

Proposed Glenshero Wind Farm

Questions and Answers

1. What is being proposed?

This is a proposal for 39 turbines, at 135m to blade tip, plus associated infrastructure, including 28km of new tracks, seven borrow pits, and an on-site concrete batching plant.

2. Where is the site of this proposed development?

The site is to the north-west of Laggan in an area of wild land in the south of the Monadhliath mountain range. It is immediately south of an existing 66 wind turbine development known as Stronelaig.

3. Why is the Glenshero Wind Farm of concern to the John Muir Trust?

The John Muir Trust previously objected to the consented Stronelaig wind farm. This development was proposed in an area that would have qualified for Wild Land Area status on merit of the strength of its wild land qualities – remoteness, ruggedness, absence of human artefacts. The area of land to the south of Stronelaig remains relatively wild and free from the intrusion of development. If Glenshero proceeds it will intensify and extend the impacts of Stronelaig to the south. The consequence will be further loss of wild land and a weakening of the wild land qualities in the nearby Wild Land Area 19.

4. Why is the John Muir Trust objecting to the proposal?

We are objecting to this proposal for several reasons:

- a. The Stronelaig development was finally approved on the basis that its scale was reduced. Turbines in the original scheme were removed from the final design on grounds the surrounding wild landscape could not accommodate them. The Glenshero proposals amount to a re-introduction of the turbines that were removed from the Stronelaig designs. In landscape and Scottish Planning Policy terms nothing has changed to justify the reintroduction of these turbines.
- b. The significant localised impact on the wild qualities of Wild Land Area 19. People who visit Wild Land Area 19 will no longer be able to experience these qualities to their full extent. The sense of awe will be restricted, and the sense of remoteness and solitude will be less pronounced.
- c. It is proposed in an area where people can still experience a sense of remoteness and solitude as a result of the absence of human development. Popular nearby and landmarks include Ben Alder, Carn Dearg, Carn Sgulain, A'Chailleach (the Monadhliath Munros), Meall na h-Aisre, the Creag Meagaidh National Nature Reserve, Glen Roy and the Corrieyairick Pass.
- d. It is of a scale (39 turbines) that in combination with the existing Stronelaig development (66 turbines), consented Dell development (14 turbines) and proposed Cloiche (36 turbines) development creates an industrial landscape (with a footprint larger than the city of Dundee). The scale of ecological destruction, peat excavation and change to landscape character is a combined, compounded, cumulative product of all the turbines plus tracks, cables, hard standings, sub-stations, the excavation of seven quarries and the extraction of 195,000 cubic metres of aggregates – more than was used in the construction of the Queensferry Crossing across the Firth of Forth.

5. Who else is objecting to the proposed development?

NatureScot, the Scottish Government’s independent statutory advisor on nature; the Cairngorms National Park Authority, Mountaineering Scotland, Wild Land Ltd and The Highland Council are all objecting too.

6. Does it matter that this area is no longer as wild an area as it was at the time before Stronelaig was constructed?

The land that is being proposed as the site for new development is wild land. Its wild qualities are no less important because the Stronelaig development has been constructed. Wild land in Scotland is a finite national resource and every new development is the further erosion of wild land qualities. As more wild land is developed the more precious the remaining areas become.

7. Why is the proposal being decided through a Public Local Inquiry?

When the local Planning Authority, in this case the Highland Council, objects to a planning application, this leads to a Public Local Inquiry. In a Public Local Inquiry all parties submit an Inquiry Report and have an opportunity to make their case. A Reporter listens to all the arguments and makes a recommendation for whether the development should proceed or not to the Scottish Government. The final decision as to whether the development is approved or not is made by the Scottish Government.

8. Is participating in a Public Local Inquiry the best use of John Muir Trust resources?

The John Muir Trust does not participate in Public Local Inquiries lightly. We do so as a last resort. In this instance we have combined our resources with those of another objector, Wild Land Ltd. for cost efficiency. We have also focused on the arguments where we can add value: impacts to wild land and cumulative impacts of this development in the landscape. We have not spent time or energy repeating arguments that are well articulated by other parties in this Inquiry such as impacts on the Cairngorms National Park and the way this development is contrary to Highland Council’s Highland-Wide Local Development Plan. In the past the John Muir Trust has been able to play a supporting rather than a lead role in Public Local Inquiries (e.g. Culachy, Caplich Public Local Inquiries) and in doing so can add value in the decision-making process without over-committing the resources of the Trust.

9. Does Scotland need this development to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions?

There is no question that Scotland needs to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and to decarbonise greenhouse gas emitting sectors of our economy such as transport and heating. On-shore renewable wind energy has a role to play and is already helping a transition in Scotland to net zero by 2045 (73% of renewable electricity produced in Scotland in 2019 came from wind turbines)¹. The Scottish Government’s Annual Compendium of Scottish

¹Annual Compendium of Scottish Energy Statistics 2020, August 2020 Update, <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/statistics/2019/05/annual-compendium-of-scottish-energy-statistics/documents/annual-compendium-august-2020/annual-compendium-august-2020/govscot%3Adocument/ACSES%2B2020%2B-%2BAugustFinal.pdf>

Energy Statistics (August 2020) shows an installed renewable electricity capacity of 11.9GW with an existing pipeline (in construction or consented development) of a further 13.5GW. 2019 was a record year for renewable electricity – 30.5TWh generated, enough to power every house in Scotland for 3 years. With an ability to calculate how much renewable energy capacity we have and are expected to have in the near future, the question becomes how much more do we *need* to reach net zero by 2045? Scotland produced 90.1% of its gross electricity consumption from renewable sources in 2019.² However, whilst this reflects the rapid decarbonisation of the power sector, other sectors notably transport (accounted for 36% of GHG emissions in Scotland in 2018)³, industry (accounted for 27% of GHG emissions in Scotland in 2018)⁴ and buildings (21% GHG emissions in Scotland in 2018)⁵ still have a way to go before they decarbonise. It would be helpful to model the combined capacity of existing, consented, in construction and repowered on-shore development, plus the forecasted growth in off-shore development (target for 10GW from off-shore by 2030), with reductions in energy consumption achieved through energy efficiency, a circular economy, active travel and waste reduction and carbon sequestration from habitat (notably peatland) restoration. Together, we might expect these initiatives to bring the net zero by 2045 target within reach, without the need for new large scale development in Scotland’s most sensitive landscapes, protecting wild land for present and future generations.

10. How can we properly plan for the renewable energy development that Scotland needs?

Critically, a strategic approach to reducing greenhouse gas emissions in Scotland can be provided by Scotland’s next National Planning Framework. A strategic approach will take a plan-led approach to siting a mix of renewable energy (on-shore and off-shore wind, solar panels, battery storage) whilst also planning for grid connection. This approach would complement national efforts to reduce energy consumption, improve energy efficiency, implement a circular economy, reduce the loss of carbon from development on peatland and restore peatlands to their full carbon-storing potential (peatlands are the single most important terrestrial store of carbon globally and evidence⁶ suggests wind farms constructed on peatland may do more long-term harm than good).

11. Can Scotland contribute to UK net zero emissions reduction targets by 2050?

Yes. As things stand, the UK is a single energy market and UK-wide only 21 per cent of electricity was generated via renewables last year. Consequently both the UK government and the Scottish Government see Scotland as a major contributor to UK energy targets, because of its terrain and far greater landmass pro-rata to the population.

² Reducing Emissions in Scotland Progress Report 2020, Independent Committee on Climate Change, <https://d423d1558e1d71897434.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/Reducing-emissions-in-Scotland-Progress-Report-to-Parliament-FINAL.pdf>

³ Page 50, Reducing Emissions in Scotland Progress Report 2020

⁴ Page 54, Reducing Emissions in Scotland Progress Report 2020

⁵ Page 56, Reducing Emissions in Scotland Progress Report 2020

⁶https://www.researchgate.net/publication/309340607_Peatlands_and_Windfarms_Conflicting_Carbon_Targets_and_Environmental_Impacts