

# PROPOSED AERO-GENERATION AT STROUPSTER

Representation by

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**Film Production Designer**

Local Hero, The Killing Fields, Defence of the Realm, A Fish Called Wanda and many more.

## **Location Requirements**

As a Film Production Designer it falls upon my shoulders to identify and select the perfect shooting locations. When I say perfect it is not sufficient for a location to be visually stunning; from the production office's point of view it is imperative that it is also practical. This means road access, local accommodation and office space, easy access to urban centres (air and mainline transport if possible) and nearby facility to park up the production circus.

These demands, beauty and practicality, are not always easy bedfellows.

The making of Local Hero was a case in point. While the West Coast locations we settled upon could not have been more perfect for the demands of the script, the filming itself was, to a degree, a logistical nightmare. The nearest town with suitable accommodation and facilities was Fort William. This meant a minimum of an hour's drive, twice a day (sometimes more) for the entire shooting crew.

The most expensive thing on any film is shooting time. While precautions are taken there are always those unforeseen moments when something goes wrong, an item has been forgotten or an artist is unwell. If this leads to a two hour delay in shooting the impact can be severe. In this day and age of fiscal restraint and with tight budgets for most movies the effect can be extremely serious.

However in the case of Freswick and its locale - and I speak from experience having worked here with both Murray Watts on his film 'The Walk' and recced with director Norman Stone for the future production 'North' - we have the perfect situation - for now.

## **Freswick and its Environs as a Film Location**

I am in favour of wind farming - when its end use is thoroughly considered and it is sited in the right place. This is certainly not the right place.

Freswick and the surrounding countryside is a filmmakers dream - from the conception of a film to the completion of principal photography. The castle provides the ideal place for the writer to work during the development period, offices during pre-production and production and, during the shooting period, a perfect unit base.

Furthermore it is a stunningly visual and varied location in itself. It's a magical place, a one-off that inspires, a place of great beauty and serenity - for now.

As to the surrounding landscape it could be argued that Blanket Bog and rugged coastlines abound in Scotland. This is true; the trouble is that so much of it is virtually inaccessible. Happily this is not the case in the region of Freswick and Stroupster – for now.

### **Financial Implications**

It is a well know fact that the arrival of a film unit can bring substantial injections of cash into an area. It can also provide work for a not insignificant number of people – albeit on a relatively short-term basis.

However Freswick Castle, its environs and the Freswick Project have the potential to bring film and filmmakers into the region in ever increasing numbers. On that basis it also has the potential to provide a more sustained inflow of cash into the local economy, and to provide work for its inhabitants

### **The Likely Outcome as a Result of the Installation of a Wind Farm**

Now there are plans afoot to erect a wind farm in the area. If this appeal is successful then Caithness in general and this region in particular can, in effect, wave goodbye to filming in the region – unless of course the filmmakers requirements include a series of 110 meter high wind turbines in shot – maybe a documentary or drama about the desolation wreaked on blanket bog, the possible destruction of the carbon sink and subsequent release of carbon caused by the installation of a wind farm. Or maybe, if the RSPB are to be believed – see CWIF-W Document Reference CW34 "The distribution of birds around upland wind farms" – a programme about the negative impact this is likely to have on the indigenous bird population in the area.

However, apart for that possibility, there would have to be some extraordinary reason for filmmakers to venture this far north. At present the magnet is this area and Freswick in particular. It is totally unspoilt and unique. A wind farm would change all that.

While computers have to a large degree changed the face of filmmaking over the last few years, to digitally remove a forest of mammoth windmills could be, for anything other than the most major of feature films, prohibitively expensive – and why go to the bother when you could film something, maybe slightly less perfect, but without that added cost a hundred miles further south.

### **Conclusion**

This is a vast and beautiful area on the edge of a true wilderness that is a gift for the filmmaker. It's a landscape of sweeping vistas and huge skies, the stuff of the wide screen and the perfect drama backdrop. This is not a landscape to be despoiled lightly.

It is also an area of great archaeological interest where early man can be imagined in relationship to his surroundings, where ancient history is 'brought to life'.

The installation of these vast monopods would change all that – with the possibility that it could be forever.