

Talladh-a-Bheithe Wind Farm

Scottish Parliament Debate - Briefing September 2014



Project Overview

Talladh-a-Bheithe Wind Farm Ltd, a subsidiary of Eventus BV, formally submitted proposals to Scottish Ministers on 23 June 2014 for permission under S36 of the Electricity Act (1989) to construct a 24 turbine wind farm within the Talladh-a-Bheithe Estate, 25km south of Dalwhinnie and 14km west-north-west of Kinloch Rannoch.

The applicant has undertaken more than six years of studies, with a multi-disciplinary, highly experienced UK based development team to produce a carefully balanced project, designing the wind farm in a natural landform 'bowl' of the estate – minimising and avoiding views of the turbines from residential areas and roads around Loch Rannoch.

The progression of the proposals has considered in detail the approach to the mapping of Areas of Wild Land, and the applicant made detailed representations to the Scottish Government's consultation process on the topic. The approach to the proposals has resulted in a design that seeks to have acceptable effects upon the surrounding landscape, ensuring significant distance between the turbines and local landmarks, such as Schiehallion (18km to the east) and the A82 at Rannoch Moor (26km to the west).

Transport and access have been subject to rigorous assessment. The proposed routes have been designed to minimise the usage of the local road network and instead utilise rail and barge for component transportation.

The Section 36 application was accompanied by a comprehensive package of supporting information prepared by the project team including an Environmental Statement, technical appendices, details of consultation activity undertaken and associated outcomes, and a Planning Statement to set the proposals within the relevant policy framework.

Application Progress and Consultation Activity

The Section 36 application has been in the consenting process for three months now, and the project team are in the process of reviewing all the consultee responses, with a view to determining the scope and requirement for potential changes to the scheme, clarification of information contained in the submission, and to provide additional information where appropriate, for example in response to new policy including National Planning Framework (NPF3) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) which were both published in June 2014 following completion and submission of the Section 36 application.

The plans have been subject to extensive community consultation, including the formation of a Community Liaison Group, to ensure that local residents are fully aware of the detail contained in the application. Talladh-a-Bheithe Wind Farm Ltd is also exploring a range of community benefit opportunities with local residents, including the commitment to making an annual contribution of £5,000 per MW of installed capacity, equivalent to approximately £375,000 per year. In addition, discussions regarding community ownership are also being pursued, including the community being a co-operative of the wind farm, opportunities for co-investment through a community share offer and the establishment of a community green bonds initiative.

Wild Land

As highlighted above, the approach to the progression of the proposals has sought to actively engage in the debate on Wild Land and how this relates to the site and surroundings. The original site search exercise for the proposals deliberately excluded the former 'Search Area for Wild Land' which included the northern portion of the Talladh-a-Bheithe Estate.

The applicant actively engaged in the consultation process on Wild Land, and submitted a detailed representation and technical report to the consultation on NPF3 and SPP in June 2013, and then further information to the SNH consultation on proposed 'Core Areas of Wild Land' in December 2013.

The information lodged by the applicant included a detailed assessment (incorporating detailed and extensive field studies), which considered the site of the proposed wind farm in accordance with the SNH wild land identification methodology. This exercise

highlighted significant inconsistencies and inaccuracies in the assertion from SNH that the wind farm site should be considered as part of the proposed 'Core Areas of Wild Land'. The representations were considered without further dialogue with the applicant or their technical advisers, nor was any feedback from SNH on the technical assessments provided.

The Talladh-a-Bheithe Estate, and especially the area around the proposed wind farm site includes extensive man made alterations to the landscape and environment including hydro-electric infrastructure such as dams, sluices, metalled access roads and overhead lines, as well as commercial forestry. The status of the proposed site as wild land is therefore disputed.

The approach to Wild Land has consistently highlighted that it is not intended to be used as a designation per se, and is proposed as a strategic tool to be used in policy making and to inform the preparation of spatial guidance. This is made clear in the 'SNH Advice to Government' document, also produced in June 2014.

SPP also highlights that in areas of Wild Land, *"development may be appropriate in some circumstances. Further consideration will be required to demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation."* (para 215) . It is clear therefore that SPP does not rule out wind farms from within Wild Land Areas.

SNH's 'Advice to Government' is also clear in highlighting that the Wild Land mapping is *"...used most effectively as a strategic planning tool, reflecting that it is the product of a desk based analytical study."* (para 5.2 p17)

The assertions by consultees and third parties as to the potential implications of the proposed development on Wild Land fundamentally misinterpret the status of the site in the context of wild land, and without reference to any detailed technical assessment of the site in terms of wild land characteristics, in contrast to the approach as presented by the applicant. The applicant is currently reviewing consultee responses relating to wild land and landscape and visual concerns, and is considering the approach to providing further information on this matter.

Parliamentary Motion – Observations

The Parliamentary Motion and associated commentary and press releases infer that the Talladh-a-Bheithe proposals are a 'test case' for Wild Land and the Scottish Government's approach to the policy. This is simply not the case, and the Talladh-a-Bheithe proposal requires to be assessed on its own merits and should not be determined through a Parliamentary process or pre-judged through mis-application of the status or intentions of Wild Land as a policy tool.

The proposed development is still in the early stages of consideration by the Scottish Government, and the applicant's position is that it is inappropriate to pre-judge, or actively seek to influence Ministers' views on a proposal before all consultee responses can be considered in the round, and the applicant be afforded the opportunity to respond to any technical or policy issues arising and provide clarifications or supplementary environmental information.

It is also incorrect to highlight the project as a 'test case' for Wild Land. There are many other large scale onshore wind projects at a Section 36 scale which are currently at a more advanced stage in the consenting process. Pending decisions from Scottish Ministers will provide a more appropriate position on developments in or adjacent to Wild Land. These include Sallachy, Glencassley and Allt Duine Wind Farms (all three with Ministers awaiting a decision), and Limekiln (recently the subject of a Public Inquiry). The decisions on these proposals, and consideration of Wild Land in each case, will be fundamental to the approach to Wild Land in the decision making process and all are more advanced than the Talladh-a-Bheithe proposal. It is therefore inappropriate to pre-judge Talladh-a-Bheithe, at this early stage in the consideration of the proposals.

Scottish Ministers have a statutory duty to consider the proposals under the terms of the Electricity Act 1989, and to treat each application on its own merits. The current debate on the Talladh-a-Bheithe proposals questions the transparency of this approach and Eventus BV are extremely concerned that the project is not being afforded the opportunity to be assessed on its own merits in terms of procedural fairness, given the heightened media attention being promoted by selected consultees and Members of the Scottish Parliament.

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