

CWIF-WAYFARER

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STROUPSTER PLI

PRECOGNITION OF MURRAY WATTS

Mr. Shiel,

I believe that Stroupster Windfarm will overwhelm one of the most beautiful and significant sites in Scotland. Freswick Bay, the Castle and the surrounding area have a unique combination of historical importance, outstanding natural beauty and remarkable bio-diversity. This site is a precious inheritance which should be treated with the greatest sensitivity. Stroupster Windfarm would unquestionably dominate this whole environment and radically and detrimentally affect this landscape.

INTRODUCTION

All aspects of the Freswick Castle project would be affected by this development. Freswick Castle is a unique environment which, by its very nature, attracts a special kind of visitor to the area. Perceptions of a changed landscape would have a negative impact in a variety of ways on the potential for attracting visiting ornithologists, film-makers, visual artists and people seeking artistic and spiritual retreat. Serious concerns about the proposed development range from artistic projects, business issues, tourism and the international image of this remarkable environment. Another major issue to be addressed is the long-term issue of responsibility and stewardship for an outstandingly beautiful and significant historic site. Irrespective of the Wayfarer and Freswick Castle enterprise, the Castle and the surrounding bay are among the most precious assets of the county of Caithness and need preservation and protection of the highest level for future generations.

A PERSONAL JOURNEY

I hope that you will bear with me as I begin the examination of these issues with a biographical note. I first came to the Far North on a family holiday, at the age of 15. My father is a distinguished ornithologist who in his day was regarded as an expert on bird recording, and many of our holidays were in search of beautiful and wild places with the chance of seeing a remarkable variety of birdlife as

well as enjoying the inspiring scenery. What happened to me at the age of 15 is what every person in the tourist industry in the Far North would wish for with their visitors: I fell in love with Sutherland and Caithness, and I kept returning again and again, in trips for relaxation and inspiration as a student, then bringing friends, then bringing family on memorable holidays. I was so overwhelmed by the beauty and wildness and space, the vast arenas of sea and sky, that I kept on coming back for artistic and spiritual inspiration

In 1995, I drove north from Wick towards John O'Groats for the first time. It was a journey that would change my life and affect the lives of many other people too, although I had no idea of its significance at the time. All I knew was the wide open landscape, unfolding before me, the vast horizons and the drama of the huge cloudscapes. All I felt was the thrill of many tourists, on that final stage of the journey to the world famous destiny of John O'Groats. The only difference, however, was that although I had been a tourist in Sutherland and Caithness many times over the previous thirty years, this time I had come to look at a property with the slight possibility of buying it and coming to live here. I had been looking for many years for the right place to develop a haven for artists and creative people, a place of profound inspiration where guests from all over the world could write, paint, make films, converse and enjoy hospitality. I had no doubt that such sensitive and thoughtful visitors would truly benefit from the unique landscape and extraordinary breadth and beauty of Caithness, but I had to find the right place.

I carried with me a photograph and some details about Freswick Castle but it is easy for impressions to deceive and for hopes to be dashed. What happened, as I approached Freswick on that cold February day fourteen years ago, was exactly the opposite. I was overwhelmed by the beauty and quiet grandeur of that scene, infinitely better than the photographs; I was thrilled by the sense of ancient history and the blue bay, the burn flowing into the sea, the village of Skirza unfolding along the headland, the loneliness of Warth Hill rising in the distance and the wild moorlands reaching so far to the west. It was impossible to imagine a place where there was such an epic meeting-place between human habitation and genuine wildness, between important historic architecture and old and new cottages nestling in the landscape, and between the small figures of farmers, villagers and charity walkers and the immensity of sky and the vast horizons.

I studied Art History as a student and visited the Sistine Chapel Ceiling several times, but looking at the skies of Caithness I knew immediately that there was something so much greater here in the Far North. This was the artistry of nature itself, a landscape which should be celebrated around the world, treasured, protected, loved and cared for in every possible way. If anyone had told me then that in ten years time people would be seriously proposing to erect 12 one hundred and thirteen metre tall turbines in this location, I would not have believed them. I would have reacted with incredulity. I would have regarded this with more outrage than if someone had suggested painting huge white stripes all across Michelangelo's masterpiece – for there is a wonder in the world of Caithness which is far greater than even the greatest works of human imagination. Why would Caithness people treat their finest heritage with such carelessness and disdain? Why would the people of the Far North sell their birthright? I would not have believed that then, and I do not believe that now, because of the wisdom and rightful pride in this community I have come to know and respect so greatly.

It was this precious environment, with its remarkable vistas and its glorious bio-diversity that brought me to Freswick, with the intention of bringing many others from around the world. I have to say now that if I had driven up the road on that day and come across the Stroupster Wind farm dominating the landscape, I would have turned round and driven away in sorrow and despair. I doubt if I would have

even gone inside the Castle, but if I had, I would have seen the wind farm from many angles. If I had driven up to John O'Groats, as I did for the first time on that day, I would have come back down from Warth Hill to see the wild moor land as a factory of white towers, and the immense views to the mountains of the south utterly overwhelmed by vast rotating blades.

I am so grateful that that was not what I encountered and that I was able to buy the Castle, and ultimately two nearby cottages, and begin to develop the vision. I was able to move to Freswick full time in 2002. My children have been educated here, they have put down roots and consider this their true home. Freswick Castle, the cottages, and the whole environment of this magical north eastern corner of Scotland have become my home too – but a home shared with hundreds of others over many years.

AN INTERNATIONAL PROJECT

Many creative people from around the world have been drawn to the extraordinary power of this location, the open landscape all around, the bay, the cliffs, the burn rushing into the sea and the immense diversity of the wildlife. They have shared with me the love of history, archaeology, and the ceaseless drama of the natural world. Travellers have been stirred by the long journey here and the symbolic significance of being on the edge of Britain and in the area of John O'Groats, one of Scotland's – and the world's – most famous names.

These reflections are not mere sentiment, they are all the solid basis for an economic and creative calculation. I knew, with such precious assets, I could attract significant numbers of people to visit over the years, coming for refreshment, spiritual and creative renewal, or to develop film, TV and theatre projects, write books, compose music. And this is what has happened increasingly and, at the very moment we are considering the Stroupster Proposal which threatens to overshadow all these years, interest in the Freswick project increases in New York, London, Toronto, Oslo, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bratislava, Barcelona, Cape Town.

A great deal has been achieved and reference will be made elsewhere to the history of the project so far. But it is also true to say that we are on the threshold of something very significant and, like a butterfly emerging from a chrysalis, this is also a moment of great vulnerability.

TAKING THE LONG VIEW

It is very important, when we consider the issues around the proposed development at Stroupster, that we take the long view. By this I mean five or ten years, not the supposed generation or far more, beyond the probable life time of some of us, when turbines may be taken down.

We must consider the potential of John O'Groats, and the remarkable site of Freswick Castle and its environment, for its impact on tourism and increasing awareness of the Far North around the world. It is vital not to act casually and say, the John O'Groats hotel is falling into disrepair and the whole site is in need of inspiring development, but let's discount it for now. Or to say, the archaeological site at Freswick is buried beneath the sand, Freswick Castle is not yet renovated, so let's just treat the whole area as unimportant – effectively a charming but insignificant backdrop to modern technology. We must envision the potential of excavated brochs to be visited (there are three sites at Freswick), the

foundations of the Viking Village to be preserved and visited by tourists one day – a site, according to the ES statement, of undoubted ‘national importance’ – and the Castle fully renovated, at the hub of exhibitions of archaeology, history, wildlife, a place to be visited by schoolchildren, a place of ecological, historical and artistic quest for the young people of Caithness, as well as a vital international hub of creativity. If we saw all this happening, we would say a hundred times over, this is not the place for a wind farm. This can become a glorious window into Caithness and its treasures, its history, its landscape, its wildlife, all exceptionally found together in one small but vulnerable region at the very climax of the tourist route. We should protect this place, invest in its greater future, share the glories of our world with the world beyond – a world fraught with overcrowding, loss of meaning, destruction of wildlife and total loss of a sense of history.

HISTORY AND ARCHAEOLOGY

In this regard, it is worth saying a few things about the importance of the Freswick site from a historical point of view and how this might be of significance in the future for local, national and international visitors.

Freswick Castle has been variously a Norse long hall or stronghold, the manor and fortalice of Burnside (referred to in the 1635 Great Seal Charter), and the Laird’s tower-house which became the caput of the Freswick Estate. It has been referred to as Freswick Tower, Freswick House, the House of Freswick and Freswick Castle. Its history contains plenty of intrigue, darkness and light, but its very earliest history is among its most enthralling secrets.

A great deal has been written about the excavation of the Viking Village, and has been published in the book ‘Freswick Links, Caithness: Excavation and Survey of A Norse Settlement’, by Christopher Morris, Colleen Batey and James Rackham. I remember the awe of an archaeologist friend in Wales, when I said that I had bought Freswick Castle – he could hardly believe it - and this was when I first discovered something of the famous and remarkable history of Freswick Links. But less has been said about the Castle building itself. It is well-known by local historians that the Castle was owned by the Mowats until it was bought by the Sinclairs in the mid-seventeenth century. What is less well known is the Norse occupation of the actual site. Michael J Gunn in his entry for Caithness Castles, available on Caithness.Org tells of Hallvardr or Havard of Freswick who is referred in Njal’s Saga as the first holder of the estate. Hallvardr died in 1040, and bearing in mind the history of Sweyn in the Twelfth Century, through other Norsemen until the time of the Mowats, Freswick Castle is arguably one of the oldest continuously inhabited sites in Scotland. Michael Gunn’s article is a helpful summary of this fascinating history. The authors of the ‘Freswick Links, Caithness excavation’ make one very intriguing suggestion: ‘The discovery of Norse remains under the present Freswick Castle may conceivably broaden the list of Lambaborg candidates.’ Lambaborg is the near-mythic home of Sveyn Asleifarson described in the Orkneyinga Saga. Morris, Batey and Rackham examine the evidence for both Bucholie and Ness Head as locations but go on to say about Freswick Castle: ‘Admittedly it does not fit the description as neatly as the other sites but... (unlike the other locations)... it does present archaeologically contemporary material in a relatively defensible position.’

The same archaeologists conducted an excavation which documents their evidence both for the importance of the site and for the urgent need for further and more detailed excavation. The report: ‘Freswick Castle, Caithness: report on rescue excavations carried out in 1979’ (published in the

Glasgow Archaeological Journal, Vol 11 1984), makes clear the case for the Norse occupation of the site and for the significant possibility of a late medieval site still buried under the Castle garden.

All this goes to say that the visible antiquities of Freswick Castle; the ruined doocot, the mausoleum, the exceptional stone bridge across the burn, as well as the glories of the interior, above all the huge spiral stone staircase ascending a round tower up five floors and the late medieval rooms half-below ground; should all be considered alongside the potentially important archaeological nature of the Castle site itself.

Further and detailed excavations could easily elevate the significance of the location even more, and all this is part of the long-term perspective.

Freswick Castle is a grade A Historic building with one of the most ancient pedigrees among historic houses and castles. Historic Scotland defines the A listing as implying a building of 'national importance.' Even in its current state, it should be regarded as one of the jewels in the crown of Caithness and its whole environment should be regarded as a precious asset, a landscape which is indissolubly linked to the power of this remarkable place.

THE CASTLE, THE COTTAGES AND THE TURBINES

It has been argued that the Castle was built to dominate the coastline and face out to sea, and so its principle vantage and position will not be compromised by this development. Actually, it was built facing north, and it has many windows looking west. There are only 7 windows in the Castle facing east and 17 facing north. But with the restoration of the West Wing, for which planning permission and building warrant have been issued, there will be at total of 17 windows facing west. It will be possible to see the turbines from the historic archway facing west at ground level, and many of the views for guest accommodation throughout the whole building will be deeply affected.

The guest cottage, which will continue to be used for visitors, will have some of the views from the large windows of the beautiful library and, above all, all the views from the main lounge dominated by the turbines. This cottage has not been mentioned in any of the environmental statements or reports, but it is at the hub of our hospitality here and is also the full-time home of the director of arts, Monique Sliedrecht.

The very large west-facing window of the other cottage, used for family and guests, will also have its views radically altered.

In this sense, the immediate setting of the Castle and cottages is profoundly affected. However, it is my contention that the whole wider environment of the Castle, every approach other than driving east down the lane towards it, will be fundamentally changed. Driving south or north along the A99, the eyes of the traveller will not simply look east, deliberately ignoring the giant turbines to the west; they will take in the sweeping and broad views to every side, the panorama which is the hallmark of this unique landscape and historic setting.

THE POWER OF LANDSCAPE

It may well be argued that surely all the kinds of creative people from around the world who will be attracted to come and stay at Freswick are also keen supporters of renewable energy and all positive environmental initiatives. Perhaps they will appreciate the beauty of the wind turbines and even think that Freswick Castle is enhanced by its relationship to contemporary technology.

It is true that everyone, including myself, my resident director of arts and hospitality Monique Sliedrecht, and hundreds of our visitors are completely in favour of a sensitive and healthy approach to the development of renewables worldwide, but the argument that creative people will enjoy or enthusiastically endorse the presence of vast turbines in the immediate landscape is profoundly mistaken. Many of our visitors have written to oppose this development in the past, and many others in various countries have expressed their shock and dismay at the proposal.

This turbine-hugging idea, memorably depicted by a well-known comic actor who was paid a lot of money to hug and kiss a turbine (in an energy company sponsored advert for STV weather), ignores how visual artists, film-makers, writers and artists of all kind respond to landscape.

Firstly, landscape has a great deal to do with scale and context. A turbine next to an industrial development on the edge of a city is one thing, but placed in wild open moor land it is quite another. The late poet laureate Ted Hughes, whose house I stayed at whilst on a writer's course at Lumb Bank in West Yorkshire, was one of the first artists to despair at the turbines invading Bronte country. These turbines were very small compared to the ones proposed at Stroupster, but he could see that they radically altered a landscape of loneliness and elemental power, a landscape full of villages and roads and stone walls and human habitation but still deeply linked to the wildness and beauty all around. The turbines changed all that.

However, we don't have the attraction of the Bronte legend and the easy access of West Yorkshire to offset the disappointment for tourists. In Caithness, we do not have Skara Brae or the Ring of Brora or the incredible available archaeology, history and beauty of the environment of Orkney. Perhaps we will one day, if Freswick and other sites are developed, but right now we are preparing to overshadow one of our finest ancient monuments at Camster with giant turbines. This is not an auspicious start to proclaiming Caithness as a wonderful centre for history and archaeology, as well as inspirational landscape. The turbines will gradually change Caithness into something else, especially if our most precious coastal and historic routes are overwhelmed. Artists see this very clearly, and certainly will not see Freswick in the same way – and may well not be attracted to travel vast distances to stay and work here, when their environment is effectively dominated and determined by rotating turbines.

Landscape has symbolic power for the creative imagination. We live in a world full of empty words, celebrity obsession, shallow and exploitative imagery: the landscape of Caithness has a deep symbolic power which rises above the superficiality of life and the fluorescent strip lighting of our cities, our shops and, all too often, our homes. Landscape changes with light, it speaks of past, present and future, it speaks eloquently of belonging, and of transcendence, it burns brightly in the memory of writers, painters and poets. It attracts film-makers looking for a visual power in a medium which explores imagery more than words.

A FILM-MAKER'S DREAM – OR NIGHTMARE?

My witness, Mr. Roger Murray-Leach, one of Britain's best known film production designers, will speak about the significant potential for film-making in the Freswick region and the danger to this possibility of the proposed development. All I will say here is that, as a film-maker myself – and someone who has worked with Roger and many other remarkable designers, actors and directors – I will feel a profound sense of bereavement at the loss of this potential. I have already made one film here, planned another, and in recent years was visited by a Hollywood producer who described the region as 'a film-maker's dream' – she announced that she would love to make a feature film here one day. Such projects can have huge economic impact on an area, a fact carefully researched and detailed by the Scottish Film Commission, who have visited Freswick and discussed projects with me. The financial advantages to the region of a very successful feature film would certainly outweigh any financial advantages to the county from a single wind farm.

Film-makers can also teach us to understand the power of an open landscape. It is one thing, for example, to show a wide shot of the Grand Canyon in its vast loneliness, it is altogether another to show the same wide shot with a figure on a horse trailing dust. The moving object defines the story. It becomes what the landscape is about, and this is the greatest danger with erecting giant moving turbines on the wild moorland landscape of this corner of Caithness. A single still tower, like the Nybster tower, may become part of the grand scene, but giant moving objects truly dominate and draw the eye constantly and redefine the landscape. In a fundamental sense, the Stroupster Wind Farm would become the statement we wish to make about our inheritance and our environment: modernity and industry, no bad thing in themselves, but vastly out of scale and disastrously out of context.

A TRUE HOMECOMING

We must truly cherish what we have in this corner of Caithness, and recognise its supreme value. The experience of coming to the Far North is, for many visitors, like a spiritual homecoming: it should not be the shock of a clinical industrial site but the glory of the wild, alongside intimacy, history and hospitality.

Artists are often seeking a sense of home, of coming home, and Scotland rejoices in this concept. Freswick Castle, in the wider landscape, speaks of this sense of timelessness and belonging. The whole visual context has deep symbolic power, because artists are not in search of communication, but of communion, of connection, of belonging to the world. This is why the place and the project have had so much success, with so many from the great cities around the world, as well as being a very special kind of welcoming home to local people too. This is also why the symbolic power of the landscape is so attractive to film-makers, who will not go to the expense and trouble of digitally removing turbines but quite simply choose other more evocative locations.

Why change this heritage so fundamentally? Tall white turbines are different kinds of symbols, saying something else. In the wrong context, these turbines speak of clinical technology, wind as a consumer product, financial exploitation of a cultural heritage. Creative people, as much as they applaud renewable energy in all its forms, care deeply about context: and to put a wind farm here speaks loudly of 'robbing Peter to pay Paul', of degrading an environment in the name of 'The environment.'

FRESWICK CASTLE, ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT

One of my greatest concerns, as we take the long view of the development here, is that not only the delicate balance of nature in this area will suffer but the perception of damage to the environment will radically affect possibilities for collaboration with leading ornithologists and ecologists at Freswick Castle.

Perceptions are extremely important when attracting visiting scientists and experts, running conferences, creating an important base for the study of birds and wildlife generally. I have already described my own family influence and my father is one of the chief contributors to the Beautiful Birdsongs of the world series produced by the National Sound Archive at the British Library. All my father's archive is going to the British Library, at their request, but his library of bird books has been gifted to the world-wide conservation organisation, A Rocha. For the foreseeable future, these books are available for study in the A Rocha section of the library at Freswick Castle and a long-term collaboration with A Rocha has been discussed over many years. The founder of this organisation is Peter Harris, a close friend of mine since student days. My father was a mentor to Peter Harris in his early days, and in many ways Peter has fulfilled my father's own dream to devote his life to the study and care of birds and the environment, with an organisation now operating in 18 countries around the world. Peter Harris has stayed at Freswick Castle and was astonished at the biodiversity here. As an expert on raptors, he was delighted to see seven varieties in one day. We have discussed the idea of a strong connection with A Rocha, involving displays on the birds and wildlife of Freswick Bay and the whole area, field trips and ecological conferences, including the education of local school children in their natural heritage. Monique Sliedrecht, who lives and works at Freswick, has taught courses on ecology and the environment at the Au Sable Institute in America and has also visited Peter and Miranda Harris at their French A Rocha centre. Monique will have a leading role in making this connection between arts and environment, education and ecology.

However... how can the construction of the Stroupster Wind Farm only 2 km away from the Castle do anything but cause grave concern to environmentalists who are concerned about the habitat of birds and the integrity of the flow country? This is what I mean about 'robbing Peter to pay Paul.'

The recent article in the Journal of Applied Ecology, 'The distribution of breeding birds around upland wind farms', surely has relevance to this discussion, although the study was no doubt based on wind farms on higher ground than Stroupster. However, the birds referred to are significant species around Freswick, buzzard, snipe, curlew, golden plover to name a few. The fact that – according to the article – 'levels of turbine avoidance suggest breeding bird densities may be reduced within a 500-m buffer of the turbines by 15-53%' must cause great alarm. Even if a spurious attempt is made to discount the relevance of this article to the proposed development, it is impossible to ignore the earlier study by the very same authors, published in Mires and Peat Volume 4 (2008-9), 'Assessing the cumulative impacts of wind farms on peatland birds: a case study of golden plover *Pluvialis apricaria* in Scotland.' The map on page 3 of this article clearly shows that Freswick and Stroupster are among the very few places in Scotland which have the highest density of Golden Plover breeding. Many of my bird-watching guests at Freswick Castle have been particularly delighted by the golden plovers they have seen, and these experiences have been an important part of why they have come here. The article concludes: 'golden plovers appear to be sensitive to wind farm development by virtue of their occurrence on areas that are favoured for wind farm construction and the apparent reduction in breeding densities associated with wind farm development.... our results suggest that development in some areas could lead to potentially significant cumulative impact on regional populations.'

I come back to the point about perception. No doubt environmental arguments will attempt to split hairs over distances – is it 200 m, or 500 m or wider distances of detrimental impact? But here one must appeal to common sense. Warned of a dangerous gas leak 2km away, would a human being be reassured that it will only be harmful up to 500 m? Or would a sensible person consider giving the whole area a very wide berth of five km or more? How, in any way, can we be sure that the golden plovers, and the other remarkable and increasingly rare birds in the experience of many visitors to the Castle and its environs, lapwings, snipe, curlew, kestrels, buzzards, will not be seriously affected by this development. It is arguable that recent research is pointing in this direction. And, as far as ornithologists, ecologists and others drawn to the Freswick Castle Project, how can we be sure that the mere perception of damage to the environment itself will not overwhelm this aspect of the vision and potential here. Not only the golden plovers, but the birdwatchers themselves may give us a wide berth.

Finally, on this subject and on others, I make a great deal out of ‘perception’, because this is precisely the issue for Caithness, tourism, and the whole heritage of the county, and it is very particularly the issue for a site of the enormous historical and ecological sensitivity of Freswick Castle and the landscape around. Massive turbines become the perception of the area, its statement, its meaning, its priority, overriding all other quieter and deeper perceptions, whether spiritual, historical, artistic or ecological. No amount of discussions about habitat management, or measures to ameliorate the effects of the development, can deal with the strident matter of perception and the very obvious and overwhelming change to the landscape, which has a devastating effect on the whole vision and experience of so many visitors.

SPIRITUAL AND MATERIAL

You will see from the brochure for The Wayfarer Trust that there is a charity which has the most important part to play in the long-term development at Freswick. You will also realise, from the material at the end of this precognition statement, that the charity places great importance on spiritual as well as material development. The Wayfarer Trust has artistic, educational, environmental and spiritual objectives, and considers these to be indivisible. The Wayfarer Trust has an outstanding chairman in Jock Stein who was once the warden of one of Scotland’s largest retreat centres at Carberry Tower, near Edinburgh. Mr Luke Walton, a new trustee, will speak as a witness about the Wayfarer Trust and its hundreds of supporters, as well the international connections for Freswick Castle around the world. I would simply like to state here that spiritual values can easily be overlooked in our rush to deal with material problems and concerns, including the supply of renewable energy.

It is commonly said that ‘Global warming’ is the world’s greatest threat. It is not. The world’s greatest threat is human greed. Global warming is a terrible symptom of rampant greed on an epic scale. The same vice of human greed lies behind the shallow materialism, hedonism and lust for money which has nearly led us to the brink of global financial meltdown.

The reason I make this point is that all too often we approach the issue of the environment from a materialistic point of view. But the experience of Freswick for myself and so many visitors here has been to go deeper than this, to re-discover spiritual awareness; to experience the wind as an elemental power, not as a commodity to be harnessed; to experience wild spaces as environments for awesome reflection, for a radical reassessment of priorities; to encounter the teeming wildlife as a humbling reality which is so much greater than our material aspirations, including our needs for more electricity.

I hope it will be clear from later material that the Freswick Project offers something very remarkable in creating this kind of awareness: change in our global crisis has to begin with fundamental change within ourselves, and for this we sometimes need very special environments where we can step back and consider our lives, in the context of glorious open spaces and exceptional natural beauty.

It would be ironic to abandon the exploitation of the environment in favour of another kind of more subtle exploitation, in which renewable energy gets mixed up with powerful vested financial interests, where large-scale industrialisation of the landscape overwhelms the humbler contributions to this crisis, and in which 'wind' becomes a resource and our last remaining wild spaces near to human habitation become available territories to be filled with whirling machinery.

All I ask, and all the hundreds of supporters and visitors to this place ask, is that wind farms are more sensitively sited. There is a need to protect those who are vulnerable, and we consider this project to be very vulnerable indeed in the light of Stroupster proposal.

THUS FAR AND NO FURTHER

This brings me to the issue of boundaries. Clear boundaries are a crucial element in family life, law, society and the whole of civilisation. Where boundaries break down, ill-discipline, self-indulgence, selfishness and bullying result. If good and acceptable boundaries are not observed, in all our planning developments too, then confusion reigns and, ultimately, the wind energy companies themselves will suffer because the public of Caithness will surely turn against this kind of renewable energy. If a wind farm can go absolutely anywhere in the county, then a visual equivalent of the Highland Clearances is a danger: wealthy landowners and companies can override the lives of thousands of ordinary people who have no power and no influence to protect their own precious heritage and quality of life. It is arguable that if the Stroupster Wind farm is given the go ahead, if a wind farm can be sited in the setting of wild and beautiful open moor land, next to a grade A Historic Building, in view of an archaeological site of national importance, in the context of one of the most exceptional areas of biodiversity, and alongside the main tourist route in the far north of Scotland, there are simply no boundaries any more. It has all broken down.

A PERSONAL PLEA

This is the situation which has led me to despair and, for the first time, with all the ups and downs of years, to question my decision to come here. I want to stay, I have made this place my home, I want to continue as an arts ambassador for Caithness and to do everything I can, to join hands with others, in the enrichment of cultural life in the Far North. But in the context of continuing to strive in my own writing, working in small and large theatre productions, in half hour films and major movies, in making as many connections as I can in as many different ways for this beautiful region which has come to be my home, I have suddenly found myself with painful questions. Here I am, working unpaid for months, to defend the landscape. What sense does that make? I will never make any money out of Freswick Castle, it is a charitable enterprise. I raise money for the Wayfarer Trust, I talk to major foundations, I travel the world to persuade people to come here, to woo artists of all kinds and nationalities, I work with other wonderful partners and visionaries in this region... whilst having to pay my own way with my own writing. But for weeks now I haven't been able to write, or earn money...

why? I am defending the landscape. There are other people who are being paid well to fill our landscape with giant turbines, in the wrong context, and to the detriment of so many. But I am not being paid a penny to stand up here and say ‘don’t do this.’ I am not being paid to develop the Freswick Castle project. I am doing it because I believe in it, because it matters more to me than my own personal ups and downs, emotionally and financially. I believe in Caithness and in her people, and in this place, and its great potential for the future.

Mr Shiel, I am asking you to champion the Far North and give people like me a reason to carry on.

A PLACE AND A PROJECT WITH INCREDIBLE POTENTIAL

Even at this very moment, when I am having exciting discussion with other arts organisations in the region as to how we can collaborate on doing great things for the future of the region, I am struggling with many questions, as you can see. Even the labour of this inquiry is a serious distraction, a drain on time, money and resources, and the shadow of the development which has fallen across Freswick for many years now has caused both doubts and significant delays in fundraising.

Yet there is so much to fight for, so much that has been achieved and must not be lost, so much potential for a significant future, that I want to share this with you in brief outline.

I hope that you will see the potential and also sense what may be lost to the region if this wonderful project does not come to its full fruition, if the butterfly cannot emerge safely from its chrysalis.

ECONOMIC AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Freswick Castle now has planning permission and building warrant, and authorisation from Historic Scotland, for a major renovation and refurbishment. The site already includes art studios, a beautiful library of 5,000 books, a delightful guest cottage, and many rooms available for hospitality and work in the Castle, including a chapel and café area in the medieval vaults. But the plans include the rebuilding of the west wing of the Castle, providing a four-bedroom self-catering guest house, an art gallery and seminar room, offices and reception. The main tower house will see the great hall restored, a refectory, bedrooms and studio facilities.

The last decade has seen visitors from all over the world, and strong connections growing with the US, Canada, Norway, Austria, Holland, Spain and many other countries. Visitors have come from as far afield as Chile, Russia, India and Nigeria. I continue to travel to many cities giving talks at arts conferences, speaking about Caithness, its beauties and its potential, and inviting people to come and stay at Freswick Castle.

Recent years have seen many water-colour workshops in local schools by artist Monique Sliedrecht, local artists gathering for creative weekends in the Castle leading to art exhibitions, thirty US students staying at Mackays Hotel and attending a European study week at Freswick Castle, Easter and New Year house parties, artists from all around the globe.

One of the most significant events, illustrating the potential for wider economic impact and development was the film ‘The Walk’, which I directed on location at the Castle in 2006. The filming

involved employing local caterers, suppliers and other businesses, and arranging a week's accommodation for the crew at Mackays hotel.

The Songs of Praise programme in Caithness the previous year came about directly as a result of the development at Freswick Castle and the close friendship between myself, Sally Magnusson and programme director Norman Stone. Magnusson and Stone's connection with Freswick Castle led them to choose Caithness for their company's contribution to Songs of Praise, and as a result 8 million people in the UK and around the world saw the glories of the county, as well as hearing the advocacy of Prince Charles and others for this unique environment.

Both 'The Walk' and 'Songs of Praise Caithness' have been visual ambassadors for the county and, although humble projects compared to a feature film, have made their own impact already

As for the exciting future, it can be fairly argued that the work at Freswick Castle will be firmly rooted in the local community, but will bring in money and resources, investment and creative input, from all over the world. The eventual momentum at Freswick will range from employment opportunity for builders, landscape gardeners, caterers, administrative staff, designers, artists and young film makers, not to mention the revenue for restaurants (the Trust recently booked out the John O'Groats School House restaurant with thirty guests and visitors to Freswick Castle are frequent customers), hotels, taxi companies and local shops. The Castle will, in some ways, be almost like a modern cultural equivalent to a medieval monastery with a core of hospitality, care, spiritual and creative life at the centre, surrounded outside the walls by a whole thriving community of suppliers and businesses

It is important to understand the concept of The Wayfarer Trust, and the vision for the development at Freswick Castle, so a clear sense of future potential – building on more than a decade of hospitality and events – can be gained. What follows is a very brief digest of material carefully worked through by me over the last three years, alongside the trustees of the Wayfarer Trust. This is the vision being shared with foundations and individual supporters:

THE FRESWICK PROJECT

The purpose of the Freswick Project is: 'To empower an international community of artists to engage in culture and its renewal through creative excellence, professional integrity and spiritual inspiration.' The mission of the project is: 'To establish a centre for the arts at Freswick Castle, Scotland, that will be a place of spiritual enrichment and artistic exploration; a haven of inspiration, creativity and vision for artists and cultural leaders from every walk of life. The aims and objectives of the project include:

- (1) To enable artists of all disciplines to discover and develop their gifts and so deepen their impact on contemporary culture.
- (2) To provide an environment for the creation and performance of artistic works, including open-air theatre, music, arts exhibitions, film-making and festivals; to enrich both local and national cultural life through the arts.
- (3) To work for justice, peace and the prevention of suffering and oppression through the use of the arts and the media.
- (4) To be a resource for schoolchildren and the future generation; to help young people discern their own pathway and possibilities for enriching the culture.

- (5) To strongly affirm the powerful and inspiring work of many filmmakers, writers, TV directors and producers, composers and performing artists at work in the media today, and to offer a haven of encouragement and renewal.
- (6) To create a sanctuary where busy creative people can be blessed by the power and beauty of the natural world, strengthened by closeness to the environment and discover a deeper sense of responsibility to protect and cherish the earth.
- (7) To provide cultural leaders with an opportunity to explore their role in cultural renewal through a deeper understanding of their own lives and the relationship between the arts, the media and their own vocation.

The Freswick Project will be defined by the following essential characteristics:

1. It will affirm the importance of the arts in culture and in human experience.
2. It will be truly international in scope
3. It will be deeply rooted in the local community.
4. It will provide an 'ecology of hope', an environment in which true hope can flourish.
5. It will have an educational role in a number of significant ways.
6. It will provide the highest quality of programmes and services
7. It will provide a place of unique artistic, historic and environmental inspiration.

Programmes and Services of the project will include:

1. **The Integrity Project** – an inspirational programme for artists working in every medium, who wish to deepen their professional and their personal lives.
2. **Arts in the Community Programme** – an experiment in local cultural renewal
3. **University Partnership Programme** – Fine arts, Media and Film and Communications departments, Creative Writing students, arts and drama schools will all benefit from high-level and small-scale courses which offer professional insight into technical and personal issues in the arts.
4. **The International Master-Class Screen Writing Course** – a programme designed to encourage and enlighten writers already engaged in the industry
5. **The Leonardo Project** – bringing together artists and scientists to make connections between artistic and scientific thought, and to encourage cross-fertilisation of ideas.
6. **The African Arts Exchange** – a programme to bring African artists to Freswick for high-level training from professionals in the art and media world, and to arrange reciprocal visits for artists from the West to take up short residencies in African countries.
7. **Planet Earth Project** – a collaboration between artists, environmentalists, film-makers and cultural leaders to explore how the message of stewardship of the environment can be conveyed through arts and education..

CONCLUSION

I have outlined both the achievements of recent years, and also the extraordinary future potential of the project at Freswick Castle. I have explained why the proposed erection of the turbines at Stroupster is profoundly threatening to this enterprise.

However, I want to conclude by saying that even if nothing had ever happened at Freswick Castle in recent years, and no wonderful project were being developed at such great cost of commitment, time and money, it would still be quite wrong for this application to be allowed. Whoever owns Freswick Castle, and whoever lives in this glorious north-eastern corner of Caithness, must share the responsibility of stewardship for the immediate and the longer-term future.

It is fashionable to apply the term 'NIMBY' to anyone who objects to wind farms next to their own homes. But it is worth considering this famous phrase, 'Not In My Back Yard'. The first thing – something I have learned from my many North American visitors – is that Americans and Canadians use the word 'yard' when we would use the word 'garden'. So already, this term in a UK context is depreciating even our gardens and referring to them as if they are slabs of concrete, when it is the wind farms that are bringing vast piles of concrete to the peat land nearby. Then there is the description 'back' – but it is not the 'back', in this part of Caithness, it is the front, the main garden, the most important and beautiful part of our inheritance. As for 'My' back yard, this is a ludicrous idea. I only own three and a half acres around the Castle. This area is not 'my' garden but surely it is 'our' garden. It is the rightful heritage of the inhabitants of this area but also a gift which should be in perpetuity to all the hundreds of thousands of visitors, travellers and wayfarers who come this way. So we cannot talk about 'NIMBY', but we can say with confidence, 'Not in Our Front Garden', 'Not in Our Precious Landscape and Glorious Inheritance' which has so much to offer to the world, in this very famous corner of Britain which everyone agrees is crying out for a far greater welcome for tourists, and a greatly enhanced sense of its own significance.

This particular area is surely not only one of the crown jewels of Caithness, but is at the very top of one of the most beautiful countries in the world and should literally crown the Scottish nation and shine in all its purity and beauty for generations to come.

It is not selfishness, nimbyism, small-mindedness, but – in my view – a moral obligation to stand up for Caithness and to believe in a remarkable future; a future which can include sensitively sited wind power, tidal power, renewables of every kind, technology and industry, but must include – must preserve – must enhance – its grandeur and glory, its uniqueness, which is now under threat. Caithness should be singing around the world about what it has in great abundance: space, sky, wilderness on the edge of civilisation, vistas which bring spiritual and artistic inspiration, an elemental power which reminds us of our place in the universe and speaks eloquently of the spiritual as well as material values on which our ultimate survival depends.

MURRAY WATTS