

## Planning Application : Skelpick Estate, Bettyhill

Proposal Description            Planning application is for construction of 2 wind turbines, 80 metres to tower hub and 120 metres to blade tip, installed capacity 5 MW, construction of 2.9Km of access tracks and improvement of existing private access tracks, erection of switchgear control building, permanent 70 metre on-site anemometry mast, underground on-site cabling, temporary construction compound and welfare facilities.

Planning Application Reference            07/00448/FULSU

Deadline for Objections            **18 January 2008**

Use the following form to submit an objection by post.

### Objection form

Name (Required in capitals)

Address (Required)

Town (Required)

Postcode (Required)

Email


Planning Application            Consent to construct and operate a wind farm at Skelpick Estate, Bettyhill

Planning Application ref:            07/00448/FULSU

Please enter your concerns and reasons for objecting in your own words in the text box below. This will ensure that your objection is recognised and counted as an individual objection

Reasons for Objecting

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Please select as many of the items listed below which you consider are also relevant to your objection.

## **Landscape**

- The proposed development is for two turbines standing 120 metres to blade tip. The visual impact of these very large turbines will be highly significant over a very large area. The original proposal was for 50 turbines, later reduced to 22 and now to 2. How do we know more turbines will not be added later?
- The proposed development would be highly visible from parts of the A836 – a designated primary tourist route. This development is contrary to Highland Council Structure Plan Policy T6 concerning the protection of scenic views, including those “*... from tourist routes and viewpoints.*”
- The cumulative effect of this development, when taken together with the applied for wind factories at Strathy North, Strathy South and others proposed for North Sutherland, will be extreme. Where once there was an unspoilt wilderness landscape the area will become a ‘windfarm landscape’. The proposal is contrary to Highland Council Structure Plan Policy L4 in that it does not enhance and maintain present landscape character.

## **Carbon Dioxide and Peat**

- This site is within the Moorland Slopes and Hills landscape character (LCA). It is within a highly sensitive area with predominantly sweeping heather and grass moorlands consisting of blanket bog, wet and dry heath, all of conservation value. It is also of huge value as the best natural eco-system in the world, being a carbon and methane sink, twice as good as all the forests of Great Britain and France put together. Peat stores the equivalent of all of the last 21 years of Britain’s CO2 emissions. This has been recognised by research done at Durham University and also by administrators of the National Parks in the North of England. As the majority of peatlands are here in the North of Scotland, it is vital that we do not damage them or they will release CO2. It is impossible to restore peat once it has been seriously damaged by wind farms. If properly managed, our peatlands will continue to absorb not only CO2 but also methane, which is infinitely worse than CO2. Our peatlands must be saved and why are they not National Parks as they are in the North York and Lake District National Parks? The value of peatlands is well understood by the English Government’s leading environmentalist Adrian Phillips and by the chief executive of the Lake District National Park, Richard Leaf. Why have our peatlands not been given equal recognition by the Scottish Executive? Except for selected sites managed by RSPB they are being neglected and destroyed in Caithness and Sutherland.

## **Hydrology and Hydrogeology**

- The site is predominantly sedimentary sandstone overlain by peaty soils, some of it blanket bog. Two main watercourses cross the site running into a loch so there is a danger of pollution, and a risk of silt and debris blocking, affecting flora and fauna, unless strict measures to prevent this are observed, especially during construction. It is noted that Borrow Pits are off site, but where the stone is to come from is not stated. The source should be included in the present application and not be the subject of a future one.

## **Archaeology**

- This is an area rich in hut circles but there could be buried archaeology preserved in the peat, which should be monitored.

## Ecology

- The vegetation survey was carried out over a four day period in September 2006. It should have been carried out from May to July for a proper assessment.
- Priority habitats are of blanket bog with various plants of significance. The majority of the site is of wet heath and bogs, also bog pools, which are of particular habitat importance. The rest of the site is non-priority habitats consisting of wet and dry heath and grassland.
- Future upgrading and new tracks, combined with the associated ditching, will affect the hydrology of the site, to the detriment of the wet areas of the site. There is also a risk to watercourses from pollution from dust and debris which would destroy habitats. Construction work and noise will further disturb habitats.
- Otter surveys can be carried out at any time of the year but this is not the case with any of the other protected species mentioned in the study, which were carried out from 9 -13 October, instead of the recommended time from March to October. So further survey work must to be carried out again at a more appropriate time of year.
- As a consequence only Otters were recorded in the Clachan Burn but the study states that the other species such as Badgers, Pine Marten, Wildcat and Water Vole could be present even if unseen. Water Vole are the most likely to exist as they are already present in upper stretches of the Clachan Burn.

## Birds

- The original plan was for 50 turbines, later reduced to two groups of wind turbines in clusters of 17 and 5. The much-reduced plan for two turbines may indicate the acknowledgment of the highly significant level of protected bird species using the area. The Environmental Statement states *'the overall pattern and density of flight activity was higher than recorded on many other upland sites in the Highlands. This appears to be a function of the proximity to the marine environment, the density of lochs and the geographic situation as part of the first landfall for migrants.'*
- The development will be sited close to the Lochan Buidhe Mires section of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA) and Ramsar Site.
- Protected species that have been recorded breeding in the area are Red-throated diver, Black-throated diver, Hen harrier, Northern Greylag goose, Golden eagle and Merlin. Peregrine falcon and Short-eared owl have also been observed.
- Red-throated divers, a cited interest of the nearby SPA, are at particular risk from this development due to their flights to their feeding grounds out at sea and between lochans. The ES acknowledges that these birds, colloquially known as 'Rain geese', seem to be more active during inclement weather than other moorland birds, adding to the risk.
- The construction phase, depending on when it is undertaken, may well impact significantly on breeding Hen harrier, Merlin and Golden eagle, which have been recorded nearby, as well as Greenshank, Curlew and Red grouse. Red-throated diver breeding lochans are close by both to the east (within the SPA boundary) and west of the development.

- Once operational there is significant risk of collision with the rotating blades by nocturnal bird migrants that make landfall on this part of the coast, raptors who are particularly susceptible and to birds who fly both at night and during inclement weather.
- The proposed overhead power line introduces a further risk to birds including migrants such as swans and geese, as well as to breeding Curlew and Greenshank.

### **Tourism**

- These two turbines will appear between an official tourist viewpoint and the view that it describes, one of outstanding beauty of moorland and distant hills. They will destroy the view from one of the north's most famous tourist routes. This cannot be justified to provide a small energy source far from its end use.

### **Transportation**

- The proposed route to the Bettyhill Wind Farm site is via Scrabster Harbour and the A9 until the junction with the A836 at the Weigh Inn Motel and then heading west along the A836 to Bettyhill. The proposed turbines at 120 metres are 10 metres higher than the ones proposed for Baillie wind farm, for which the stone boundary wall of the Weigh Inn Motel would require to be taken down and rebuilt to allow the turbines to get round the corner. It is ridiculous to have to take the wall down again for the transportation of these turbines to Bettyhill Wind Farm. Is this going to happen every time a wind farm is built west of Thurso? No mention has been made of the disturbance and inconvenience to the motel, or whether they have been consulted, for this major dislocation to their property. Over what period of time is this likely to occur?
- Is the same situation going to occur at the Isauld Bridge in Reay, which is on a tight bend? The ES only mentions minor road widening. Are the old bridges in Reay capable of bearing the loads, has this been checked?
- As the construction period is projected to be 9 months, there will be great disruption to other traffic on the A836 with all the abnormal loads, heavily loaded HGVs and contractors' plant, noise and dust. This will cause major, not insignificant, disruption to other traffic.
- A proper assessment of all these issues must be carried out prior to planning consent being considered.
- The ES states that there is an existing track off the A836 to the wind farm site over much of its length but this will have to be upgraded and widened. It would be extended into the site with a new track, which will be floating where it is on peat.

**Please acknowledge receipt of this objection in writing**

*Please complete the form and send it by letter post to the **Area Planning and Building Standards Manager, Highland Council, The Meadows, Dornoch, IV25 3SG.***

***Thank you for taking the time to register your concerns about the proposed windfarm.***