

Mr Martin Godwin

SSEN Community Liaison Manager

Spittal to Beaulieu power line

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Dear Mr Godwin

SSEN Transmission – Pathway to 2030; Spittal – Loch Buidhe – Beaulieu 400kV Reinforcement.

Contin Community Council is responding to your consultation on behalf of the residents they represent. To this end I am directing my concerns solely to Contin. However, the postal address for Contin is Strathpeffer. The two communities are only separated by a parish boundary and their needs and concerns are the same and should be considered as one.

No one in Contin is denying the need to have green energy. In Contin there are encouraging signs that green energy solutions are in use. There is a residential estate built to passive house standards and evidence of increasing numbers of air source heat pumps in use. Even our 6th Century Church is heated by air source heat pumps. We are already working towards one of the spatial principles of Just Transition for Scotland.

A more considered solution from SSEN would have mitigated the anger residents are now expressing.

Residents feel the consultation has been very badly managed with members of the public not being aware of the meetings. Flyers were issued but letters should have been sent, addressed, to every household in order to ensure residents realised the impact of the proposals and the importance of attending a presentation.

The leaflets sent out were misleading and failed to indicate how badly Contin would be affected. At a hastily organised public meeting in Contin Hall on 17th March, 150 people who were unaware of the consultation event in Dingwall attended. Contin Hall was at capacity and another 30 people were sadly turned away. This is evidence that your flyers failed to inform the public.

As Contin and Strathpeffer are badly affected villages, why were neither of these locations selected as a venue for a consultation event?

Cabling alternatives

The decision to use a twin-circuit 400 kV AC line on conventional lattice towers typically 57 m high appears to have been made already. Clearly there are other possibilities, since the submarine links are using DC (525 kV) undergrounded for substantial distances (20-60 km) where crossing land. DC clearly gives the option of a second marine route running along the coast and into Beaulieu. Overhead DC appears not to have been used in the UK. There are alternatives to lattice towers that are not as tall now being used elsewhere in the UK for twin-circuit 400 kV AC, and there are designs for single-circuit towers used in other countries, again not as tall as the proposed towers. Although these alternatives may be more costly to install, there must be a proper assessment of how the lifetime costs compare with social and environmental factors.

Route selection methodology

Many of the residents who have been able to read your consultation booklet have found themselves at a loss to understand the rationale for route selection, and in particular "preferred route" selection. The "issues" or criteria used to compare routes vary from route to route, and those related to local concerns, including landscape, recreation, amenity, and heritage appear to be greatly under-represented. If this "sophisticated software" is to be used at all, it is essential that the input criteria reflect principles 1,3, and 6 of the NPF4 framework (just transition; local living; rural revitalization), and also the balance of objectives as stated in the ESO Holistic Network Design: cost to consumers; deliverability and operability, impact on the environment, and impact on local communities. According to these decision frameworks local concerns should be afforded a weighting something between 25% and 50%. The HND also notes that: "By assessing environmental and community impact to a greater extent earlier in the project development process, the HND is expected to reduce the overall impact of transmission network infrastructure for projects within its scope and help expedite their delivery". According to your own guidance you have got this consultation completely the wrong way around.

National Planning Framework 4 February 23

'The decisions we make today will have implications for future generations. Scotland in 2045 will be different. We must embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities, build a wellbeing economy and create great places.' NP4

Although the framework addresses the requirement nationally for the development of renewable energy, it also places considerable weight on the impact of these developments on people and places.

SSEN has failed to consider the impact of the proposed development on Contin as stated in the National Planning Framework

Environmental impact and the need to achieve net zero have equal importance. They should not be an either/or decision. The SSEN design should achieve net zero AND have minimal environmental impact.

Pylons would deface the whole area. Different solutions should be negotiated with local communities.

Residents in Contin agree with the two outcomes below as stated in NP4

A Improving the health and wellbeing of people living in Scotland

Contin is surrounded by the forests of Blackmuir, Contin, Torachilty including Loch Achilty and Rogie falls. These are all within our parish boundary. There are many paths and core paths around Contin and through the forests in regular use by walkers, walking groups, and cyclists from individuals to local cycling clubs to bigger events like 'The Strathpuffer' endurance race each January. This also brings revenue to the village.

The Contin Island is the oldest part of Contin where the River Blackwater, stocked with salmon from the Contin hatchery, branches, creating an Island with a core path around it. The 7th Century Church and graveyard are located here in surrounding farmland overlooking the Tor across the river. Exciting archaeological investigations are currently in progress. There is a caravan site on the island leading to the Black water river which promises tourists a haven of serenity. **This is close to D3 and D2 alignments of your proposed sites for the pylons to which residents strongly object.**

The whole area is a haven for wildlife including protected species, such as pine martens, red squirrels, a wild cat, a red kite feeding station, as well as important mixed woodlands managed by Forestry and

Land Scotland. **The freedom to explore green spaces is essential to the well-being and mental health of the residents and visitors alike.**

B Increasing the population of rural areas of Scotland

Contin is also on the North Coast 500 and as such many tourists stay to enjoy these spaces whilst on holiday. They spend money in local shops, reside in local rented properties, Bed and Breakfast accommodation and a caravan park. Tourists will stay away because the landscape has been destroyed. The revenue this brings to a small rural area will also be reduced, thus increasing the drift of people to towns, leaving increasingly elderly, isolated rural populations. Property prices will fall. Without an environment in which the young residents can live and thrive, the drift to towns will increase. This is clearly against the above outcome. **Your proposals would be in contradiction to these outcomes from NP4 by placing pylons through Contin.**

Here is a brief summary of our residents' concerns /comments not already covered in this letter as noted during the 17th March meeting in Contin Hall.

- Route maps were very difficult to read
- There should be underground cabling
- A faulty Assessment made by SSEN
- Electromagnetic radiation and health issues both physical and psychological
- Cable noise being heard inside houses
- Further investigation of underground sections required
- Rich heritage ignored
- As we already have the highest standing charges and electricity prices we should have reduced electricity bills.
- The cheapest option for SSEN is not the best option for residents
- Compensation for all property owners as recompense for the drop in property values due to the defacement of the environment.
- "People before Pylons"

Yours sincerely

Norma Ross

Chair

Contin Community Council.

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