It did not have to be referred on to the Scottish Executive. The point was made that this could be deliberate and would allow the developer if this application was approved to make further applications to the Highland Council to extend any development initially approved.

- Technical inadequacies

Within the planning application all we see is representation of the impact of the turbines themselves. There is no information on transmission lines, transformers and substations but it was understood that this information would be the subject of a further planning application.

There is insufficient information regarding the construction, e.g. the tens of thousands of cubic metres of peat which will be removed, and where it will be stockpiled.

The peat bog is the best ecosystem for storing carbon and when this is broken into during construction, carbon and methane will be released.

Huge quantities of peat will be removed for foundations, hard standing and access tracks.

The concrete bases may have an effect on the remaining peat bog and the applicant has not demonstrated any understanding of this long term.

Toxins from maintenance operations and detergents from cleaning the turbines will leech into the peat and to the rivers resulting in overall damage to the water table. It was noted that there was no facility for collecting the effluent from such operations.

Power generation and "Green energy"

The impetus for wind farm developments is political, with the need for the Government being seen to be working towards meeting Kyoto agreements on carbon emission reduction and targets for the proportion of power generation by renewables. This results in pressure on Highland Council to approve this type of application.

Substantial monies have been invested in wind farm development and technology but this money would be better allocated to other types of power generation which produce "green energy"

Wind turbines were known to be no more than 30% efficient and that at the existing wind farm at Farr available information was that the turbines were 19% to 26 % efficient. The usable output from wind turbines was further reduced by possibly 40% voltage loss when any power produced was transmitted long distances.

With this type of inefficiency there has to be a better way of investing money in alternative power generation, closer to the locations where it is required and directed to communities for local power generation.

There is no local benefit to be gained from power generation and Scotland already generates more electricity than it uses. There is no need for the extensive damage to the environment to transmit power inefficiently over long distances just because it was possible over the national grid.

The further point was made that the power is being transmitted from Scotland to serve not only the national grid but for export to Europe, with the Government reaping the benefits.

Wind farm developments cannot be classed as "green energy" because of the long term damage they do to the environment.

The problems caused by the variability of wind power generation result in not only fossil fuel power stations, or nuclear, being required as backup, but that the inconsistency of requirement makes those other power stations less efficient, involving "ramping up" when the power is required.

Whether we think wind energy green or good, without government subsidy through the Renewables Obligation, no windfarm is economically viable. The efficiency levels quoted above result in extreme damage to other generating capacity and increased cost to the taxpayer to deal with this variability.

Windfarms will not avoid or replace the need for nuclear power generation.

The argument from developers that the more windfarms you build produce smoother variability ("even if the wind is not blowing in one place it is blowing somewhere else") does not address the fact that this would result in the need for thousands of wind turbines all over the Highlands, nor does it address the reality that "weather is bigger than wind". If there is a high pressure area over Scotland resulting in no wind there, it may well be over Europe as well.

The costs to the consumer on electricity bills for supporting this type of renewable energy and its variability are currently estimated to be an additional £260 per year.

The only person who spoke up in favour of wind farms said that we all use electricity and some green alternative is needed and at least with wind power something is being done, and it is not right to think in terms of "not in my back yard". Better to allow such development but to "control the damage" with specific restrictions on any development.

Tourism – Economic impact

A local tour operator spoke against the random development of wind farms and said that if there were to be such developments then there should surely be a national Government strategy zoning industrial areas for them, and that wind farms could not be considered to be sustainable because of their negative impact.

The point was made that tourists come to Scotland for the unspoilt landscape not to look at industrial sites. Tourism is Scotland's biggest industry and these developments will "kill tourism" in this area.

A resident of Dava also referred to the many questionnaires which had been read out at the previous CCC meeting. These were completed by visitors on the shores of Lochindorb, with the vast majority of those confirming their reasons for coming to the area as being for the quiet and the unspoilt landscape, and that they would not come back if the windfarms were constructed.

A local bed and breakfast owner who is new to the area said that she has no established business and is trying to encourage people to the area to cycle and walk but she does not know what she will be able to say to guests about where to go and that it is already obvious that tourists were concerned about wind farms that have been built.

Another owner referred to repeat visitors who travelled each year from Israel and a "concrete jungle" there, who simply could not believe what is happening and planned for Scotland with regard to wind farm developments. These people come each year for beautiful landscape not industry.

A request was made that any submission by the community council would include reference to the negative economic impact by tourists changing their habits and not visiting the area.

Construction traffic

Significant concern was expressed about the road safety aspects.

The number of vehicle movements were questioned as it is not clear from the planning application if these will be single or return vehicle movements, and more than one resident who had written to the developer to ask such questions had not received any reply to questions raised.

It was considered inappropriate to allow the centre of Carrbridge to be used as a thoroughfare for construction traffic. It was noted that this was part of the route planned by the developer, with lorries carrying turbine parts accessing the proposed location from the A9 at Grainish, and the route for construction and "light traffic" being from the A9 north of the village and along the A938 Inverness Road.

The existing dangers of the A938 were highlighted, and the point made that there was only one narrow pavement and it was already intimidating for adults to use that pavement, let alone the dangers to children who use the road walking and cycling to and from the village and school. Accidents on that road have already occurred involving pets which were killed or injured.

Increased heavy traffic for the planned development would heighten the dangers and raise the likelihood of serious accidents.

The concerns expressed for the B9007 included in the first place that the road was not built for the type of heavy construction traffic which would be involved and that it would be damaged by such traffic.

Also although the planning application includes for the widening of this road with long lay-bys it has also been suggested that the alternative to doing this would be simply to close the road to public traffic for unspecified periods during the construction. Those residents who live on the B9007 described their previous experiences of the road being closed in the winter and the disruption and difficulties caused by that. There was also concern regarding the health of young children living there being cut off from access to medical care when the road was closed.

The application from the developers gave emphasis to their successful "dummy run" of turbine transport to the proposed site. This "test run" was severely criticised as no turbine was used, simply a ladder protruding from the back of a truck, and also as the residents most directly affected who were due to be advised in advance of when the test run was taking place, were not advised at all. Traffic on the B9007 was held up for some time.

The proposed Glenkirk windfarm adjacent to Tom nan Clach may, if access over the Findhorn river is denied, resort to using the same route as Tom nan Clach, resulting in more traffic being used for a longer period.

Habitat and environment

It was noted that the Dava moor was an area of outstanding natural wilderness with an existing presumption against development. It was suggested therefore that due to the habitat and wildlife that this application would go against EU directives, and that such a development is more suited to an industrial area.

With regard to the wildlife the proposed siting of the turbines is in the flight path of geese and that this is an area where there are golden eagles and other birds of prey.

It was also suggested that the culture of north eastern estates is against birds of prey and that their destruction is of benefit to those estates.

Another point was made that such a location for turbines and its likely damage on endangered species, was against EU law.

A further point regarding the removal of peat and the introduction of concrete and toxins into the peat bog would have huge effects on not only the water table but on the burns and rivers and would therefore destroy the fishing and this would be a further loss of income to the area.

Proliferation

It was highlighted that this application is one of many windfarms proposed for this area.

Several windfarms are proposed for the Monadhliath with the potential for many across the Dava.

A map produced by Highland Council shows the Dava to be very close to a zone which might be approved for wind farm developments, and that with Government pressure this area could be used for this purpose. The fear was expressed that if Tom nan Clach is approved then this will "open the floodgates" for many more and that the whole area would be trashed.

It was noted that the windfarm at Berryburn on the north eastern edge of the Dava, for 29 turbines, had been approved.

Other developments currently proposed are as follows:

Cairn Duhie – scoping for 15 turbines – progress not known

Tom nan Clach – 17 turbines – application in planning

Glenkirk – 31 turbines – application in planning

Dunearn – scoping – no details available

Achagour – scoping - 5 turbines

Pollochaig – no details available

What can be done?

The question was raised that given that the majority present were against the development what could be done to try and prevent it.

The following actions were suggested:

Lobby MPs and MSPs writing to them about the specific application and also requesting a comprehensive strategy which takes the whole area into account and not the piecemeal way in which each application is applied for requiring separate objections to each application.

Write to Highland Council Planning Department. Make sure that you include the word "object" in your letter. If you simply express concern then it will not be taken as an objection.

The importance of writing with an objection to the planning department was stressed, as from previous experience with proposed [housing] development in Carrbridge. The Reporter, who overturned the previous rejection from Highland Council, quoted as a main reason for this that only 23 residents objected, which was too low a percentage of the residents of the village to be significant.

The point was made that if anyone wished to object but did not have time to draft their own letter that "pro forma" letters were available which could be signed at the meeting and would be taken to Highland Council.

However, it was also noted that individuals writing letters have much more impact with the planners than "pro forma" objection letters.

Include a request that the Planning Department require better and accurate visual representations of the turbines from the developer which comply with EIA regulations and the Highland Council's own regulations.

Request representation of the combined visual effect of the turbines from all the separate planning applications.

It was also noted that with regard to the planning application for Tom nan Clach that the deadline for "timeous" representations is 28 September 2009, and that objections should be in by then.

SB stated that the CCC would write to the planning department with objections raised at the meeting.

Vote

A vote was taken on the proposed windfarm at Tom nan Clach.

Although the meeting was attended by a number of people from outside the village only residents of Carrbridge and Duthil were allowed to vote.

67 people attended. 55 were Carrbridge and Duthil residents.

Of those allowed to vote 43 (78%) voted against and 3 (5%) voted in favour.

SB provided a summing up of the main points above, which will be included in the letter from the CCC to the Highland Council Planning Department.

The meeting closed at 8.45 pm