**Moffat & District** **CommunityCouncil**

**Summary of Public Meeting to debate Wind Farm proposals**

**Organised by Moffat and District Community Council**

**Wednesday 8th November 2023 – St Andrews Church, Moffat**

**In attendance**

Representatives of the developers of both proposed windfarms, press, councillors and members of the public.

**Opening remarks**

The meeting opened with an introduction by the Community Council Chairman, who read out a section of the Constitution of the Community Council, explaining the requirement to ensure the Council represents the broad spectrum of all the views of the Community, and that this meeting was an opportunity to capture those views, on an informed basis, as the Community Council would be making representations to the Energy Consents Unit in Holyrood, with reference to the two wind farm proposals, one at Scoop Hill and one at Rivox.

Subsequently the meeting heard three presentations, one from Community Windfarms Ltd who are proposing to develop the site at Scoop hill, just south of Moffat, one from Belltown Power UK ltd, who are proposing the development at Rivox, west of Moffat, and one from a local campaigning group, Save our Hills, who are based in Moffat.

**Scoop Hill Developers statement summary**

Community Windfarms Ltd was started 22 years ago, by a Farmer, and now operates 9 Turbine farms around Lanarkshire/Ayrshire and Dumfries and Galloway. They build and manage their own projects. During the build and operations stage they use as many local contractors as possible. Current projects use mainly Scottish Contractors. Community Windfarms have paid some £8million in Community Benefits, a figure which is growing all the time. CWL explained that this year is recorded as the hottest ever, and net zero is needed asap, especially via green power.

If built, Scoop Hill would be the fourth largest Wind Farm in Scotland. It would also include 2 battery storage units. It would start just south of Moffat.

Originally proposed in 2020, the original application has been revised following public consultation, and the number of turbines reduced to the currently proposed 60. The reductions in numbers are to the west of Scoop Hill, reducing the original visibility from Moffat and nearby housing, and those near Boreland to the South. The Turbines require Aviation Lighting for safety purposes, and 17 of the 60 would be lit, there would be no mid-mast lighting. The lights would not be deployed at reduced strength.

NatureScot have identified the environment in DumGal as particularly suitable for Turbine Farms. Most of the site location is described as’ Commercial Forestry.’

The output of the Farm would be some 432 Megawatts, enough to power some 450,000 homes, and reduce CO2 emissions by some 735,000 tonnes per annum. It would contribute £5M per annum in Business rates to the Government. An estimated 250 people would be involved in construction, and some 50 subsequently in ongoing operations. Most current employees are based within the postcode of the Farm in which they are employed. Based on the current scheme, the Farm would generate some £2.6 million in Community Benefits.

The developers are involved in various projects for community support already, including education in renewable energy.

**Rivox Developers statement summary**

Belltown Power are a UK based developer. They work in renewables including solar, hydro and wind. The Rivox site is some 5 kms west of Moffat. The area at Rivox is designated as ‘Commercial Forestry’ at present. The land owners, Forestry Land Scotland, want to generate further renewable benefits above and beyond the Forestry alone.

The original tender was generated back in 2019.

The Rivox site is regarded as a good windfarm location for the following reasons.

The meteorology is good, wind speeds are higher than average.

The impact on forestry operations would be very limited.

The site has no ‘environmental designations.

Local visibility of the site is limited.

Since 2019 there have been a number of Community Consultations, which have resulted in revisions to the scheme. Final application was submitted in July. A large number of properties have been sent feedback forms, which can also be sent on-line. The key topics arising from consultation were as follows…

The general public desire to see the development impact on domestic energy bills, and a local area Electricity Discount Scheme is proposed.

The Visuals have been improved with a reduction from 33 to 29 turbines, with south and south east turbines removed. The developer states that from Old Carlisle road to the east of Moffat, the development should be hardly visible. 12 of the turbines will have Aviation lighting, which should be visible only from below or above.

The nearest ‘Wild land’ designation is Tala/Hartfell. The developer has consulted with NatureScot over the suitability of the site.

The South of Scotland Golden Eagle project has come up in consultations, and the developer states there is no impact on Eagles as they are not Forest hunters.

2,400 properties received details in Jan 2023.

Community benefits of £5,000 per annum per MW would be paid by the developers. The developers will designate 1% of ownership of the scheme to the local community.

**Save our Hills statement Summary**

Save our Hills in Moffat is a group of local residents with a common concern for the environment. They are not opposed to Wind Energy, they are in favour of renewables, but in a balanced mix. They are concerned about the number and scale of developments in the area, and the issues around planning policy that have allowed a concentration of turbines locally.

They believe the developments will impact on the Landscape and local eco-diversity for at least the next 40 years. They are grateful for the opportunity the meeting presents to share their views.

They explained that the proposed developments were not about altruism, but a drive for profits from the developers. The land areas are designated as suitable for 150-meter height turbines, and yet the turbines proposed are significantly higher.

The developers have come to the south of Scotland because the planning regime in Scotland is far less restrictive than that in England.

Save our Hills want the Community to consider three issues in particular..

Do we need these turbines in this area?

Is this the right place for these turbines – an appropriate location?

Is there a more attractive alternative.

There are already over 1,300 turbines in Dumfries and Galloway, there will be hundreds of thousands of tons of concrete poured into the hills, and potentially 100kms of new access roads if these go ahead.

30-45 turbines may be visible from Beechgrove, between 16 and 30 from Moffat High Street, and 35-40 from the Golf club, 46-60 from Annandale services, 31-45 from Manor Holiday park.

A series of images and videos were shown, detailing the issues involved in the creation of foundations etc, the impact on communities during the build process, and of wildlife killed by turbine blades.

There are risks to human and animal health from infrasound, from heart problems to perception disorders.

Bird kill is probable, with Golden Eagles vulnerable.

Unpredictable effects on micro climate and micro weather.

Impacts to Hydrology and watercourse impacts.

The negative financial impacts of Constraint Payments – some £1.15 billion in Scotland since 2010.

The loss of beauty of the landscape as a local amenity and asset.

The new risks of BESS storage, including fire and toxicity.

Damage to the ecosystem as a result of build and ongoing disturbance.

Aviation lighting damaging the Dark Skies designation and credibility.

Blade flicker and its impacts.

Plus, all the disruption caused by heavy traffic etc during build, commissioning, operation and decommissioning.

There’s also the possibility of as yet unknown and not yet predicted consequences.

The mitigation offered by the developers merely reduces risks, it doesn’t eliminate them.

They suggested that the developers’ benefits statements should be challenged. The potential exists for these developments to impact local hydrology and force further climate change. The impact on Hydrology from foundations etc has the potential to alter watercourses leading to flooding. Rivox could impact on Elvan Water, additional drainage management would be needed for security. Scoop hill could also cause flooding, impacting on the Annan. Whatever is suggested as mitigation, is not prevention of the potential issues.

Save our Hills suggested that there was not a net energy saving from the total process of build, installation, operation and restitution subsequent from Wind Farm developments.

They stated that Turbine farm proximity, causes an overall loss of turbine productivity, due to the creation of long wind wakes, measurable up to 100kms away from the turbines, and a significant impact up to 50 kms away. They showed the number of turbine fields already installed in the area.

They stated that no-one knows if these projects are carbon negative, when assessed in the context of the broad overall scope of multiple installations rather than individual Farms. The issue of reduced efficiency from proximity is not addressed in these two applications.

Dumfries and Galloway are already exporting £4Billion of energy from the county annually. Even if turned off, the Turbines are a cost due to the Constraint payments scheme. They stated that it would be more efficient overall if existing fields were repopulated with more effective turbine designs.

Is there a need? - It was pointed out that Dumfries and Galloway already generate between 7 and 10 times more electricity than it consumes.

Is the location appropriate – no, this is an area of outstanding beauty, essential to our main industry – tourism.

Is there a more attractive alternative? – yes, our natural assets, a sustainable local green economy, fit for our children and grandchildren.

The group suggested that a better solution for Moffat would be its own Community owned Windfarm for Moffat.

It was stressed that we should be planning for a future that really took into account Moffat’s own needs and requirements.

**Issues arising and questions asked etc.**

Opening public statement from the floor was that the Community benefits on offer are a false incentive, as Moffat’s key asset is the beauty of the region. These developments could cause the loss of that asset. The Community already has enough Windfarms in the region. The developments will still be visible despite revisions, damaging the views on the main approaches to Moffat. The Eagle community does believe there will be an impact on the Eagle population. Farms built in France and Spain have seen Eagle populations leave the area after Wind Farms are established.

It was asked if the Community generally has the resources, skills and influence, to stop the progress of these projects, when compared to the resources and expertise of the development proposers.

It was indicated that the RSPB has reported on the role of Eagles on Mull, and this suggests that the Eagles are a key contributor to jobs and employment on the island, reinforcing the perspective that existing bio-resources can provide local employment.

On the subject of local jobs, the issue of where turbines are built was raised. Local jobs are likely to being the areas of civil engineering, electricals and maintenance. The UK turbine building capability was lost to UK manufacturing as a result of government policies in the 1970, and turbine manufacturing is now a global business. Some Community Windfarms turbine masts were built in the UK, in Campbelltown, but that capability is no longer there. It’s possible that CWL will source turbine blades from Denmark.

There was a discussion about the detailing of the total energy and carbon footprint, and the validity of current assumptions when the overall project is concerned…..including the impact on other farms etc. It was indicated that there is a ‘Carbon Calculator’ used as part of the Planning application process. It was suggested by the developers of Scoop hill that Carbon payback took approx. 2.5 years, the subsequent 37.5 years of life all contributing to carbon reductions.

Questions about the potential impact of the loss of efficiency due to the impact of multiple farms on each other, met the response that the developers were aware of this, but the overall outcome is still good, (or they wouldn’t be doing it.) it was suggested that a single turbine is the most efficient installation, but the economies of set-up are challenging.

A query was raised about the differentiation between Carbon payback, and Energy payback, with the suggestion that the energy payback period would be much longer. There was also a challenge to the technical accuracy of the ‘Carbon Calculator’ as later ‘models’ could produce different outcomes.

Project life Community benefits of £5,000 per MW per year were raised, to be contrasted with the Developers potential profitability over the life of the project. Whilst profit figures were not released for commercial reasons, the developers suggested that profitability could be no more than a prediction given fluctuating tax, subsidy, interest/financing costs, energy policy revision possibilities over the life of the project.

The issue was raised regarding the creation of a Trust to distribute Community benefits was raised, and the example of Kirkcudbright was mentioned. The developers expressed sympathy for that suggestion.

The name of the Scoop Hill developers’ company was queried, asking if it implied a special degree of support for Communities, an explanation was given for its selection back in 2001.

The point was made that Moffat has existed up to this point without Windfarms, presumably to imply the Community benefits are not a reason for the town to choose wind power as a source of income.

The Rivox developers were asked if it was their commercial strategy to sell on the development once it was up and running. The developers said it was not, however, they did point out that Companies do change ownership over time.

There were a number of queries regarding the Bearholm sub-station. Although not relevant to the application/proposals, this apparently has a 15-year service life, it will be the connection point for these proposed farms, and they are expecting a 40-year life. Questions were raised as to the implications for Bearholm and the potential requirement to upgrade and upscale the facility. The connection licences for the developers are currently in place till 2025.

It was asked if the reality of the proposals were simply a fiscal vehicle for profit generation from the developers, or a genuine intent to improve the climate change situation. This profit motive/potential local environment damage dilemma poses a thought-provoking challenge for those who espouse a greener position locally. It raises the issue of our responsibility to the locale, the County, the country, the world etc.

A subsequent discussion took place regarding Grid capacity, and the potential of restriction on the Clyde valley trunk, being responsible for potential huge Constraint Costs. There need to increase grid capacity is also part of the overall energy/carbon cycle understanding. (It was suggested that electricity from Moffat would be routed south to England, rather than north through the constrained Elvanfoot facility.) It was pointed out that grid arrangements had been designed for Coal power stations and subsequent distribution from those points.

The issue of ‘end of life’ was raised. It was suggested by the developers that three options were available, and more may emerge over time.

1. If the farm is still working, it can continue to run after 40 years.
2. If technology allows it, the turbine systems can be upgraded
3. Last option was decommissioning and recycling.

It was noted that the target grid connection date for Rivox is 2030.

It was stated from the floor that the impact on migrating birds of further developments was not understood. Moffat lies on a route for many birds, including geese.

The Scoop Hill developers said that part of the application process did involve an ecological and ornithological assessment, and no objections had been raised by NatureScot or RSPB. This was challenged from the floor, as it was believed that RSPB were not happy with ongoing turbine developments.

It was asked that key questions are considered..

1. Is this the right thing to do for Climate change?
	1. What are the risks?
2. What are the risks to our economy and biodiversity
	1. This includes Fire and flood potential issues

The issue of the social ownership of local land was raised, is it the legal owners or is the landscape a long term social/community asset. If it’s the latter, it was suggested that these developments do not offer enough for the future community strategy of Moffat. Something more progressive is needed.

The Rivox developers pointed out that they would ensure the Community owned 1% of the Farm, and create a route to buy/ownership of a further 4%, at cost, once the Farm was up and running. This would be a low-cost/low risk investment for the Community, and they indicated that was the best route to community ownership, given the challenges of establishing a small Farm.

The Council in Dumfries’s designation of local land as 19A designation, indicates their perspective that the land (area) is suitable for wind farm development. This specification indicates suitability for a turbine height of 150 metres. The proposed turbines are significantly higher. The developers indicated that the 150-metre height was an outdated specification, and such masts/turbines are no longer available on the market, and that all application now are in excess of 150 metres. National Planning policy is now allowing heights of 200 metres or more.

It was suggested that these applications are an opportunity for Moffat to take a different course, which could include developing our own small wind farm. The community to manage this to ensure the avoidance of diversity loss. The plans as proposed would damage all of Moffat. There was general support from the floor for a Community Windfarm, Rivox developers suggested this would be a good use for Community Benefits.

The issue of lax/simpler planning consents in Scotland compared to England is part of the overall issue, and planning regulations could yet change in England.

Significant concern was raised about social and transport disruption during the build phase. The Rivox developer said particular attention would be paid to support and improve footpaths, and traffic would enter and exit the site from the Haulage route on the A701.

The Rivox developments owners are the Foresight group, based in London.

The role of the Community Council in influencing the process was the subject of queries from the floor, with calls for the Council to step outside its constitution and take up a position. It was suggested that at Leadhills the Community Council did take up a position, where ultimately two proposed farms were not approved.

It was agreed that the Secretary would request an extension from the ECU, and this has been done.

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