

# CWIF-WAYFARER

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## STROUPSTER PLI SUMMARY PRECOGNITION OF STUART YOUNG VISUAL IMPACT

### **Borrowpit**

The restored borrowpit will present a rock escarpment half a kilometre long enclosing a 4 hectare depression to south-bound travellers on the A99 and to those on the Canisbay road. I submit that if this were an application for a quarry in isolation, it would be rejected because of its visual impact.

### **Turbines**

I believe that the visual impact of the Stroupster Windfarm would be such that it merits refusal on stand-alone grounds as well as cumulative.

In 2005 SNH wrote:

***Whilst we agree with the impact assessment for designated landscapes, in our opinion, should this proposal proceed, it would be highly visible from large areas of the wider Caithness landscape."***

In 2007 SNH wrote:

***Impacts of Stroupster alone  
The turbines would be visually prominent but would not be a dominant feature nor prevalent within views into, out of and within north east Caithness. For these reasons the landscape and visual impacts of Stroupster alone are acceptable.***

Reference to Appellants' Document App 02 Figs 5.3 and 5.4 shows that the areas over which the tip visibility and hub visibility of all 12 turbines is not very different, confirming that when turbines are visible it is to a high degree.

There are a number of man-made vertical features in Caithness to look out for which provide useful references when considering the degree of visibility of Stroupster Windfarm. These are:

- The former water tower at Nybster (the Tower)
- The communication mast at Brabster
- The communication masts on Olrig Hill
- The very tall but very slender mast at Thrumster

The Tower is almost 8 metres wide at its base and just over 20 metres high. It sits on the high ground which leads on to Stroupster Hill at an elevation just under 70 metres.

- A Stroupster turbine would be three and a half times the Tower height to the hub, and a further twice more to the tip.
- The 12 industrial units will occupy an area on a hilltop 1 kilometre wide at its narrowest and just over 2 kilometres at its widest.
- The highest turbine tip would reach to 600 feet above sea level overlooking the most populated part of Caithness outside Thurso and Wick, most of which is on land below 100 feet.
- The development is prominent from the north/south and east/west tourist routes.
- The development cannot be seen against a backdrop from any location; it will always be skylined from wherever it is viewed.

***The turbines would be visually prominent but would not be a dominant feature..***

I ask myself “What further attribute or property would this development have to exhibit for SNH to promote it from prominent to dominant?”

And I cannot answer that. It seems to me to already have all the features of “dominant”.

I can, perhaps, shed some light over SNH reaching the conclusion it has.

Please refer to CWIF-W Documents CW17 and CW18.

These documents demonstrate 2 recent windfarm applications where SNH has given advice on visual impacts based on material which Highland Council has found unacceptable and which do not conform to minimum recommended standards set in “Visual Representation of Windfarms Good Practice Guidance” (The Guidance), which SNH itself fronted, and is commonly referred to as the “SNH Guidance”.

In both cases SNH did not ask for its standards to be applied nor reject substandard material.

Examples of SNH accepting images with viewing distances less than the Guidance, of which I am personally aware, include the Beaully-Denny Transmission upgrade, The Muaitheabhal Windfarm on Lewis, and the Causeymire Windfarm in Caithness.

The Guidance says of Correct Viewing Distance (VD) that images should be between 300mm and 500mm for hand-held viewing, strongly recommends 400-500mm, and describes 300mm as the “minimum acceptable”.

“Minimum acceptable” is nevertheless acceptable, but it comes with an unwritten subtext “**provided everything else is ok**”. A poor quality photographic image combined with an “acceptable” 300mm viewing distance is not acceptable.

Refer to Appellants Document App 02.

In Spring 2005 I attended a public meeting held by npower renewables in Auckengill Hall showing plans for the Stroupster Windfarm. I studied the visualisations in this document and came to the conclusion that this was a well sited and fairly unobtrusive development.

By the Autumn of 2005, I had become much more knowledgeable about proposed windfarm development in general and windfarm visualisations in particular.

I responded to the consultation headed up by SNH on “Good Practice Guidance for the Visual Analysis of Windfarms” which ultimately led to the current accepted Guidance.

My theme was that the visualisations should inform and I used images from Stroupster Appellant's Document App 02 to illustrate examples of the bad practice found in many windfarm ES visualisations.

Here are a few examples from App 02:

**1. Poor representation of the appearance of turbines.**

Refer to:

VP 01 Brabster,  
VP 03 Warth Hill,  
VP 05 Auckengill.

CW15 also refers.

**2. Use of wireframe images where a photomontage would be more informative.**

Locations which merited a photomontage in my view would include:

VP 04 Freswick,  
VP 08 Noss Head,  
VP 09 A99 North of Reiss,  
VP13 Watten,  
VP15 Lyth,  
VP 16 Bower, and  
VP 23 Dunnet Head.

**3. Poor quality photography.**

Most of the ES images are poor. The more important the viewpoint, the poorer the image. These are some examples of poor photographic quality disguising the nature of the outlook.

- VP 07 Bridge of Wester. CW6-300 refers.
- VP08 Noss Head. CW5 refers.
- VP 09 A99 North of Reiss. Refer also to Highland Council Document HC 14 Viewpoint 9a.
- VP 11 Thrumster. This photograph has no definition. Even the nearby sheep are indistinct. Contrast this with CWIF-W Document CW7 Thrumster taken from some 300metres nearer Thrumster. Note the prominent silos right of centre. Note also that there is a near horizon on which these silos stand, and that the turbines are located on a more distant horizon. The horizon in ES VP 11 is the near horizon. The windfarm site is not even in this picture, nor is Warth Hill, and nor is the far horizon reflected in the wireframe.

This viewpoint location is extremely important. The first real sight of Stroupster Windfarm to a northbound traveller is from the northern end of Thrumster from

where CWIF-W's image was shot. It is a wide landscape with few distinctive features.

SNH said *“The turbines would be visually prominent but would not be a dominant feature nor prevalent within views into, out of and within north east Caithness.”*

I beg to differ.

- Viewpoint 23 Dunnet Head. Contrast this with Highland Council's Document HC14 Viewpoint 23.

#### **4. Images which do not inform the nature of the location.**

Viewpoints 04 Freswick, 05 Auckengill, 06 Nybster, and 07 Bridge of Wester could be fields anywhere.

CWIF-W Documents CW1 and CW2 are presented to demonstrate the nature of the settlements of Freswick, Skirza, Auckengill, and Nybster, and their relationship with the windfarm, which cannot be deduced from the ES images. I could have provided similar demonstrations from the communities of Lyth, Killimster, Bower, Watten, Barrock, East Mey and others.

I will address Bridge of Wester below.

#### **5. Images which conceal the nature of the view or location.**

Viewpoint 22 Barrock is one such case. If the photographer had gone 50 metres left or 50 metres back up the road he came, then it would be clear that Stroupster Windfarm is highly visible from Barrock. See CWIF-W Document CW23 shot from a house some 250 metres to the east.

Viewpoint 07 Bridge of Wester is another case. In the village of Keiss there will be some visibility of turbines but only as glimpses behind houses or trees etc, so there is no representative location in the village. The ES presents Bridge of Wester as an alternative viewpoint:

*“5.208 This viewpoint is located on the A99, to the south of Keiss and southeast of the proposed Stroupster wind farm, and is representative of views obtained by local residents and road users.”*

Bridge of Wester is some 2.7 km from the centre of Keiss. See CWIF-W Document CW3 which is Keiss village viewed from the A99 some 1.5 km from the centre of Keiss, and which I submit is more closely representative of the views from Keiss, is a more rational location than Wester Bridge, and it (or a nearby location, there are plenty of choices) should have been presented instead in the ES.

In 2005 when I attended the Stroupster Windfarm exhibition in Auckengill Hall, I was uninformed and naïve in respect of windfarm visualisation. Given the nature of the visual effects in this Environmental Statement, it is understandable that I came away believing then “that this was a well sited and fairly unobtrusive development.”

As SNH does not question the quality or accuracy of Visual Information or Assessment presented to it, it is not surprising that, having relied on the visualisations in the ES, it concluded that:

***“The turbines would be visually prominent but would not be a dominant feature nor prevalent within views into, out of and within north east Caithness.”***

A statement which is demonstrably erroneous.

CWIF-W wishes to recommend 3 specific locations which the Reporter should visit to test SNH’s assertion:

- The first is Thrumster.
- Noss Head (or the CW5 location which gives a virtually identical view).
- Warth Hill which I will describe in detail.

A photograph cannot show what is seen by the human eye, and it is difficult to get a truly representative photograph from Warth Hill because of the distances involved and the subtle shades in the landscape. The ES image from Warth Hill is not a bad one, but it does not do the view justice. It requires exceptional conditions to get a really good photograph, but even in relatively poor conditions the actual view is stunning.

From this point, (See CW34 Caithness and North Sutherland map) the lighthouse at Noss Head can be seen at a distance of 9 miles, Scaraben 33 miles, Morven 34 miles, Ben Alisky 28 miles, the Griams 38 and 40 miles, Ben Klibreck 55 miles, Ben Hope 57 miles, Ben Loyal 51 miles and, on exceptionally good days, Ben Spionnaidh and Cranstackie on the shores of Loch Eriboll, some 64 miles away.

The ES says:

***“The Stroupster wind farm would be prominent in views to the southwest and the large scale of the turbines would reduce the prominence of the distant mountains on the skyline.”***

I would suggest that this view would not be seen again during the lifetime of the development as the turbines will dominate the view, not the mountains, and this is too precious a jewel to squander.

CWIF-W undertook to indicate locations from where the Reporter may view existing wind turbines in similar conditions to those shown in ES images so that he can make an informed assessment of their visual impact.

CWIF-W Document CW15 can be used to assess the comparative impact of the proposed development against an existing similarly skylined one at Buolfuich.

### **Cumulative impact.**

From Tesco’s in Wick,

- Camster Windfarm will dominate the horizon to the south-west with all 25 turbines visible from hub height.
- Achairn and Bilbster already dominate the view west.
- Causeymire turbines are seen in the distance.

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This is already a landscape dominated by wind turbines to the south and west. I believe that Camster Windfarm was the windfarm too far. To impose Stroupster to the north would simply add more unacceptable cumulative impact to existing unacceptable cumulative impact.

Mr Sheil, Caithness already has an unfair burden placed upon it.

Caithness Windfarm Information Forum and Wayfarer urge you to refuse this appeal.