



FULL TRANSCRIPT

of

PUBLIC MEETING

14th JUNE 2025

2.00pm – 4.00 pm

PHIPPS HALL, BEAULY

Agenda Sections

WELCOME 2

PART 1 – CC STATEMENTS 4

PART 2 – FURTHER STATEMENTS FROM AUDIENCE26

PART 3 – CONSENSUS STATEMENT VOTE.....35

CLOSE36

[WELCOME]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Welcome, everyone.

Welcome. I have a fairly gentle Highland voice. I just want to check that you can hear me at the back of this hall.

Okay, good. We have an unprecedented number of community councils joining us - some online, but the majority are in this hall. From Skye, Caithness, Nairn, down towards Dalwhinnie, Morvern, and so many in between.

You are almost warmly welcome.

I have today added up the population represented by the Community Councils who've said that they support this and according to the last Highland Council census, you represent over 72,000 residents in the Highlands.

That is a significant number, and your voice deserves to be heard.

This convention is organized by community councils for community councils. This is your time to speak.

So that you can tell us about the totality of what the pylon lines, the substations, the wind turbines, the pumped hydro, the battery storage, the workers' camps and all of the ancillary infrastructure, what that totality actually means for the Highlands. You know your community, and you represent them, and your voice matters.

A few minutes ago, there was a map up there, and it was a map that recently was published by the Highland Council and it was described by many others [*HC Energy Infrastructure Arcgis map put up on projector*], thank you. It was described by a number of people as fairly sobering. I am very grateful to the Highland Council for publishing that map, it was quite a piece of work to get that done and published. It shows in excess of 1,300 major energy infrastructure projects across the Highland area.

It came about because of you - over 60 community councils backed the motion that I presented at Highland Council last year to get that map published so we could visually see what this means for our land and start to join up the dots and get a better understanding of what they call cumulative impact.

Highland Islands Enterprise published a paper recently, the title is "Regional Transformational Opportunities in the Highlands and Islands" and there was a high-level convention in Strathpeffer. Where organizations from across The Highlands discussed that paper. It details a possible £100 billion investment, the lion's share being in renewables infrastructure. I went to that convention in Strathpeffer as an observer, and I found out about it - well, I actually found out about it the night before and what struck me about it was... There was no community voice.

There was no voice for tourism, which is the backbone of the Highland economy.

Well, I see that your communities deserve proper representation when transformational decisions are made about our land and our way of life, because that is basic democracy.

So, now to the agenda.

In the first part of the agenda, it's for the community councils to speak up. We have only one hour for this part of the agenda, but we now have an unprecedented number of community councils who have joined us. Over 50, which is amazing news but we never anticipated that level of participation when we started this process. So, it basically means, it's good news, but we're not going to be able to hear from all of the community councils - so please keep your statements short. We will publish every statement after. We will take that forward after.

Then we move on to Part 2 of the agenda, and that is very much dedicated to looking at what our community councils and our communities are looking for from our key decision makers. From our representatives - at Highland and national level.

I will open up the floor to everyone at that point - and I think we've got about 45 minutes for that part.

Then I'm going to move on, if I may, to a possible vote, because I want you to have something tangible to take away from this. Not just a talking shop. If we can identify consensus in what is being said. We will try our best to present that...it is not going to be easy, because of course there are differences of opinion. Of course we all have differences in terms of our experience. But we're going to try our best to pull this together.

As with any show of hands, if you have a contrary view and you don't feel that you can take part in a public vote, we appreciate that, we understand that. Please email me afterwards, because of course, all views will be considered. That's community engagement.

A small point on housekeeping, please. There is an emergency exit over there. I think you all came in that door, it's also an emergency exit out.

We have two roving microphones. When you speak, please speak up and hold the mic towards your mouth. Try not to wave it around. Please state your name and the community council or the group that you represent, if you represent a group.

We do have a number of councillors present here from Highland Council. They are here as observers only, but I think we are all very grateful to those who have come today and are on listening mode. Thank you

Likewise, I have always concentrated on policy, on procedure, on community engagement. I am not here to express my view.



I am simply here to objectively facilitate your view being made known, whatever that may be.

We also have politicians here. I've picked out a few of them, and again, please be here as observers. This is apolitical, it's not a chance to campaign. So, we're all here to help each other through this, and let's make this a good day.

So what I'm going to do first of all is move on to the first part of the agenda. It's for the community councils to speak up, and I'm going to invite a number of them forward to speak up, and then we'll just open it up to any other community councils that we can squeeze into this process.

So, first of all, Muir of Ord Community Council, please.

[PART 1 – CC STATEMENTS]

GORDON SHAND (Muir of Ord):

Good afternoon, everybody. I hope you can hear me – a wee introduction. My name's Gordon Shand, I'm the chair of the Community Council in Muir of Ord. We had our AGM on Thursday, so I've been on the job for 3 days - but I hasten to add, I've been doing the job since February, when the Community Council reformed after a time in abeyance. So I haven't been chucked under the bus by my fellow community councillors.

So you know, of our comments on the current infrastructure developments. So Muir of Ord is not quite as affected as our near neighbours here in Beaully and Kiltarlity but we still do have four energy infrastructure projects to where we are part of the main transport route to site and two with new overhead lines and underground cable routes running through the outskirts of our village.

We also have other developments to consider, which I'll touch on later.

So I'd like to give this feedback in 3 sections.

Where we are now, our observations up to this point. And where we're going.

So, what are we now? We've received comments from our community. These have been summarized, rounded up a bit, some of the edges taken off for this gathering. Our comments are very similar to those of our neighbours and probably the majority of the 1400 plus comments that are currently on the Highland Council planning portal for the Fanellan application. The comments that come in at all levels and here are some of them.

So, why are we communities represented here today? Bearing the brunt of the government's headlong rush to meet Net Zero without seeing any real benefit from it in our



energy costs i.e. progress on a regional pricing system for electricity and I'm sure we're not the only ones thinking that.

Concern for the environmental impact, obviously, during the construction and operating phase of the overhead lines and underground cable works in our area as well as the increased traffic volumes in and around the village.

We keep hearing the quote, an industrialization of the Highlands, and that doesn't have a good ring to it.

Our business community - they're concerned with this industrialization and the potential visual impact it's going to have. This could affect our tourist numbers with a knock-on effect of our supporting hospitality and retail sectors. Now, we all know they're struggling with the cost of living crisis and every other crisis, so another headwind won't be welcomed by them.

Our supporting infrastructure requires a review. An upgrade in places before any major work starts. That might be a big ask, but the observation still stands.

Anyone who's driven the tour of Muir of Ord through the Beauly route knows exactly what we're talking about, the state of the road. The pinch points that we have in there. Add all the expected traffic into that, and we're going to get traffic congestion. We're gonna get driver frustration and obviously the potential higher risk of accidents. And on that, I'll give you our wonky crossroad junction into Muir of Ord industrial estate. Anyone who's gone through it knows exactly what I mean. It's hardly keeping up with traffic at the moment, never mind with all the new traffic.

So, observations... in getting here.

The first one - public consultations. Just to be clear, Muir of Ord hasn't had a public consultation, so you know, being only human, when we see a consultation in Beauly or Kiltarlity, we say "That's for Beauly or Kiltarlity" - so there are faults on all sides.

But, have they been effective? A lot of people have been commenting ...a lot of people have been commenting directly to us, some of them directly at us and on social media, again, pretty directly saying that they haven't been aware of these developments and their local implications. Information they did have mainly came from social media sites, like the Communities B4 Power Companies, who I think are represented here today and have the poster outside.

So, the developers (shoot me down if you think, I'm wrong) I think they've played it by their book. They've had the requisite number of events at the required stages of their development but from the feedback I'm getting the message hasn't come across, and that's the issue.



It would be interesting to hear from other communities what they think about the current consultation process and its effectiveness and how they deal with it. As I say, we're still quite a new community council, so we're still learning some stuff.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you very much, as you're sort of towards the end... I'll have to hurry you up.

GORDON SHAND (Muir of Ord):

Okay right, I'll just finish off one of my hobby horses.

Who owns the cumulative effect?

We as a community have four energy and infrastructure projects and two housing developments, with about 200 houses in various stages of planning. All in the same transport route, all potentially on the same timeline.

So who gathers this data? Judges when enough is enough.

With this type of overview, I feel we as a community are running blind at what's coming at us.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you so much, Gordon. Well done.

Okay, so we'll hear from our friends on Skye and Skeabost District, please.

If you need to stand up.

ANDREW ROBINSON (Skye & Skeabost District):

Thanks, Helen. Um, I'm Andrew Robinson, I'm from Skye & Skeabost District Community Council. I'm also a coordinator for the Skye Wind Farm Information Group that has about 1,500 members.

Like everywhere else on Skye, we face an unprecedented number of wind farm proposals, I think it's 8 at the current count, 5 of which are either in Skeabost District or immediately border those districts and we also are reeling from the government decision last week to push through the Skye overhead reinforcement line in the face of a clear objection from the Highland Council. The Council objected to this line, normally there would then be a public inquiry into the line but Scottish Government have seen fit not to grant us that. We've already got SSEN and RJ McLeod boots on the ground, clearing forests, clearing tracks to build the substations for that line well in advance of any decision that was made, so it was obvious the contractors knew it was going to get passed.

So we're trying to cope with how we deal with that. The option would be a judicial review, possibly, but the costs for a judicial review, we've been told that we're looking at probably £150,000 or more.



We're already facing a public inquiry into a wind farm in two weeks' time. That is costing the Skye Wind Farm Information Group £25,000 in expert witnesses to fight that battle, and we're cleaned out after that so we have no chance of finding £150,000 for a judicial review.

From a community council perspective - the volume and complexity of all the applications is overwhelming, it's different developers with different timelines that make it very difficult for community councils to play a part in the process. We don't have training or experience in any of these issues. We're fighting companies who bring in professionals in every area, who can run circles around us if you get into technicalities.

On Skye, the developers are pressuring the community councils to establish trusts or community companies to deal with the so-called community benefits that they're offering us. The community benefits are tiny and if I could just give one example within 3km of my home, there's an existing wind farm, Ben Aketil - they have paid something like £700,000 in community benefit over the 16 years of life, £700,000 to the local community - while they have paid £51 million to their shareholders, ultimately a Cayman Island-owned private equity company. That's the scale of the difference, the inequity that we face.

Developers are claiming that their money will be the only source of finance we get in local communities, so if we want money for small-scale projects, we've got to support them. And they're bullying community councils [*mic issues – fixed*] into signing up for their scheme. They want us to form community trusts and community companies. Community Trust or community companies to deal with the small amount of community benefits that they're offering us. So it feels like we've been pressured into rushing into signing up with them and they will then use those new Community Council agreements [*on how to deal with the community benefits is a sign that we want.*]

[*mic issues*]

I'll shout – I'm nearly finished anyway.

So we feel like we are being blackmailed into signing up to deal with their small amount of community benefit that they're offering us when we don't actually want the wind farms at all to start but they are sort of saying if you don't sign up then we might give the money to somebody else. At the last meeting I was at up at [...] they suggested that they'd give the money direct to the Highland Council if we didn't get our act together and form a joint group of all the community councils on the island to work out how we spend the money they are offering us. None of us want the money – well maybe a few of us want the money.

So it's a chaotic situation. What we would like is a pause on all the wind farm and infrastructure developments across the Highlands... across Scotland to be honest...and the power lines and cables while somebody takes a strategic overview of what we do.

[APPLAUSE]



The national energy system operators predict we are only going to need 11 GW of power in Scotland by 2050 and we've already got 20 GW of renewable power already built or online [in Scotland]. So we're already inline to be double what's needed in Scotland. So anything beyond the 11 GW we need that's a political financial or commercial decision and the mechanism does exist to enable an overview of this – its something called a planning enquiry commission and in the Town and Country Planning Act of Scotland the government have the option to set up a planning commission when a planning issue is so complex, is so technical that it can't be decided on a piecemeal basis and we're all being picked off one application at a time, one substation at a time

[APPLAUSE]

While it feels like no-ones taken much of a strategic overview, so we need to get Scottish Government to stop, to look, to justify why they think this destruction of our countryside is acceptable or to make a decision about what is actually necessary for Scotland... we call for a moratorium and a Scotland-wide enquire commission into what is appropriate for Scotland...and what do we need... and what is being done just for political purposes or for financial gain

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

OK Thank you Andrew.

OK ..now we have Rogart and I think we have Jonathan Hodges from Rogart

From Rogart, you have a statement, if you're happy to speak... read it out, please, or... fantastic.

JONATHAN HEDGES (Rogart):

[Mic issues]

I haven't actually seen that statement yet but basically for Rogart there's going to be up to 9 projects planned for the parish of Rogart...we've got 3 at the moment but the most controversial one is Kylie Wind Farm which until last October was opposed by Highland Council – so we though great it is being opposed we get a public enquiry – local people can actually see what these windmills are actually going to look like because at 250m tall ..and these developers come along and provide visualisations like a 1980s video game – makes me so angry because I don't know what is going to look like.

250m tall windmill and I have no idea whatsoever.....I know what my neighbours shed is going to look like because they have provided context but I have no idea whatsoever..so anyway... we thought it was going to be opposed but then a month ago basically Highland Council chucked us under the bus with about 4 days notice there was another planning meeting – Highland Council withdrew their objection and we've now got no chance for a public enquiry.

So local democracy has gone.

[APPLAUSE]



So we need to get it back. If the Energy Consents Unit are the next port of call.. they are remote..they are politically driven... we just feel right up against it in Rogart...and its basically the “N” word - its Net Zero... Net Zero used as a bulldozer... what is Net Zero... and that’s just not good enough - we need a proper local planning process because at the moment that is just not happening – so I completely agree with a pause and a strategic plan that is what we need and maybe it’s a democratic process so actually people have been involved in that rather than it being top down.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you so much OK - we are going further south now Morvern Community Council - Morvern Community Council

[Zoom participants noting - mic issues]

Thank you. Okay, I don't have a speaker from Morven, but they've sent a supporting statement.

Um, but what I do have, if I can ask, invite Dalwinnie Community Council?

Nope. I think they're perhaps online? We can always come back.

Dunbeath Community Council? If I can read out for Dunbeath... No, that's... Have we got a mic?

CAMERON KEMP (Kirkhill & Bunchrew, Chair):

If I can read out for Dunbeath...

I think I'll just read out briefly for **Dunbeath - Andrew Bailey** said Labour MP Mr Henry Tufnell recently raised the fact that net zero is not delivering more jobs and cheaper bills for the people of the UK.

So we must now reconsider the approach. More and more Labour MPs are raising questions about the loss of jobs in the oil and gas industries. We must therefore speed up this process of raising these questions on all MPs, and stop this Miliband lunacy, and that's a quote, and scrap target dates.

Thank you

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Ok so now back over to Skye – can we hear from Sleat Community Council please.

TIM SHONE (Sleat):

Okay, when I started this, I was asked to make it brief and it is brief, so I can't compete with the people who've been here before, I'm afraid.



My name is Tim Shone, I'm a past chair and still a member of Sleat Community Council - which is on a very south tip of Skye - the Garden of Skye.

Although our specific area has not to date been subjected to any of these major energy infrastructure, and there's no planning applications on our patch either. However, the potential is there for the future. There was, some years ago, talk of a wind farm there, and it was put to the back burner because of local objections, and also because of that there's nowhere the power could have gone. There's no connection to the grid.

Two community councils immediately to the north of Sleat Community Council, Broadford and Strath and Kyleakin and Kylehea - they're in a different situation. They have the grid upgrade to the outer isles going right through their patch.

And the guys in Skeabost that's heading your way - and to support Skeabost as well, the RJ McClouds are already digging on the hill. Just preparing for this grid upgrade.

Broadford and Strath are putting big objections to a 400 person camp for the workers on this. That's one camp and another one, even bigger camp - actually two camps there. And lots of objections, and this has been pushed through, again, by the Scottish Government, bypassing Highland Council. That's the way I see it, anyway.

We are pleased to support our neighbours in their efforts.

We are supporting and we already have some, small-scale wind generators, mini hydroelectric schemes solar panels and we feel pretty strongly that this is the best way forward and having several small generating units which can more easily blend into the countryside while still feeding the grid with any unused power and the idea of having large-scale turbines thrust upon us without local consultation or consent is abhorrent.

We on Sleat Community Council we are fortunate there's nothing happening in our patch just now but we are pleased to be at a Convention of Highland-wide Community Councils presenting a conjoined front to get local opinions throughout the Highlands, listen to and respected.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you very much and now over to Dunnett and Canisbay in Caithness, I understand they're not present but they've sent a statement that they would like to have read out.

CAMERON KEMP (Kirkhill & Bunchrew, Chair):

Ok I'll read out a statement from **Dunnett and Canesby. Mark Gibson.**

First of all, we would like to give our apologies for not attending this meeting in person. This is just a little too far for us to travel.



We would also like to thank Councillor Crawford and other people who are there who have worked hard to bring this meeting together to highlight some issues facing community councils across the Highlands.

We represent a community council in the far north coast of the Scottish mainland. Our area includes the famous Dunnett and Duncansby Heads, John O'Groats and the late Queen Mother's former Castle of May.

It is a scattered community which generally relies on tourism and farming as the main industries. We welcome tens of thousands of visitors each year, but we have a good local community with active development trusts seeking to improve the area for both locals and visitors alike.

One major problem is shared with many other areas, and that is depopulation. Our local plans recognise this, and lack of good long-term job opportunities and poor public transport links feed into this. However, we do attract people back to the area through our natural environment and clean air and slower pace. That said, we are not, as a community council, automatically opposed to energy development. We have just off our coastline, the pioneering Mey Gen Tidal energy scheme. We have several wind farms in operation. As a community council, we have traditionally weighed up the pros and cons of these developments, listen to what local people tell us, and will often take a neutral stance if that is appropriate.

We did not object to the Mey Bess (thats battery energy storage scheme) which we felt, for various reasons, was not appropriate to our area, but we do take each scheme on its merits. However, the recent influx of applications, mostly piecemeal has made it very difficult for us to look in any detail at each one, or understand the bigger picture.

We are a small group of volunteers, often with many other responsibilities. The need to read through 100-page documents, attend meetings with developers, and then write, if needed, detailed objections to proposals might be okay as a one-off but when it has several applications within the same year, it becomes beyond our limited capabilities.

From our slowly... from our lowly position, there seems to be no one... no one single energy strategy just a year-by-year, scheme by scheme advancement with very little benefit showing for the local communities.

We pay the highest prices in the UK for our electricity, and that annoys many of our constituents when they see the energy being generated is stored almost in their backyard.

We come to this meeting with open mind... open-minded, but also, in a little way, heartened that so many other community councils share some of our concerns and want to look for solutions that are not detrimental to the environment or economies of our local communities and that can deliver real benefits.

[APPLAUSE]



HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Can now invite Invergordon Community Council?

[Mic issue – discussion in the hall]

SALLY NORTHERN [?] (Invergordon):

First of all, thank you for organising this event. Very much needed.

Invergordon Community Council is slightly different in that we host the Port of Cromarty Firth rather than the port hosting the town so whilst I acknowledge that we don't have wind farms technically on our doorstep we are subject to, potentially, transportation and the impacts that that has.

So, as a community council, we never ever imagined that we would need to monitor and prepare responses to planning applications across the wider Highlands particularly if the component parts are coming in through the port of Cromarty Firth as a green port. I'd like to thank the Highland Council for that piece of work that they've done on the number of wind farms. It's quite a staggering number.

Some of the issues that I kind of just flagged up are visual impact of bigger and bigger turbines on communities that are some considerable distance away from the actual wind farms.

Battery storage facilities are also flagging up concerns. Our belief is that community councils need to come together to support each other and respond appropriately to all applications - regardless of where they are.

[APPLAUSE]

We are a wider Highland community, I think we all have to stand together, and I'm just going to acknowledge a few points. It's some of my colleague, Community Councillors have made here we are all volunteers and I speak for Invergordon Community Council we are only a small group, and my neighbouring community council, Saltburn, I can see here, we all work full-time as well and some of these documents that we're being asked to consider are not just hundreds of pages - they're thousands of pages...and you're kind of looking at it, and you think, I'm gonna have to read this - what am I missing?

You know, the way planning applications are... and community councils are there by statute but we have no statutory powers, so we have to be listened to and my concern is that sometimes community councils are treated as a tick-box exercise. So the fact that we need to come together and even respond to applications that are not in our area we need to have our voices heard properly, and represent our communities. We need to work together.

So, just finally, thank you for organizing this, guys. I think it's long overdue.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you so much. Now over to Kiltarlity Community Council, please.

SUSAN OGSTON (Kiltarlity):

Are we good? Great, unlike Helen, I don't have a soft Scottish voice, Highland voice, so you're fine.

Probably don't need a mic. Um, just quickly before I read out my statement, I would just like to say a quick thank you on behalf of the Kiltarlity Community Council to Cameron, because this is a massive undertaking to bring all these people in. He'll recorded everybody that's come in, all the emails that's been sent out, so a massive thank you to Cameron.

[APPLAUSE]

And also, a huge thank you to Helen for chairing the event as well.

[APPLAUSE]

Our statement is pretty brief, so I'll get started. On the 5th of August 2020, our fellow community councillor, the late Bill Fraser, received the first notification of what was going to be called the Beaully Reinforcement Project, since that day, our Community Council has been inundated with public inquiries, emails, meetings, and a cascade of planning applications.

We've had to navigate a maze of outdated maps and dense documentation. Only recently, thanks to Helen and some long-overdue support from the Highland Council has any meaningful assistance begun to reach us. Sadly, for many of our efforts, it feels like the support has come too late.

We are now being asked to sacrifice our way of life, our traditions, and the very, very fabric of our communities for the sake of a distant goal. But to what cost?

Let us be clear, we are not against sustainability or progress. We are not NIMBYs. We care deeply about our environment and our future but we also believe that progress must respect local voices, local needs, and local circumstances.

[APPLAUSE]

Too often, the Net Zero agenda overlooks the real and immediate concerns of rural communities. It disregards the impact on our local economies, our jobs, and our quality of life. As community councils, we are on the front lines. We hear the concerns of our residents. We see the effects of these policies on the ground, and we are fighting, and literally we are fighting, for the future of our communities.



In Kiltarlity, the proposed Fanellan development threatens to change our village forever. If SSEN is allowed to use our roads as a thoroughfare, the character and charm of our community will be irreversibly altered but this is not about aesthetics, it's about our health, our safety, and our way of life.

[APPLAUSE]

The number of community councils represented here today is a testament to our shared commitment.

Now we call on our councillors and politicians at local and national levels to match that commitment.

Let us stand together and let us make our voices heard.

Thank you.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you so much – Torridon and Kinlochewe Community Council, I think we have a statement from them to be read out, and again Cameron, if you can kindly do the honours. Thank you.

CAMERON KEMP (reading Torridon and Kinlochewe):

Okay, thank you. This is from Caroline Hamilton, Chair of Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council.

This is to wish everyone at the convention the very best from Torridon & Kinlochewe Community Council.

We are sorry to be unable to join you. We believe it is absolutely essential that local people should be involved at the highest level within local and national government when issues such as the major proposed renewable energy projects for the Highlands are discussed.

These projects could have a devastating impact on people's lives and livelihoods not to mention our precious landscape. It is therefore vital that communities are listened to and concerns within communities addressed.

Put simply, without local voices, such as those represented at this convention, we fear our democracy... very democracy is under threat.

Best regards to you for organizing what I'm sure will be a great event.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

So now over to Halkirk & District Community Council.

STUART MILLS (Halkirk & District):



Thank you very much.

My name's Stuart Mills, I'm the chair of the Halkirk & District Community Council.

We all recognise the importance of climate change and working together to develop a realistic and achievable solution. In acting to protect the environment from the impact of climate change we also need to recognise the effects of renewable energy schemes so we don't damage our unique and valued environment at the same time.

Caithness and especially the Halkirk area is under siege from developments which we must remind ourselves are business opportunities designed to make a profit.

[APPLAUSE]

In coming up with a plan, we need to value our current quality of life and provide reliable and cheap power to all users, recognising our local environment and housing stock. Many of the Government supported solutions (UK and Scottish) are not suitable for rural areas: EV transport and Air Source heat pumps.

Currently we are far from this, and we don't have an agreed and balanced plan for developing renewable energy developments.

Our current situation in Halkirk is that we have 42 wind turbines built and operating and a further 45 in the planning process. About the energy storage schemes based on lithium-ion technology (which is not the best) we have 1.4 GW of applications in process between Mybster and Spittal - we don't even have a full-time fire brigade in Caithness.

Infrastructure-wise. We now have an accumulation of substations around Bannerkirk with high voltage cable routes across the county and overhead power lines.

Our major issues are noise issues, access across local roads, we're now getting red lights in the sky because the turbines are getting so high in a rural environment.

We now have a UNESCO World Heritage Site, which has now got wind farm proposal in the middle of it, believe it or not and other developments alongside.

There is little community buy-in and a recent development near my home, there's been no engagement with the community council or the residents at all.

With the standard of planning applications is also a considerable concern in the fact that they are very, very poor and especially with the Tormsdale application near my house there's been no construction transport management plan submitted to demonstrate they can get the construction materials to the site and that's now been proposed by another wind farm development, because somebody else has already thought of it.

The key observations that we've got at the moment are the planning process is not suitable for energy developments within the area and we would like to see an integrated



plan to show all developments to support a any planning obligation that goes forward...and if you look at the Bannerkirk issue with the substations, they only show one - they don't show the other two substations to go with it or the cable runs that go across the county.

We also consider that the planning applications are poor and require several iterations to be fully assessed - often these are rejected and resubmitted with minor changes. All at the expense of the general public and the planning authority. We believe that we should have a single pass funded application via the Highland Council and if the developer wishes to reapply, they should fund it themselves.

[APPLAUSE]

We currently feel let down and ignored in the favour of developers.

Current generation capacity far exceeds our local and regional energy needs in favour of profit, and also some technical solutions which are rather dodgy.

Our third action is the planning applications must include a suitable technical appraisal of what is being put forward and that's currently not there. The high-level strategy needs to be developed in an acceptable plan to deliver reliable, cheap power for the benefit of local communities and the protection of the environment. Net zero needs to be fully developed around a balanced solution.

We also need to make sure that we retain the ability to have public local inquiries where necessary.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you, Stuart. Now on to Kilmorack Community Council, please.

ANDY FRASER (Kilmorack):

So the Kilmorack area, which I represent, has been the centre of numerous energy-related proposals basically since the Second World War ranging in size from dams, substations to battery storage systems and where the community has opposed these, we've generally had to fight these alone.

Things seem to be changing now and although we're not quite at the centre of SSEN's latest batch of proposals we as a community are still very much affected by the seemingly endless stream of developments which SSEN and others are proposing to take forward. All of which appear to be short-term, with no overall long-term strategy.

So, very heartening to see so many similar affected communities coming together today and taking a united stand against both ongoing and proposed developments. Together we stand a much better chance of success in having our voices heard and getting our message across to government to take a step back from the current headlong charge into the destruction of our highland communities and landscape.



There's currently an incessant drive, a headlong rush to achieve set timescales but does Scotland really need to be the first to achieve these? I would suggest not.

While we accept that there is an issue regarding climate change which we can't deny. We do not agree with the unrealistic deadlines being set at government level.

As these alternative energy schemes are being progressed there will undoubtedly be further technological developments over the years, and some of the earlier schemes implemented may soon be overtaken by these developments and/or government policies and in relation to government policy, a case in point. Is a recent announcement from Westminster that another nuclear reactor is to be progressed in England. So, will we then still require to transfer so much energy down south? Because a lot of this infrastructure that has been set up at the moment is not for local people, it's to transfer energy down south.

We therefore suggest that it's time for the governments to pause and take stock.

Stop and think, introduce a moratorium and such for their large-scale developments in Scotland.

[APPLAUSE]

To be absolutely clear, we as communities are not against progress and we accept the reality of and the issues associated with climate change but the sheer volume of recent and current applications many of which are simultaneous and the tight timescales involved in turning these around do not always give us as communities the opportunity to fully review and respond to them in an appropriate and timely manner

And the driver behind many of these initiatives appears to be greed and profit for companies, rather than energy sustainability for the Highland people.

[APPLAUSE]

As community councillors we are unpaid volunteers with other commitments and demands but as politicians continue to ignore public concerns we currently appear to be the only voice that the local communities have.

So, I have one final thought for consideration - Scottish Government elections are due to take place next year. If the currently elected politicians are going to continue to ignore us maybe it is time for this and current groups to put forward our own candidates for election next year

[APPLAUSE]

To further emphasize just how important this issue is to us all and how serious we are taking it.



[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you, Andy. Now over to Contin Community Council, please.

JOHN HEATHCOTE (Contin):

Hi, I'm John Heathcote, Secretary of Contin Community Council. We've got the overhead power line scheduled to go through our patch, and the Arnish to Beaully line also goes through our patch. Lots of wind farms, and all the traffic that this generates has got to go up a road which is... basically not fit for present purposes. It was built sometime before 1870. But I've submitted a statement, but I want to pick up some things from what's been said.

Although we're... represent only 70-something thousand people. We are actually a third of Scotland's land area.

The UK's current plan for energy is not to have a plan. There's one or two ideas to 2030, and they involve some really impracticable assumptions. There are some ideas to 2035 that I can't make add up, and Scottish Government's going for 2045, but there's nothing to 2045.

Scottish Government, a couple of years ago, published a draft strategy it's politics aside, it's a really bad document, you can't get any numbers out of it, and it's not finalized or accepted.

The UK government has proposed new permitting legislation for Scotland. It has to go through the UK for legislative reasons but it's not yet passed, and it could radically change the way in which these projects are consented but they'll all have happened before it.

So sadly, I believe 2030 isn't achievable.

For much of my recent life, I've actually worked with issues around climate change. It's real, it's urgent but actually, the UK is a tiny proportion of total CO2 emissions. We should not break our country for them.

[APPLAUSE]

I see we have the potential to lose, lose, lose, lose.

We lose our landscape and our entire way of life. There's nothing about renewables that guarantees reliable electricity without huge amounts of storage being built. And there is no current technology to do that - there's a Royal Society document that discusses it.

Most of these wind farms and transmission lines are owned by overseas companies, so the profits actually go out of the UK.

[APPLAUSE]

And by trying to drive projects faster than they will go, they will cost much more than they would do more slowly. You can't buy the wire, you can't buy the transformers, you can't buy the converter stations unless you pay top dollar.

Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you so much. We have got about another 5 minutes for this part, so I'm gonna move on to Strathdearn Community Council, please.

JAMES DUNCAN (Strathdearn):

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen. Can you hear me okay, yeah?

I'll just start off by saying we did a community survey not too long ago and the overwhelming majority was against the wind farm.

So we'll start with this. At this very moment in Strathdearn have 13 wind farms surrounding our community, but we also have another 6 in the pipeline bringing the total number to 19 wind farms surrounding our beautiful, idyllic landscape.

The community council has had to deal with all the complexities and rules of planning to understand how we go about putting out putting our concerns to the ECU and Highland Council. In doing so, we have incurred costs and a great deal of time and effort to respond professionally to these Section 36 applications. All in the space of the last 6 months.

When these wind farms are all up and running our week glen which is 22 miles long and about 6 miles wide will produce enough power to run around 70% of all houses in Scotland. All this, well, we pay more for our energy than anywhere in Europe, and watch almost helplessly while our beautiful flora and fauna are irreparably damaged.

All this without including the dominant and unsightly power lines. Pylons, transmission stations, battery storage facilities, and a lack of, in my opinion, local democracy.

We must, as the Highland Community Council Convention, get together to bring back democracy to the Highland power grab and stop the destruction of our world-renowned scenery, quiet way of life and protect the wildlife and wild lands that are iconic to our highlands. Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Now, Nairn River CC.

Maybe not... okay, we have a statement, a full statement. We will publish it after.

Okay, and Dornie and District.

LINDA BROOKS (Dornie & District):

Okay, hi. Linda Brooks, representing Dornea District Council. Firstly, I'd like to say that we're not against future renewables, and we actually welcome net-zero ventures but like others, consultation with local people and deployment of these are both areas of concern.

However, as a principal we would like to see zonal pricing for electricity. We currently pay amongst the highest rates for energy in the UK despite having a hydro station within our community area.

Our experience is that until this year's 80th anniversary of hydro stations there's been no recognized community benefit from having this infrastructure in our area and we ask that community benefit which should be significant, managed and distributed using the greatest level of subsidiarity should apply to existing as well as future renewables development.

And that's the statement from Dornie.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you very much. Now to Kirkhill and Bunchrew Community Council, please.

CAMERON KEMP (Kirkhill & Bunchrew):

Like, you...so our committee is facing multiple proposals for renewable energy infrastructure on an industrial scale, with projects intended to transition the UK's energy capacity and drive the green transition but the Highlands and Islands are not the principal beneficiary as many people have said today.

Under threat locally are some of the most remote, beautiful, and fragile landscapes, places that retain a visceral connection to our cultural heritage the bustling village of Beaul, the rural communities where traditions are strong, Kiltarlity, Fanellan, Kilmorack, Newtonhill, Cabrich, Kirkhill to name a few. These developments are a direct threat to those communities and their natural environment, our heritage, and our biggest industry, that is tourism.

We are being told to sacrifice this. We are being told that we have to bear this. We are being told now all of this is for our benefit. There's been no economic impact assessment of the cost to our communities.

As far back as 2019, Scotland produced significantly more wind energy than required domestically despite the surplus, renewable energy infrastructure continues to disproportionately target the Highlands, sterilising vast swathes of land, including vital peatlands, forestry and farmland We currently have amongst the highest electricity prices in Europe.



We are told of community benefits, but this does not equate to what is to be taken away from us. The negative impact on families, people's mental health. Local businesses and the value of homes has not been addressed or properly compensated for.

The public consultation by Scottish and Southern Energy Networks.. Electricity Networks promoting their schemes has not been meaningful. Piecemeal plans to divide your communities. Instead, could create... these could create, instead, a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to offer something that would benefit and revitalize our rural communities to reverse the trend of depopulation and an aging demographic and offer a future for our youth.

We need our elected members to support and protect our communities at national level given that community consultation is inadequate, and local democracy is being ignored.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, I'm gonna ask just two more community councils, and then I'm gonna have to close this bit to an end. So, Ardross Community Council, please, Sheila.

SHEILA CAMPBELL-LLOYD (Ardross):

Good afternoon, my name's Sheila Campbell-Lloyd, and I represent Ardross Community Council.

Ardross actually appointed a planning lead because we actually have 15 live ECU planning applications in planning at the moment - 15. We have a very small glen, and we will literally be surrounded by turbines...hundreds... well, there'll be nearly about 200 by the time if they all get approved.

But I want to do justice to our Community Council by reading our Community Council's statement.

The Ardross community are feeling overwhelmed whilst the Ceislein Wind Farm adjacent to Fyrish is the most notable and a red line for our community we currently have 7 wind farm schemes in scoping or planning around our area, added to the 5 that are already in place or being constructed.

All of the wind farm applications show night-lit turbines with sizes ranging from 180 meters to 250 meters. These are the largest wind farms, the height of wind farms in the whole of mainland UK.

Just to give you a comparison of that, if you cast your eye over the Black Isle and look at the Mount Eagle transmissions mast on your way home today they'll be 7 meters taller than that. That transmission's mast is lit every night so will these wind farms be. Our entire glen will literally be surrounded by flashing lights.



Furthermore, we have 8 battery farms, 1 hydrogen plant, and the Spittal to Beaully transmission line, which cuts straight through our Glen.

All of this literally surrounding a small community of circa 600 people.

Who are shouting as loud as we can. But... I don't know why I feel quite emotional right now.

But the public consultation...

[APPLAUSE]

For those of you who know me in this audience, you know that I'm not susceptible to tears - so it's a strength of feeling.

Each public consultation exercise feels like a tick box exercise. Easy statements roll off their tongues – “Your views will be taken into account”... “the view from your house won't be that bad”. You can't... you can't hear them. Honestly, you can't hear them... “Your house price won't be affected”... and the “lights at night, they won't be that bad”.

Ardross as a community is not against renewable energy, and we're not... we currently have five in the Glen. We just want it to be a balanced and sensible and a coherent process A strategy that looks at the accumulative impact on communities rather than race to build whatever they can while the opportunity for profits are high.

We call the Scottish Government to listen to the voices of the Highlands.

Enough is enough.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, so I'm going to ask Garve Community Council if you can please... you'll be the last Community Council that we go through in this session. Okay, thank you.

SADIE MICHAELA-HARRIS (Garve & District):

I'm Sadie from Garve District Community Council.

I want to raise, on behalf of all of us, the failing of the ECU because what's happening with the ECU is they're not getting our objections onto their portal in good time.

We know, we know from the recent, um, wind farm application at Carn Fearn there are over a thousand objections gone in. They've managed to get 50 on there. The closing date was the 4th of June. We've been in touch, my colleagues and myself, members of our community, thank Sharon, have been in touch with them, and they've said it's not a statutory obligation to publish our objections.



That is a failing, it's maladministration, and it needs changing, and it needs changing quickly!

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, um, now, just one other CC would like to speak. So, Strathnairn, please.

PHIL MACKINTOSH (Strathnairn):

Okay, I'm Phil MacKintosh, Chair of the Strathnairn Community.

We are inundated with wind farms, pump hydro schemes, and basically don't know which direction to turn.

Every month at our Community Council meetings we have planning applications landing on our desks, 1000-page documents, and I echo what everybody says, we're all volunteers and expected to have time and energy to do this. It's unacceptable, and it needs to change.

We're in the process at the moment of a wind farm being put forward to be situated on top of the hill which you will all get to see from wherever you stay, because it's going to be ridiculous.

If you think Mount Eagle is a high mast ..this is worse, and an it's just crazy. So the only way that we can change things is if we all stand together and speak as one.

Because we're not being listened to it at present.

[APPLAUSE]

And it's the pace at these things are coming. It's non-stop. It's just crazy. Our roads... infrastructure - we currently have one wind farm running a lorry every 6 minutes and it's only going to get worse. You know, our kids are going through their school life remembering, going out to the school bus, worried about being run over. We've got the older population on their last years worried about it being run down? It's not a good balance.

So, thank you.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

I said one more, but there is another one.

So, Strathglass Community Council as well, so then... you would hear from everyone on the table, the top table, which is all of the community councils that have I hosted this event today, please.



Thank you.

HUMPHREY CLARKE (Strathglass):

Hi, I'm Humphrey Clark. I'm chairman of Strathglass Community Council and I share with others the frustration of the SSEN consultations, which consist of lots of glossy maps, inaccurate and descriptions of what they're going to do, regardless of what we say.

[APPLAUSE]

Like other communities we are surrounded by wind farms and applications for many more. Even more alarming is an application for a 60 acre at Bingally which is home to Black Grouse and water voles - supposedly protected species. It will overlook the adjacent historic village of Tomich and be clearly visible to walkers on the mountains opposite. In the planning application, this is dismissed as having a minor effect on tourism and local residents.

The cumulative effect of the construction traffic alone for all these sites will destroy tourism for anyone who wants to experience tranquility and wild beauty.

The infrastructure plan, as stated by the government, is intended to decarbonise the grid and provide cheap, reliable electricity as we, the taxpayers and users of this energy, will have to pay for all of this in some way or other it seems reasonable to question how this massive destruction of our environment is actually achieving those aims.

For those outside the ivory palaces of government it's clear that wind is not reliable and cannot be controlled to meet demand.

We had 3 weeks of very low wind in January, when UK electricity demand was high. On the 8th of January, when the UK demand was 41 GW wind provided only 17.5% of that. Which, incidentally, would have more than powered the whole of Scotland.

Imports from the continent provide 13%, and two gas-fired power stations were fired up specially to cover the peak demand and paid 50 times the normal rate to do so. Had a Russian ghost ship been in action we would have had a blackout much worse than the ones in Spain earlier this year.

Wind is unreliable, we do not need any more turbines. Most of the nation, especially industry, actually want cheap, reliable energy - never mind the greenery.

Wind turbines cannot be a cheap source of power because the operators have to be guaranteed high rates that will compensate them for their investment in plant which does not run continuously or consistently. Furthermore, all wind power has to be backed up with other means of generation that is otherwise idle, wasted capital expenditure for which we have to pay, in some way I remind you.

[APPLAUSE]

As has been previously mentioned, battery energy storage and pumped storage are not effective at backing up wind because they can only provide power for hours not days or weeks. That is not the solution.

Whether or not you believe that decarbonizing the grid will actually improve anything for the climate, which clearly is changing. It is not unreasonable to ask SSE how much carbon will be saved as a result of this massive destruction which in itself emits vast quantities of carbon? And therefore, what's the carbon payback period? And in the same view, we've asked, what's the financial payback from the improved efficiencies? Astonishingly, today SSE have declined to answer that. Whether that is because they don't know, haven't thought of it, or whether it's too embarrassing to admit, I don't know.

[APPLAUSE]

Regardless of the above. The UK only emits some 2% of the world's CO₂. If we throw the unbelievable amounts of money at Net Zero and achieve it the result on climate change, I regret, will be imperceptible and unmeasurable because none of the major potential polluters have made any significant commitment to Net Zero.

Our governments are apparently prepared to sacrifice our irreplaceable natural beauty, our businesses, homes, tranquility, mental health for this simple objective. A fraction of this proposed expenditure devoted to mitigation, such as improving existing housing to... deal with the changing climate, flood prevention, maybe even some firefighting aircraft to deal with forest fires would have far more benefit than throwing money into a bottomless Net-Zero pit.

For anyone who's listening, the solution is not wind turbines, but conventional, reliable, local generation which avoids huge substations, pylons in beautiful places, it reduces transmission losses...and, very important for me, is much less vulnerable to attack by hostile forces.

[APPLAUSE]

I'm an army veteran. I watch with great interest what the Russians are doing in Ukraine, and the Ukrainians have discovered that big power stations, big substations, are hazard. We have to live with a reality. We are in a very hostile world, and those are things that will be hit. They only have to take out 3 substations and take out almost all of the wind energy from Scotland. It's ludicrous, this plan. If we must have...

[APPLAUSE]

If we must have green generation, tidal power is absolutely predictable for hundreds of years in advance and will actually fit with pump storage.

So, we totally support a moratorium on the whole project until a quantified end solution and rational route to it is agreed.



[APPLAUSE]

[PART 2 – FURTHER STATEMENTS FROM AUDIENCE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, on to the next part. Okay, can you still hear me at the back?

Okay, good stuff. Okay, I'm gonna bring that part of this presentation of Community Council statements to an end. We're going to move on to the next part.

And that is about what are the protections that you need, that you are looking for from our Highland decision makers and our national decision makers.

So what are we looking for?

Holyrood 2026 is just round the corner. as I said earlier, you collectively represent [32] thousand residents in the Highlands that, interestingly, equates to a constituency. So, that's a powerful platform for you. I really think it is.

And, so I'm gonna open this up to the floor, and really, for anyone, please, if you're going to speak, tell us who you are, hold the mic up, speak up loudly.

And, uh, so that is very much about what is it that you are looking for, you know concretely, protections, support. - What are you looking for? Thank you.

BILL LOCKYER (Creich):

Hello, everyone. My name's Bill Lockyer, I'm from Creich Community Council and for those of you who don't know where that is, it's the Kyle of Sutherland. I'm otherwise known as "Battery Bill" because I do not like lithium-ion batteries.

I've got a number of points that I need to make. I'm picking up from what people have said.

On the Energy Consents Unit side - they never pick up issues, they omit... the developers omit issues that are in the Environmental Impact Assessment Regulations which were prepared by Scottish ministers. Those are, therefore, within the control of the Scottish Government. They miss out, major accidents and disasters. They miss out air quality and they miss out population and human health. No regulator takes a point in this whatsoever. The health and safety executive are not involved. They consider lithium-ion batteries as "articles", not "substances" so the planning regulations on hazardous substances do not apply.

It's ludicrous.

Now, what is a thermal runaway in a battery energy storage system if not a major accident? They scope that out, the developers scope it out, they provide no evidence in



their scoping reports to show that it should be scoped out, let alone any scientific evidence. As an industrial chemist, I want to see that scientific evidence, because there is none that has been produced.

[APPLAUSE]

I'd like to come on to traffic as well. I live on a single-track road, the A837 and the developers, and it's 3 of them at the last count, have decided that a vehicle can travel along this single-track road at... One every 2 ¼ seconds for a 12-hour period. We need the ECU to take a dose of reality to traffic control.

Another issue I've got as well is peat. I did study peat for my degree but not how to conserve it, how to burn it. We then had peat-powered fire stations. So I know a little bit about peat.

Thermal runaways can get to 660 degrees Centigrade. Peat ground fires can start at 300 degrees Centigrade. There was a peat fire in Caithness in 2019 that consumed 22 square miles of peat and produced 700,000 Tons of CO2 equivalent. Imagine that in the Kyle of Sutherland.

The next thing is the greenhouse gas calculations. The Energy Consents Unit - well, putting it this way - their carbon calculator. Is worse than useless.

[APPLAUSE]

There's errors in methodology, they use standards and default figures. That were based on a one wind farm - 15 years ago. So, I just don't trust their Energy Consent Unit at all in terms of picking up issues that they should pick up.

And the last point I've got... battery energy storage systems. Well, as a veteran as well, I consider them as prime targets for enemy action.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you ... this lady here.

LOREINE THOMSON (Nairn River):

My name's Loreine Thomson, I'm from Nairn River Community Council.

I've been involved in planning for about 20-odd years. In answer to Helen's suggestion, how do we get this moved on so that the communities are listened to? And I suggest everybody, and I'm quite happy to send this around.



The Scottish Government has sent out a proportionality of planning assessments. I shall read you a small section of it. So sit... sit down and think very carefully about this.

And it says... “The costs associated with preparing and supporting information and assessment and particularly where this involves appointing consultants some developers may be unable to secure finance for their proposal until they've received planning permission. In such circumstances where they have a cash flow it may be helpful for the planning authority and the applicant developers to discuss the timing of certain information requirements and whether, in some cases, [...hold onto your hats here...] there could be appropriately back-loaded through conditions suspensive or otherwise attached to retrospective permissions.”

And it goes on to say they spell out the when, the where, the why, that they can actually now have these back-loaded assessments. So think about what we've got in front of us.

Now, that's point one.

Point two... point two is, I get the chief planner's letters. Recently, they have set out a new one and it's about the planning support hub, the National Planning Hub.

Here's another paragraph for you to absorb -

“The hub's support Included supporting a local authority with the provision and funding of expertise to assess technical support on hydrogen. We also provide funding to enable sharing of resources within and across local authorities. We are currently working with a range of stakeholders and environmental consultancy firms to create specialist guidance for battery storage energy systems. Other proposals and ideas are being considered and these will be tailored to support and tailored to meet your local authority needs.”

So that's another one. And my last comment is... in the Chief Planning Officer letter and this is going back to April and it says:

“Whilst proposals for much of the large-scale infrastructure required to achieve net zero is considered by the ECU, Applications for stand-alone substations are now to be made to planning authorities under the Planning Act. The use of suspense of conditions to secure submission and implementation of the schemes such as compensatory planting and biodiversity measures can be appropriate. These can be done through a test of the conditions set out in circular 4, 1998”

Well, I think everyone will agree, we have moved on since 1998.

The whole point of all of this coming from the Scottish Government is they want these developments. They are now telling local authorities If they haven't done their planning assessments well we can put them in at the end.

They're also telling them the when, the where and the what...what do they actually have to send ...the bare minimum. We don't want that we want our voices heard and this the



Scottish Government and the Chief Planner basically telling the authorities that they have been given a bit green light to basically stretch the boundaries in order to get all of these things through.

So reading all this legislation is what everybody needs to do because that is what they'll use in public enquiries against anything we put forward in judicial reviews because this has come out as their letters.

Thank you.

DAVE CHISHOLM (Lybster, Latheron & Clyth):

I'm Dave Chisholm, I'm here representing Lybster Latheron & Clyth Community Council.

In terms of what protections I think we need ours are quite aligned with what was proposed by Halkirk there.

Was that, firstly, there needs to be some integrated planning process, taking account of the conglomeration of these plants put in.

Secondly, that planning applications are often of poor quality, with early iterations of applications being rejected as incomplete or not... not... you know, fully formed. but because they are funded by the taxpayer for... this basically allows developers to iterate and improve poor applications to the minimum acceptable standard at the taxpayer's expense. This needs to be stopped, and one round of planning funded by the taxpayer only.

Further, I believe the common practice of applying for extensions to wind farms, once an initial application is granted should be looked at with contempt and rejected out of hand. So there needs to be some, you know, single application only funded by the taxpayer.

And finally, communities are being ignored in favour of developers and government priorities. Installed generation capacity as discussed far exceeds general requirements therefore there is no technical reason to install further wind farms.

Planning applications should be accompanied by some form of suitable technical assessment of a proposal explaining purpose and the need for it to be constructed.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, another speaker here, please.

KEN BROWN (Glengarry):

Thank you. Hi, Ken Brown of Glengarry Community Council.

Just what everybody else said.



[APPLAUSE]

Plus just a little piece of information on what could... we're kind of well advanced down the Skye Reinforcement Line and Coire Glas Project. We're not good at it - we've just been there a little bit longer.

A couple of mentions were made of works beginning in advance on Skye and other places.

Yes, very much so. The promises that were made in the application for a Skye Reinforcement Line have now been made conditions of that consent but the works that are going ahead are at variance with these promises and conditions. Now, how that happens is they are allowed, as "permitted developments" in advance of the project and the responsibility for that lies entirely with Highland Council.

So our debates, we have a big debate against what's going on at ECU, UK, and Scottish Government level but we also have to look to our local councillors to stand up for what is going on as permitted development along the roads.

We just have news - it's our great point - we've got UK's longest dead end. We actually think that's an advantage. It's going to close from July 7th until the end of February next year.

[Audience Member – Can you repeat that please?]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Sorry, what was that? You have the longest dead end? We didn't... I don't think we quite caught that.

KEN BROWN (Glengarry):

We have the longest dead-end road in the UK, and before this development this little community at the end, there's only about a dozen people live there, Kinloch Hourn.

The road there will close from Monday to Friday, 9 to 5... sorry, Monday to Thursday, 9 till 5, no amnesties, and on a Friday, 9 till 12.30, for all traffic from July 7th until the end of February next year. Now, the consent for that, and all the impact on tourism and everything, the consent from that was Highland Council.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, I see a hand up right at the back, please.

LYNDSEY WARD (Communities B4 Power Companies - CB4PC):

I'm Lindsay Ward, I'm from Communities B4 Power Companies. We started our group when SSEN dropped their bombshell in March 2023.

What I was interested in... was it battery Bill who stood up and spoke? I love Battery Bill, yes. You were talking about what had been scoped out. What we found out that they've scoped out your human health - SSEN For Fanellan, for Banniskirk, for the overhead lines. They've scoped out your human health. They've also scoped out electromagnetic fields. radio frequency interference, major accidents and disasters, air quality and climate. They don't want to address it in their environmental impact assessments and their planning applications.

So, that's been agreed with Highland Council and also, the Scottish Government for the Section 37 and Section 36 applications.

So, what do we think about that? They're just not interested whether we get sick, whether we breathe in all their dust, all their diesel fumes, the electromagnetic fields. Cancer clusters, possibly.

When we were looking at this, we also came across something called cesium-137. I don't know if anybody's ever heard of that.

[Audience Member: We have]

We found it by a fluke, and what it was, it was the fallout from Chernobyl. The Highlands were very badly impacted, the Highlands and Islands and it's in the peat. It's still in the peat. It's just about 30cm down. And yet SSEN and no-wind farm developer has to check if they're digging it up. If they dig it up, it gets into our waterways and into the atmosphere.

So, we've asked SSEN about it but they don't know anything about it. They haven't been asked to look for it.

Why aren't we looking for it... even if they don't find it, we know it's there before they start digging it up and we have private water supplies.

Why aren't they looking for it? It just seems to me that we're collateral damage. They don't care about the residents of the Highlands. They just want to get their big energy rolling on through.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, I see one lady, please, if you would like to speak, please.

RHONA COOGAN (Broadford and Strath):

Hello! Probably don't need the mic, because unbeknownst to most of you, my official career is an opera singer. Yes, yet I find myself as a Skye Community Council Vice Chairperson currently.

I would just like to reiterate what other community councils have been saying, and for some context our community council area is Broadford and Strath, which is the south of



Skye. A linear village of, say, about 1,300 people. You could call it the "Gateway to Skye". We have a crumbling road, A87, no pavement. I know because I have an infant of one year just turned one. So I walk this pavement on the daily. It is not fit for any indivisible loads to be trundling past. So that is my general review living on that road.

Currently planning applications in our Ward include the overhead line, two workers' camps - door stopping at either end of the village of, say, 1,200 people, one camp of 400 people, the other camp of 400 people, so we'll see how that ends with adding two-thirds of our population to the local village, with the only supermarket, a Co-O and a petrol station which is frequently empty. So hopefully they will be driving electric vehicles.

We also have a wind farm off the back of a Swedish developer on the brackish moorlands, a battery storage park. We also have the Highland Council themselves planning to store or rent space on the local airfield so that all of the developers can pay them to store the turbine components - only problem being that that is our only landing point for our emergency helicopter for the local hospital on the A87.

We've also got a substation. Last time I checked, I think it was on the verge of about 12 football fields worth - just next to the community campsite there.

I'd just like to reiterate what Susan was saying at Kiltarlity Community Council. We deserve safety in our communities.

We deserve not to have our way of life trashed

I'd like to say that we have had a huge impact on the mental health of all volunteers in various community organisations and community council ...and I would say, obviously, want something done, ask a busy person... I, myself, have a small business in Broadford, employing local people. I'm also a young... or I have a young child, I wouldn't say my young mum. Um, and I have... people pulling me in directions purely because I am willing to speak up for my area.

We're at a tug of war on the daily with the Community Council, because people are inviting us to engage with us - which is, as we know, absolute nonsense. There is currently talks for a Skye and Raasay-wide community benefit fund pot and we don't know whether to sign or not to sign, because there's such differing of opinions whether we get the money or we don't get the money.

Just a couple more points.

We'd recently submitted a legal objection against the Sodexo workers' camp for 400 people, which is actually on a piece of land, which is currently a tree nursery, by the way, just add that in there. The only reason we were able to send such a 54-point legal objection was because of an anonymous donation from a community member of £3,500 pounds.

I wouldn't know where to start with that sort of thing.



Now, just one more thing. The naivety and the ignorance of the local people, I know this because I have a burger van so I see the workers of all sorts of people on the daily, is just vast. The local people simply do not understand the effect that this will have on their businesses, because they're too busy turning over their Airbnbs.

Okay? So we need to raise our voices, and we need the local people to realize that when that A87 is clogged with a vehicle passing every 2 seconds, they won't have a job. They won't want to live here and they will move away!

[APPLAUSE]

So, with that in mind, I would say we definitely need a pause, and I'm happy to say that on behalf of Broadford and Strath Community Council and I think, just to top it off, we should all organise a march down the road to Holyrood.

And give them a piece of our mind.

[APPLAUSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Difficult to top that one. Well done, Rhona. I think... we have a lot more hands now going up, and if you would like to speak, please, yes?... and then one more person up there.

AUDIENCE MEMBER(?):

Can you hear me okay? Yeah. I'm not from the Highlands but I believe the Highlands are sacred and special and I've travelled all over the world, I've been very fortunate, but the Highlands are one of the most beautiful, spectacular places in the world.

[APPLAUSE]

And Scotland created the modern world.

We had the Enlightenment, we revolutionized the world and we should have a democracy here, which we do not have.

[APPLAUSE]

What we saw in Strathpeffer, and all over the country, is local community councils, local areas being ignored for this Net-Zero rush. As the gentleman pointed out there the wind farms are... We have 2% or 1%, the UK of all the world's carbon emissions. Scotland is about 0.3% and nothing we do is really going to benefit the world in a massive way, and we're destructing our landscapes, we're destroying our landscapes and our country.



The only way I think we're going to get a democracy is by doing something ourselves, starting our own party together and every... the last Friday of every single month we have a vote on the 10 most prevalent issues. You decide what is best for your country.

So, we're going to look at starting off a new political party, whether it's in time for the next election, we'll see but you should be running the country. You're smarter than Ed Miliband. You know what is best for your area and your country, and so we need to start something up.

So, if you're interested, come up to me at the end, I'll just be standing over there, but thank you for organizing this, Helen. Helen is an absolute superstar.

[APPLAUSE]

And Lindsay, and Denise, and all of you people standing up for your local communities, it makes me emotional to see Scotland being destroyed. I sometimes can't sleep because I worry about my country being destroyed in this rush for net zero, which makes absolutely no sense.

So, thank you, Helen, thank you for this, and hopefully we can fight this together, and hopefully the Highlands can come out of this, okay. But yeah, if you want to come out, I'll be there at the end if you want to come up.

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Okay, a lot of passion in the room. What I'm going to do now is we are... we're basically running out of time, folks. I mean, had we known that we would have had this turnout you know, we could have had a full day convention to cover it all off, but we don't have that time today.

I certainly hope that this is a real strengthening of coming together for you, and what I really want to do now is actually move on to the part where I said that we're going to look at whether we can pull together some consensus statements so that this day is, you know, yes, you've had a say, not all of you, but a fair number have had a say that actually there's something concrete - concrete statements - that we can put to the floor for a vote that can then be taken forward, so something to take forward.

So if you give us a couple of minutes. Please do not leave. We're gonna see what we can put together. We're gonna put it upon that extremely small projector, and, I will read it out as best I can, because I know that not everyone can see what is up on there but if you give us a couple of minutes and we'll see what we can pull together, okay?

[APPLAUSE]

[PAUSE FOR CONSENSUS STATEMENT DRAFT]



[PART 3 – CONSENSUS STATEMENT VOTE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

Thank you, folks! Thank you, thank you, thank you.

I saw it was gonna be hard to ask people to just have a wee break, and sorry, but we're gonna have to crack on with this, okay? So, again, can you hear me in the back?

Okay, we're good to go.

So, obviously, we received a significant number of statements before coming in here today. We have done background work on this. I have put up... and we've been going through everything that has been said as we have gone along and we have used our best endeavours, our very best attempt to try and ensure that what is being presented here has been spoken to by a number of community councils, so that there should be some sort of consensus

So, we think that this is a fair statement, and what I'll do is I'll read it out, because we've not all got amazing eyesight, so I'm gonna read it out to you as well and I would ask, actually, if we just have a show of hands at the end to vote on this, please. And as I said before, if you have a contrary view, and you are not comfortable doing a show of hands email us after, okay? So, that's, that's really important.

And I'm going to read it out, and it basically says.

This convention of... [Gosh, how many are we up now?] 53 community councils collectively representing over 72,000 residents within the Highland Council area. Recognizes the impact of climate change on our plane but opposes an unjust and unnecessary industrialization of the Highlands.

Calls for our elected members to urgently support and protect our communities at national level given that community consultation is inadequate and local democracy is being overridden with decisions made by community councils and Highland Council consistently disregarded by Scottish Government.

Calls upon the Scottish Government to undertake a planning inquiry commission to address the whole cumulative impact of all major renewable energy infrastructure developments including transmission, storage, and generation, with all ancillary infrastructure, whatever that may be on our communities and landscape, rather than the salami-sliced approach which has thus far been taken.

Calls for a pause of all major applications, given the impact upon our communities which may hasten depopulation in some areas until a clear national energy policy is in place and an economic impact assessment undertaken, given that tourism is currently the backbone of the Highland economy.



It might not be perfect, I am sure you all respectively have something else you would love to add to that, but that's what we've got - and I'm going to put that to a show of hands vote.

If you want this to proceed and go forward, and you are for this statement, please raise your hand.

[From the floor - SADIE MICHAELA-HARRIS (Garve & District): Helen can we add about ECU statutory change to it as its absolutely massive that they're not ..that it's not a statutory...]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

I think... I think we have... I think we have a fairly unanimous show of hands here.

[APPLAUSE]

And of course, there are very valid points that you have made regarding ECU and what's happening with our Energy Consents Unit and so on, I have no doubt there will be, and there were many other valid points - for example, battery storage, the regulations, the legislation, the whole assessment of that and so on....

We can strengthen this as we go on, we can add to it but this is something that we have from today that we can say to our elected members, our MSPs, our MSPs, take that to Scottish Government, take that to the UK government, and crack on!

[APPLAUSE]

[CLOSE]

HELEN CRAWFORD (Chair):

So that's it, folks and basically what I would like to say is a grateful thanks to all of the community councils who have done so much work and do so much work for us - for the hosting community councils, what an immense amount of work.

For Mr. Cameron Kemp, who is the Chair of Kirkhill and Bunchrew, and who has grafted to get us here today and to Gordon Bexley, who has provided all of the IT, including running a broadband connection to this hall from the Lovat Hotel for this event to take place.

So please, feel free to show your love also for the LovatHotel by going along thereafter and enjoying everything that there is for Beauly to have. Enjoy, and thank you to everyone.

CAMERON KEMP (Kirkhill & Bunchrew):

And thanks to Councillor Crawford for driving this on and making this happen.

Thank you very much.

