

CWIF-WAYFARER

Caithness Windfarm Information Forum and Wayfarer

STROUPSTER WINDFARM PUBLIC LOCAL INQUIRY

CLOSING SUBMISSION BY CAITHNESS WINDFARM INFORMATION FORUM AND WAYFARER

INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

The first part of this closing submission has been prepared by Stuart Young and addresses those issues for which CWIF had prepared Precognitions.

The second part addresses Freswick Castle and Wayfarer issues, and has been prepared by Murray Watts.

There is an overlap between CWIF and Wayfarer issues but repetition has been kept to a minimum.

CAITHNESS WINDFARM INFORMATION FORUM CLOSING SUBMISSION

Explanatory Notes On Oral Closing Submission

I noted in my oral closing submission that one aspect of this Inquiry which had struck me was the Appellants' reliance on "Guidance" interpreted as "Rules". Guidance is just that: guidance. A professional person should have heed to Guidance and then apply his expertise to interpret its relevance to the issue in question, not simply present it as Rules. I cited as examples the PAN 45 turbine sizes, the properties of sweeping moorland, and reliance on the Moffat Report. I will briefly expand upon these remarks.

PAN 45

PAN 45 was published in January 2002 and noted four turbine sizes at Windy Standard - 54.5 m to tip, Novar - 55.5m to tip and two larger ones, Whitelee - 110m to tip, and Burger Hill - 104m to tip. At the time PAN 45 was published neither Whitelee nor Burger Hill had been erected. The single turbine at Burger Hill was commissioned in May 2002 and Whitelee Windfarm first produced electricity in January 2008.

Even in 2002 the PAN 45 references to turbine sizes were misleading, and for the Scottish Government to reproduce them as examples in SPP6 in March 2007, when there were many better, actually constructed examples of modern sized turbines, was questionable. See CW36 BWEA-UKWED Operational wind farms.

Paragraph 44 of PAN 45 shows just how out-of-date and out-of-touch PAN 45 was in 2007. “*Turbine towers are fixed to a concrete foundation about 7 metres in diameter...*”. Stroupster turbine foundations are nominally 16m diameter.

It is clear from the case studies in PAN 45 that the statement that wind turbines were “*likely to be a prominent feature in the landscape*” (at 2km) was penned when there was no Stroupster-sized turbine erected anywhere in the UK, yet Miss Guthrie considers at 5.31 of her Precognition that the examples of turbine size and their potential visibility at 2km distance given in PAN 45 Figure 3 is still relevant to her assessment.

SWEEPING MOORLAND

Miss Guthrie relied heavily on the properties of “sweeping moorland” and postulated that these properties would “accommodate” the development. Lord MacLennan explained better than I can how the “sweeping moorland” properties of the Causewaymire “accommodates” the Causeymire Windfarm and how the “sweeping moorland” of Stroupster Hill would not “accommodate” the Stroupster Windfarm.

On the site visit, the Nybster water tower stood out like a sore thumb from many locations across the county, and if sweeping moorland cannot “accommodate” a single 65 foot high water tower then it certainly would not “accommodate” a 500 acre twirling industrial installation of twelve wind turbines each 370 feet high and 282 feet wide.

And it would make no difference if the Stroupster Hill landscape were to be called “rolling pasture” or “upland rough grazing”, or any other name one cared to give it.

THE MOFFAT REPORT

The Moffat Report, or “The Economic Impacts of Wind Farms on Scottish Tourism”, is Appellants’ document App057. It is indexed as “Report to Scottish Government on wind farms and tourism 2008”.

Mr Stewart refers to it in his Precognition as “an even more recent study for the Scottish Government into the potential effects of wind farms on tourism at the level of development now being pursued in Scotland”.

Mr Stewart clearly knew when he was asked to by me, that he would be unable to find the section in the Report which dealt with “the level of development now being pursued in Scotland”. Instead he volunteered that it was not up to him to speculate what the Moffat authors’ brief might have been. When this is coupled with an apparent reluctance to name the report, there is a strong indication that Mr Stewart had prior knowledge of the deficiencies of the Moffat Report.

Yet he cited it as a reliable reference work in his evidence.

POLICY AND GUIDANCE

Government policy cannot be debated at Inquiry, but much of the Appellants' evidence, particularly that of Mr Stewart, is political dogma and wind industry hype.

Renewables is not the objective. Protection of the environment is.

UK Government targets in respect of energy derived from renewables are probably unachievable and not engineeringly possible, and many well informed engineers and experts argue that the Scottish Government targets are completely unrealistic.

Having said that, the Inquiry can only be determined in relation to current Planning Policy and Guidance.

The Appellants wish us to believe that the UK and Scottish Government targets sweep aside all resistance and, indeed, Mr Stewart made the point that refusal of even a single small windfarm was a missed opportunity; that it was pointless to turn it down because another one would have to be sought in its place.

This argument might have relevance if there was a master plan which selected and specified the developments which were needed to meet the targets, but there is no such plan. The only criterion for selection of a potential windfarm site is the wish for the landowner to gain some money. Wind resource and proximity to grid are secondary considerations. As a result of this, many unsuitable schemes such as Stroupster come forward, and must be weeded out.

The Scottish Ministers have frequently asserted that it is not "development at all costs".

SPP6 and Annex 2 of PAN 45 make it clear that supplementary planning guidance should be based on the principle that "*windfarms should be accommodated where the technology can operate efficiently and environmental and cumulative impacts can be addressed satisfactorily*".

Let us examine this principle.

It requires that windfarms should be accommodated, but subject to two qualifications:

- *The technology can operate efficiently.* - By and large most proposals which come forward will comply with this.
- *Environmental and cumulative impacts can be addressed satisfactorily.* - If they cannot, the development should be refused. Simple. And each scheme is assessed on a case-by-case basis.

SPP6 and Pan 45 Annex 2 do not advocate that targets are so important that issues which would normally constrain development should be set aside. Rather the thrust of SPP6 is to guide development up to the point where the constraints take precedence.

Some of the constraints on development which existed pre-SPP6 have been relaxed, for example it now may be possible to develop in a green belt, but in all other cases the same constraints still exist and still carry the same weight, and these have to be overcome or satisfactorily mitigated before development can be permitted.

In insisting that targets overcome planning constraints, the Appellants have no case.

THE MOFFAT REPORT

I have demonstrated in my Precognition that the Moffat Report (Economic Impacts of Wind Farms on Scottish Tourism) is based on a flawed methodology, incorrect data, has many basic errors and does not achieve its own authors' ends, **although it probably achieves the end for which it was commissioned.**

I was subjected to no examination on my Precognition in respect of the Moffat Report and the Appellants said nothing in its defence.

The Moffat Report cannot be relied upon to support the Appellants' case, and consequently neither can the advice given on Tourism and Recreational Interests in PAN 45 Annex 2, paragraphs 44 and 45, which is founded upon the Moffat Report, be relied upon.

PEAT STABILITY ISSUES

I remain entirely unconvinced that a competent designer would choose an area of deep peat as a location for a temporary spoil heap, and I can assure you that any civil engineering contractor would go to great lengths to avoid having to deal with the problems it presents.

For those reasons, although it is feasible to create a running surface on a raft of trees incorporating a geogrid, the costs and risks are such that there is no doubt in my mind that the developer will revise his plans for the borrowpit.

It is not even known at this stage if the proposed borrowpit can yield the required quality and quantity of rock fill, nor if an alternative borrowpit location can be identified on the site. It may well be that all aggregates will have to be imported. This would significantly alter the public road use and the level of disturbance to road users and residents.

I cannot see how planning consent can be given for the project when many of the issues with which consultees needed to be satisfied are now at large.

Clause 50 of SPP6 states that "*The reduction of carbon emissions is a key objective of renewables energy policy*", and goes on to describe the potential of some soils to contribute to greenhouse gas emissions and requires that "*Developments should therefore be designed to minimise soil disturbance...*".

This in itself is ground for rejection of the appeal, as not only is there deep peat at and around the borrowpit and temporary storage areas, some turbines and access roads are also located in deep peat.

It should be noted that there is a marked level of agreement between Clause 50 of SPP6 and Mrs Leet's heartfelt statement: **Do not build on peat.**

The development should be refused as it does not comply with Clause 50 of SPP6.

The development should be refused as it will need to be redesigned to conform to Clause 50 of SPP6, and will therefore be significantly different from the proposal before the Inquiry.

The development should be refused because the supporting information in respect of peat slide risk assessment and construction method statement no longer matches the proposal, and an informed assessment of the proposal cannot be made.

CONSTRUCTION JOBS ETC

Mr Stewart in his Precognition at 3.3.7 addresses the benefits to the local economy from construction jobs etc. Mr Stewart declined to engage when it was put to him that the Caithness construction industry usually works at its peak capacity with almost no construction workers unemployed at any time, and if a relatively large construction project for Caithness such as Stroupster comes along, then an outside contractor will fill the gap, and the workforce will tend to work all week and go home at the weekend, taking its wages with it.

LONG TERM EMPLOYMENT

Also at 3.3.7, Mr Stewart indicates that there would be a need for service personnel.

N-power operates the Causeymire Wind Farm with up to three full-time employees, and will not duplicate a resource at Stroupster. It is unlikely that more than one full-time job will be created by the development.

VISUAL IMPACT

Borrowpit

In my Precognition, I drew attention to the fact that the borrowpit would be permanently visible to travellers on the A99 and the minor road to Canisbay. Mr Trinick dismissed this by reference to “angles subtended” but was not very explicit in respect of which angles were subtended by what.

Mr Shiel, you will recall that on the site visit at Stroupster Farm I drew your attention to the Warth Hill ES viewpoint location (VP03), and you will have noted that you had to look upwards to it.

VP03 is sited at 82.1m AOD. The ground level at Stroupster Farm is approximately 65m AOD, and Stroupster Farm is approximately 4.8km distant from VP03.

The ground level at the southern (higher) end of the borrowpit proper (excluding the keyhole access) is around 56.5m AOD and at the northern (lower) end, around 46.5m.

The centre of the borrowpit is approximately 3.5km from VP03.

The angle subtended from the horizontal by the borrowpit seen from VP03 is therefore greater than the angle subtended from the horizontal by Stroupster Farm by virtue of the closer distance and the lower ground levels at the borrowpit.

The line of sight from VP03 to the borrowpit passes over the NE and SW corners. If we assume that the final backfilled ground level at the foot of the SW excavated slope is 10m below existing ground level, and that the top of the bund at the NE corner is 2m above existing ground level, then the angle subtended by the top of the bund from the horizontal is 0.59035 degrees, and the angle subtended by the foot of the excavated slope at the SW corner is 0.41375 degrees. As the subtended angle at the SW corner is significantly less than at the NE corner, the line of sight from ES VP03 passes comfortably over the bunded NE corner, and the entire excavated face at the SW corner and a large part of the borrowpit floor would be clearly visible from the viewpoint on the A90 at Warth Hill.

The distance from the borrowpit to the high point on the minor road to Canisbay at the derelict cottage is virtually identical as from VP03, and the elevation at that point is also almost identical to that at VP03. In this case, however, the line of sight passes directly up the keyhole access, therefore the full north to south length of the borrowpit floor is visible, and the full height and length of the south escarpment is also visible along with a substantial part of the east and west escarpments.

I have made some assumptions in my calculations and my figures will not be precise, but the margin for error is such that they clearly demonstrate that the Appellants' insistence that the borrowpit will be virtually unseen is not justified.

Mr Shiel, I recommend that you seek confirmation from a professional land surveyor as to the potential visibility of the borrowpit.

I acknowledge Miss Guthrie's explanation that deposited peat would lodge in the fissures of the shattered rock face, and that there would be a greater vegetation cover than envisaged in my Precognition, but the fact remains that bulk peat will not remain for long on slopes such as designed for the borrowpit. An essentially bare rock face will forever be presented to travellers on the A90 and the minor road to Canisbay.

If this borrowpit had been the subject of an application for a quarry in isolation, its visual impact would have merited refusal.

Turbines

Mr Shiel, at the Inquiry I elected to read an abbreviated Summary Precognition, and the reason I was happy to do this was that much of my Precognition was dedicated to highlighting the poor photographic quality of the ES images, and the means by which the true visual impact of the development was concealed in the ES.

By the time I came to give my evidence the site visit had taken place and you had seen the location and many of the viewpoints so there was no further need for me to impress upon you the poor photographic quality of the ES images. You had also visited the ES Viewpoint at Auckengill and would have noted that you were looking at a peat bank almost devoid of human influence, whereas you were surrounded on the other three sides by a vibrant expanding community. You would no doubt have considered whether this had been a good

choice of viewpoint, and you would have formed an opinion on the quality of ES photographs from other locations.

The Appellants would defend the use of the Auckengill viewpoint by saying that it had been selected by SNH and if not agreed by, at least concurred with, by Highland Council. But when the photographs arrived back at head office, no-one picked up the telephone to SNH and said “We have taken photographs at the viewpoints you suggested, but the one at Auckengill is not representative, therefore we have selected another more suitable one”.

The Appellants did, however, having found it difficult to get good photographs from Keiss, go to Wester Bridge and take a photograph which they professed to be from a location “representative of the views from Keiss”. You will judge whether this was or was not a representative alternative viewpoint.

Much Inquiry time was wasted on the semantics of viewing distance and the merits of lens lengths in respect of photomontages.

The photomontages which I produced were not queried or criticised by the Appellants other than in that the explanation of the relationship of correct viewing distance to the measured size of the title box was unclear.

My visualisation from Tesco in Wick showing the consented, but not yet constructed, Camster Windfarm was not challenged.

“Visual Representation of Windfarms - Good Practice Guidance” (APP024) is an excellent publication and the concept of “correct viewing distance” is well explained.

Correct viewing distance absolutely defines the relationship of the image to the landscape, and Miss Guthrie and I are in total agreement with this principle.

Highland Council’s concern with images defined by lens length should not distract from the overall reality: once in the field, the viewing distance of an image is determined by comparison with the landscape. Highland Council’s 50mm lens images are crystal clear and capable of being hand-held for effective assessment of visual impact. The Council’s 75mm images are also crystal clear and effective tools for assessment, but their intrinsic viewing distance is too long to be hand-held.

The Council’s acetate images are interesting, and I can see a value in them as an assessment tool for someone with steadier hands than mine, and the use of a fixed mount would be worth exploring.

The Appellants' ES images have no redeeming qualities, and the damage done by them was done four years ago. I believed them. SNH believed them. Those who attended the public meetings believed them. This is largely why this Inquiry has become necessary.

At paragraph 4.34 of her Precognition Miss Guthrie states:

“Within the study area, I have noted the sparse nature of residential settlement. The LCA describes the area as being “largely uninhabited” which would indicate that the number of residents likely to be affected by any proposed wind farm development would be limited. This must be balanced with the fact that such an expansive, low lying landscape with simple

topography can result in extensive visibility from its more elevated parts. However, in low lying parts of this landscape of relatively uniform topography, small scale features, such as road side hedges, can effectively screen views.”

This is misleading. Reference to the LCA (Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment, App027) shows that the area referred to in the LCA as “largely uninhabited” is “sweeping moorland” in general, not the study area. The study area is perhaps thinly populated, it is certainly not “largely uninhabited” and by virtue of the low lying landscape and simple topography it is probable that more people would fall under the visual influence of Stroupster Windfarm than might do in a more heavily populated area with a less open landscape, take Novar Windarm for example which has Dingwall, Alness, Evanton, and Invergordon all closer to it than Thrumster is to Stroupster. There is no view of Novar Windfarm from any of these locations.

Miss Guthrie confirmed in examination that, as shown in the ZTV, the windfarm would be visible from much of the minor road from Lyth to Wester Bridge were it not for the hedging which lines much of it, which she referred to in support of her final sentence in the paragraph quoted above.

Mr Shiel, at the Inquiry I invited you to take note as you drove around the county of how little small-scale screening there is in Caithness from where the development would otherwise be visible, and I am sure that you have done so. I would simply like to add that whilst the hedging lining the Lyth to Wester Bridge road effectively screens the view from cars, it would not do so from higher vehicles or buses.

At 4.45 in her Precognition, Miss Guthrie states that “the appearance of the wind farm from most nearby viewpoints would be simple and uncluttered allowing views through the turbines to the landscape beyond”.

Reference to the ES visualisations confirms that only from VP03 Warth Hill is there a view to a “landscape beyond” and this is not confined to the visualisations. The only place in Caithness from which the windfarm could be viewed through to a landscape in the background is part of the eastern part of Warth Hill. From every other location the backdrop is the sky.

Stroupster Windfarm would be a prominent hilltop development, and its extensive visual impact could not be mitigated.

Mr Shiel, you have seen Caithness from the Nybster tower.

- You have seen from where in Caithness a person can see the base of the Nybster tower.
- The ZTV shows from where in Caithness the turbine hubs are visible.
- The land on which Nybster tower stands is around the level of the higher located turbines.
- The tip of the lowest located turbine would be around 60m above the top of the tower.

The development should be refused on stand-alone visual impact grounds.

On cumulative visual impact issues, I find myself in the unusual position of being in total agreement with SNH, and I can contribute little more to their arguments.

I do take issue with the Appellants' contention that, essentially, just because one can see windfarms **from Stroupster**, it makes little difference to the landscape if one can see an additional windfarm **at Stroupster**.

The development should be refused on cumulative visual impact grounds.

RESIDENTIAL AMENITY

CWIF-W document CW16 is correspondence centred upon a clarification received from Ms Alison Hurd in response to a question put to Mr Jim Mather MSP in respect of the application of the terms under Communities in Annex A of SPP6.

This was well rehearsed at Inquiry and I will not repeat it here, but the relevant extract is:

“That is why SPP6 confirms that, in all instances, proposals should not be permitted if they would have a significant long-term detrimental impact on the amenity of people living nearby. This principle applies to houses within and outwith 2 km of the proposed development and regardless of whether they are single dwellings or part of a settlement.”

- This position is repeated in Dr Stuart Black's letter included in CW16. Dr Black confirms that: **“Indeed, this is a fundamental aspect of the Council's current planning policy.”**
- The relevant correspondence was sent to all MSPs with a responsibility to Highland Region, one of which is Mr Mather, and there has been no rebuttal from him.
- The correspondence has been circulated widely throughout the UK, has been referred to frequently, and has not been refuted.
- The terms have been incorporated into the Highland Council Draft Development Plan.
- The principle regarding impact on residential amenity originated in NPPG6 in 2000, was omitted from the consultation draft of SPP6, and subsequently reintroduced in the final SPP.
- There has been no suggestion from any source that Ms Hurd's response is not a clarification from the responsible Scottish Government Minister.
- The Appellants have not taken issue with it.

There can, therefore, be no doubt that the words of “Communities” in SPP6 and Ms Hurd's clarification mean exactly what they say, and that they are at the heart of Scottish Planning Policy.

This must be so, because there is no other Policy or Guidance which gives protection to the peaceful enjoyment of one's own home from windfarm development, and for a civilised nation not to have such a Policy is unthinkable.

In my Precognition Mr Shiel, I suggested that it would fall to you to judge whether there would be a significant long-term detrimental impact. However, the Appellants' own evidence confirms that there will be, and you are therefore spared the task.

Paragraphs 5.33 to 5.36 of Miss Guthrie's Precognition list ten viewpoints from which there would be significant visual effects, at five of which the effect would be "*major and significant*", and (although the sums do not add up) at the "*remaining six locations*" there would be a "*major/moderate and also significant*" effect.

In all of these locations, therefore, the effect would be something greater than "*significant*".

Miss Guthrie conducted a survey of all properties within 3km of the turbines. Miss Guthrie confirmed on examination that properties just outwith the 3km radius would suffer the same effect as properties just within.

CWIF-W large-scale photomontages of Freswick and Auckengill (CW1 and CW2) were examined at Inquiry and the dwellings outwith the 3km radius were noted. Miss Guthrie agreed that the effect on dwellings between the windfarm and the sea from Skirza to Keiss would be similar where exposed to the windfarm, whether within or outwith the survey radius.

It should be noted that, in selecting a survey distance of 3km, Miss Guthrie has taken into account the actual size of the Stroupester turbines and has applied a professional judgement to the impact rather than rely on the PAN 45 2km distance at which a turbine is likely to be a prominent feature, and for this she is to be commended.

At Inquiry, Miss Guthrie volunteered, although I had intended to ask, that the language she used in her professional capacity was that of Policy and Guidance.

Miss Guthrie explained that an **effect** is the result of an **impact**, agreed that twenty five years is long-term, and confirmed that the effect would be upon the amenity of the residents, not upon the properties.

Miss Guthrie declined to say whether the effect would be beneficial or detrimental, replying "some people like to see windfarms".

Given that the purpose of the survey was to identify any "*over bearing significant effect*" it is clear that the effect would be detrimental.

The Appellants have therefore identified and confirmed in examination that residents of all properties within the windfarm's visual influence between the windfarm and the sea from Skirza to Keiss will suffer a long-term significant detrimental impact to their amenity.

This alone is adequate grounds for refusal of the Appeal, but CWIF-W acknowledges that not all properties will be equally affected, and indeed the results of Miss Guthrie's survey

shows that. In this respect the survey results are useful for identification of properties most affected, although I take issue with the methodology and the conclusions reached.

The purpose of the survey was to identify any properties which would suffer an “*over bearing significant effect*”. There is no such phrase used in Renewable Energy Policy or Guidance that I am aware of.

In SPP6, the strongest qualification of effect, impact, or even protection is “*significant*”.

Miss Guthrie declined to define “*over bearing significant*” but did agree that “*over bearing significant*” was one step up from “*significant*”, and did not dispute it when I suggested it might mean “intolerable” and “on the verge of causing harm”.

The Scottish Government says “significant” is not acceptable, therefore the most detrimental effect permissible is one step down from “significant”. That is, two steps short of “intolerable” or “on the verge of causing harm”.

In Paragraph 5.43 of Miss Guthrie’s Precognition, she sets out the survey search criteria, and it is for a property with its main front or rear elevations perpendicular to the viewcone of the windfarm, with an unrestricted view, and within 3km of a turbine.

Miss Guthrie does not spell it out, but one must presume that an “overbearing significant effect” would be imposed on any property meeting these criteria, else why conduct the survey at all?

At paragraph 5.44, seventeen properties within 3km are identified with “*direct and open views*” and one would assume that they met the criteria for “*over bearing significant*”.

At paragraph 5.47, sixteen of those properties are discounted as the fronts of the properties face away from the turbines, and the remaining single property which meets the predetermined criteria is discounted because it is 2.52km from the turbine.

There is no explanation of why these properties do not suffer an “over bearing impact” when they appear to meet the criteria.

It is notable, however, that Paragraph 5.48 introduces the PAN 45 2km issue, presumably as justification for having moved the goalposts.

Miss Guthrie did not take into account that many houses have through lounge-dining rooms, nor that kitchen windows are often at the rear of a property and are arguably more looked out of than lounge windows, nor that one’s amenity is not restricted to looking out of one’s lounge window but relates to the enjoyment of ones property as a whole, and that includes the garden as well.

Given that Miss Guthrie identified at least seventeen instances which almost satisfied her criterion of “over bearing significant”, one can be confident that the impact upon those properties alone would be significant enough to warrant rejection of the Appeal.

The Appeal should be refused because of the significant long-term detrimental impact on the amenity of people living nearby.

WAYFARER

Mr Watts will address Wayfarer Issues but it struck me that Mr Watts and his witnesses were asked at various times why a windfarm at Stroupster would prevent a film company coming, or why would an artist not want to come to Freswick or why would funders not fund the Freswick project, and other similar questions; and various answers were given to this, including the colossal scale, the continually distracting motion of the blades, the monotony of an industrial development of this kind in a beautiful and historic context. However, it remains a difficult question to address repeatedly because in many ways the answer is so simple.

Having had time to reflect on this, I would like to add the following:

Some things are so obvious that they are taken for granted. Everyone understands them. No-one expects to be asked to explain why.

Asking a person in the film industry looking for a location

- or an artist looking for a particular quality in a landscape
- or a person seeking solitude
- or an organiser of an event which needs a unique location
- or an investor in a project which can provide their needs,

why a massive windfarm on the horizon would deter them, is on a par with asking a seasoned city dweller why it is important to look left and right before crossing the road.

The answer is simply that if the windfarm's visual impact is such that it has a significant impact on people living nearby, then it will have the same effect on everyone else.

Mr Murray-Leach tells us that film directors do not compromise on film locations.

Mr Walton is a director of the organisation central to the funding of the Freswick Project and he tells us that the Wayfarer Trust will not fund the project if the development goes ahead.

Miss Sliedrecht is an artist who has resided at Freswick for seven years and she told you that she would not stay if the windfarm was constructed. There are a great many artists, locally, nationally and internationally, including many visitors to Freswick, who have similar strong views.

These people are experts in their own fields and there is no reason to disbelieve them.

STUART YOUNG

WAYFARER.**Murray Watts Nov 23rd 2009**

Mr Shiel,

I would like to address a number of points raised by the appellants, their witnesses and other supporters of the Stroupster wind farm proposal.

(1) The timescale of the Wayfarer Project: the crucial development period of the Wayfarer Project actually began when I moved to Freswick full time in 2002. Out of these seven years, four have been blighted by the proposed wind farm. It has not been possible to engage in major capital fundraising for the Wayfarer Trust since 2005. Yet the financial downturn has demonstrated beyond all question that the route for the development of this site is charitable, not commercial, and there are profound benefits for the region if large foundations become involved in the present and future of Freswick Castle. The Wayfarer Trust will not pursue its objectives, nor approach a number of very large foundations who have indicated their willingness to engage with this project, if the Stroupster Wind farm goes ahead.

(2) It has been argued that nothing much has been achieved so far in the history of this project and that everything is merely 'propositional'. First of all, it is clear than any project of significance can take many years to take root and develop. Stroupster wind farm has taken six years in the development so far, since scoping in 2003, only one year short of my full-time presence at Freswick Castle. Presumably this fact does not undermine the importance of the Stroupster proposal which is, by definition, entirely 'propositional'. I would also add that the claims regarding community funds, local employment, benefit to the economy, or even that the turbines will be taken down in 25 years, are entirely 'propositional'. I do not believe that this word has any relevance whatsoever to the arguments around this proposed development, and it is merely semantics aimed at trivialising both the past and future of the Freswick Castle project.

(3) Regarding the achievements of this project so far, I refer to my full precognition statement. In short, the purchase of the Castle, the later acquisition of two further cottages, the creation of a charitable trust, a film made, other films developed, plays produced, lecture tours and conferences in many countries around the world, hundreds of guests, a database of 500 supporters, work in primary and secondary schools and current plans to link the Wayfarer Trust to North Highland Connections and the planned facilities at Freswick Castle to a major new visual arts and film centre in Wick... these activities cannot and should not be minimised or marginalised, especially in the context of the extremely fragile economy of this corner of Scotland. As I have made clear, Highlands and Islands Enterprise, the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority, the Scottish Film Commission, and people throughout local schools, churches and arts organisations have all strongly endorsed and encouraged everything that has happened so far and regard this work as sound evidence of a far greater future potential for the area.

(4) The point was made from the floor, during the hearing, that the farmers at Freswick Mains are not opposed to the wind farm development. I must make it clear that the Simpson family and my family have been very good friends and neighbours ever since they bought the farm and I bought Freswick Castle (in the same year) and there has never been any tension between us over this difference in viewpoint or anything else for that matter. However, the Simpsons do not live at Freswick but at Gills, facing out to their beloved

island of Stroma and, according to the speaker from the floor, William Simpson believes that a wind farm on Stroma would not be appropriate because it would spoil those exceptional views. It is a mark of Mr. Simpson's integrity that he does not wish to profit from his own land in this way, even if the opportunity were to present itself. I take the view, along with many others, that the Freswick landscape has its own uniqueness and importance and needs similar protection.

(5) There has been a great deal of discussion about landscape character, a discussion which can be in danger of becoming too cold and technical: 'Flat Peatland Sub-type of Sweeping Moorland' ... The point was made by Lord MacLennan, at the hearing, that whilst the Causeymire site can arguably accommodate a wind farm in the context of vastness and emptiness all around, the Stroupster site is fundamentally different. The site visits made it clear that Stroupster sits within a very vulnerable area and connects to the two greatest viewpoints of the area, Duncansby Head and Dunnet Head, as well as dominating the classic view travelling south from Warth Hill. Stroupster cannot be lumped together with other potential wind farm sites in 'sweeping moorland': the idea that such a sensitive site can successfully 'accommodate' a wind farm, is in grave danger of being a 'category error' – not least because there is no adequate category to describe it.

(6) Mr Stewart stated in his precognition, 7.6, that 'the point at which the scenario changes from one of there being wind farms in the landscape to there being a wind farm landscape, where the turbines are the overriding characteristic (in effect, a tipping point or a threshold) is a matter which involves the carrying capacity of the landscape...' The submission from SNH clearly believes that the Stroupster development will have precisely this effect: of creating a wind farm landscape. Mr Stewart's agreement that the Stroupster wind farm 'would become a key feature in the landscape' (12.3.7) could arguably replace the indefinite article with the definite: the wind farm 'would become THE key feature in the landscape.' I have contended in the hearing, and I repeat the vital point, that these massive turbines are moving machinery. Very detailed discussion has taken place around still photographs and transparencies, but it is the motion of these blades, along with the colossal height and scale, that dominate a vulnerable landscape like the far North-Eastern corner of Caithness, with its unique blend of headlands, moor lands, villages and historic sites.

(7) It is clear to the Wayfarer Trustees, to myself and all those involved in the Freswick Project, that allowing the Stroupster development would endorse the proliferation of wind turbines in Caithness. The original plan of 24 turbines for Stroupster would soon be on the agenda once again, and all the arguments of the appellants only underline this fact. The door would be wide open to Stroupster becoming a very much larger wind farm and other applications could soon argue that the presence of more turbines would make very little difference to the status quo. SNH opposes the development on the grounds of proliferation and it must be emphasised that these twelve turbines alone, irrespective of further possibilities, are seen by the Wayfarer Trustees and SNH as proliferation.

(8) The issue of tourism has been raised repeatedly, but some important points need to be made. First of all, the research is partial and inadequate and conclusions cannot be drawn for or against this issue on the basis of existing studies. Second, comparison with North Cornwall and Cumbria are misleading and irrelevant. Both these areas of England have very large numbers of visitor attractions, are easily accessible, and have at least one hundred years of history in reputation for holidaymakers. Caithness has none of these things and, it must be emphasised, it does not have the developed archaeological sites, attractions, tours and infrastructure of Orkney either. There are currently very few reasons to come to

Caithness other than for the extraordinary open landscape. Turning Caithness into a wind turbine landscape will certainly seal its role as a main road to Orkney and little else. Mr Stewart reluctantly agreed that the situation in Perth and Kinross is substantially different from Caithness, and it must be continually borne in mind that this area of Britain has a unique landscape and a uniquely fragile socio-economic situation. It is worth adding that North Highlands Scotland (part of Prince Charles' North Highland Initiative) has homed in on empty vistas as the main attraction in Caithness and has used this undeniable asset as its principal marketing image. North Highland Scotland is funded both by the Scottish Executive and Highland Council, so it makes no sense at all if these bodies portray the area as enjoying uninterrupted skylines while simultaneously allowing permission for highly visible wind farms in the most sensitive areas. The Wayfarer Project at Freswick depends upon the context of hospitality within an historic building which is deeply connected to the open landscape of Caithness and this is at least one aspect of cultural tourism which simply will not happen if Stroupspter opens the door to proliferation of turbines in the Far North.

(9) It is also worth repeating the point that arguments about tourism must not descend into mere calculations about visitor numbers but must also look carefully at the quality of experience enjoyed by tourists. There is high principle and strong value in preserving this remarkable landscape because it enhances the quality of life and spirit for every visitor: it should not be preserved only because of cold numeric calculations. A similar point was made in an exchange in the film 'Local Hero', when a developer argued: 'You can't eat landscape' and the reply came back, 'No, but you can screw it up.' There is great cause and justification for protecting this North Eastern corner irrespective of numbers, and aside from any developments at Freswick Castle or anywhere else. It should be protected for its own sake, for the sake of the residents of Caithness and their children, and for the sake of any visitor who travels so far to see a place which can touch heart and soul so deeply.

(10) The possible influence of fear was raised a number of times. It has sometimes been argued that concerns about tourism, economy, even quality of life produce an irrational fear which drives anti-wind farm sentiment. However, the same point about fear as a driving force can also be made about the entire debate on global warming and the intense pressure to adopt short-term solutions. The last hundred years have seen plenty of examples of a genuine crisis, economic or political, being manipulated to create public fear which is finally exploited in sanctioning wars, unjust legislation, or unsound policies. It is just as likely at the present time that fear and exploitation play a part in producing a proliferation of wind farms in a rural area like Caithness, as that unfounded fears are the reason for opposing them.

(11) It is necessary to clarify the nature and extent of the Wayfarer Project at Freswick Castle. It is important to understand what will be lost to the North Eastern corner of Caithness if the Stroupspter wind farm goes ahead. This project is far more than the personal business of Murray Watts, although the connections through this area of the work here have already led to many millions of people both seeing and hearing about the glories of the Caithness landscape, through television, radio and film. The Wayfarer Trust centre at Freswick is very much larger in scope. My two witnesses have helped to explain this in their submissions:

11.1. Mr Luke Walton has spoken of what has already been achieved by the trust in recent years in terms of international connections and profile for this area; he has also spoken of the immense potential for the future. A trust can bring in huge amounts of money into a project and an area in a way that is much more difficult for local businesses. There are

individuals and major foundations who have a strong interest in this centre provided it delivers what is promised: an extraordinary experience of history, unique and unspoilt landscape and inspirational opportunity for creativity, education, artistic and spiritual development. Mr Walton's organisation invested £500,000 in one project of mine a number of years ago, and this foundation is only one of several bigger foundations who are seriously interested in this project.

11.2. Mr. Roger Murray-Leach has illustrated the point that this project is not about one business, but about a constellation of many freelance businesses that can be attracted to the area for periods of time. He has spoken of the potential for film-making, something that has already taken place at Freswick and has been of genuine benefit to other local businesses. A major feature film can bring millions into a local economy, but there are many other kinds of significant creative projects and enterprises, in arts, science and education, which can be brought to the area through the Wayfarer initiative. This is much more than one person, this is hundreds, indeed thousand of creative contacts, including business opportunities, for the future.

11.3. The appellants have used the terms 'propositional' and "potentiality" in the pejorative sense of projects which have not yet happened and, therefore, might not happen. To take this position about the future potential for development in the John O'Groats and Freswick area is a deadly and soul-destroying approach to such a fragile economy. There must be vision, there must be forward planning and there must be an 'ecology of hope': a whole environment in which individual and collective hope flourishes. A charitable project of this scale is a very strong offering in such a challenging economic situation.

(12) I must stress that the Wayfarer Centre at Freswick Castle is not an isolated project in Caithness but is deeply connected with other concerns in the area. Mr William Wilson, founder of Lyth Arts Centre, spoke at the hearing of the vital importance of 'cultural tourism' and Lord MacLennan spoke of Lybster Glass and North Highland Connections and some of his other initiatives. Freswick Castle is closely connected in spirit to these achievements, but it is also closely connected in fact, through a current major collaboration between the Wayfarer Trust and North Highland Connections. Music and performance venues are proposed elsewhere in the county, but part of this vision is a multi-million pound visual arts centre in Wick. This project will include a film facilities unit, with editing facilities, lighting, sound and camera units and a film projection theatre. The aim is for Freswick Castle to be a linked arts, performance and study venue as well as being the residential side of this project, attracting major film-makers, projects, events and creative courses to the area. Lord MacLennan, Graham Elliott, director of North Highlands Connections, and myself have been engaged in a series of planning meetings and visits to similar facilities down south in recent months. This is a significant collaboration, which must serve to illustrate how Freswick Castle is not some private and isolated project which can be marginalised in discussions about the landscape and environment of the far North-Eastern corner of Caithness. It will be an outstanding local facility and an international showcase for Caithness.

(13) By refusing this application for a wind farm at Stroupster, Highland Council has, in effect, strongly encouraged myself and the Wayfarer Trust to continue its work, presence, and influence in the area. Whatever may be said about limited local support for the wind farm here, the community has been balloted fairly and it has decided 61% against and 39% for. This result would be described as a landslide victory in a general election. The result was achieved even though the appellants distributed glossy brochures to every household in

the region, whilst there was no brochure or lobbying of any kind by myself or anyone else opposed to the wind farm. Both myself and the Wayfarer Trust have taken the decision of the people on this matter as a further encouragement to continue.

CONCLUSION

I come to my conclusion. I am not operating as an individual, but as a representative of a great many people who love and respect this rare landscape and regard it as a crucial part of the experience of visiting and working at Freswick Castle. The emphasis on the coastal edge and seaward facing tourists is a patent absurdity. Anyone who visits Duncansby Head, Dunnet Head or travels south from Warth Hill can see this. Anyone who stays at Freswick has a 360 experience of the landscape and this is the nub of the matter. The Wayfarer Centre at Freswick is about the uniqueness of place and the whole setting of history, ecology, landscape. It is not about how many turbines can be seen from how many windows, although this is serious enough; it is about the whole landscape, the whole area, the whole experience. The Wayfarer Trust cannot market this project if the landscape is to be changed so radically. The special nature of the Wayfarer Project belongs to the special nature of this landscape. All the trustees, and many people connected all over the world, agree on this.

Over the last four years, it has been extremely difficult to pursue the objectives of the trust in terms of major fundraising because of the uncertainty created by this application. If the application is approved it will simply not be possible to go forward and everything described above will be lost to the area. You have heard Mr William Wilson, one of the most significant contributors to the cultural life of this county over 35 years, say that he would not want to go on living here if wind turbines proliferate. You have heard Monique Sliedrecht, an artist living at Freswick, say that it is the unique and unspoilt landscape that 'keeps her here' – she would go too. You have heard the views of the Wayfarer Trustees. They do not believe the project will be viable because people connected all over the world will cease to come. You have heard my own views, perhaps rather too many of them... But these matters are not merely subjective. They are objective facts for your consideration and I am confident that you will consider them as valid evidence and treat them as such in all your careful deliberations.

MURRAY WATTS