

# Response by Innerleithen and District Community Council

## Scaud Law Wind Farm Section 36 Application

**Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit Reference: ECU00002111**

**Scottish Borders Council Reference: 23/00013/S36**

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The application is for 8 wind turbines up to 180m in height, access tracks, and associated substation and 12MW of Battery storage. The proposal is located approximately 5km to the north-east of Innerleithen. Innerleithen & District Community Council (IDCC) is one of the host Community Councils for the Scaud Law Wind Farm as the initial c.2.5km of the access track, and the construction compound is located within its area.

As a Community Council, we have taken a view on the Scaud Law wind farm proposal as a whole, considering the effects and the overall benefits to our community in the long term. As such, we **support the application**.

We feel that the long term generation of sustainable energy is vital to reduce carbon emissions and reverse the effects of climate change, and can eliminate the reliance on imported fossil fuels. Using home-grown renewable energy sources increases energy security and reduces the exposure to wildly fluctuating electricity prices which is a major cause of the cost-of-living crisis affecting so many following on from Russia's invasion of Ukraine. These are the primary reasons for our support and it was a unanimous view from our members.

However, we are fully aware of the impact the wind farm will have on our overall community and have sought reassurances from FORL to mitigate these as much as possible. We request that all commitments included in the Environmental Impact Assessment Report and the supporting planning documentation, as well as those given directly to the communities and other stakeholders, are adhered to and secured in any planning agreements and conditions.

Our response is focussed on our specific remit, and should be read alongside responses from specialist organisations representing the natural environment.

### **Expected Benefits**

IDCC is mindful that the Scottish Government adopted the National Planning Framework 4 on 13<sup>th</sup> February 2023, a once in a decade publication which puts the twin global climate and nature crises at the heart of a vision for a future Scotland for the long term interest. In relation to wind farms, Policy 11 relates to Energy developments and includes the following:

*c) Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.*

In line with this the applicant Fred Olsen Renewables Limited (FORL) has made commitments to a series of benefits as referred to in the Pre Application Consultation Report:

- **Community Benefit Fund** of £240,000 per year (index linked), based on £5,000 per MW installed, in line with Scottish Government guidance. This would equate to £8.4m over a 35-year lifespan of wind farm;
- **Local Supply Chain:** ensuring that our main contractors will spend at least 30% of the contract value locally; and incentivising all contractors to use local content;
- **Shared Ownership.** Initial discussions have been taking place, and these continue to allow the communities to invest in a potential 5% share of the wind farm.

#### Community Benefit Fund

IDCC has sought clarification as to how any Community Benefit Fund would be governed and administered given the consideration of the effects that will be borne on its area. The town of Innerleithen has a population of c. 3,200, will theoretically have visibility of the planned turbines from a sizeable area of the town, mainly the western elevated flank near the Wells, and visibility extends south including parts of Traquair and other parts of the IDCC area. Additionally, Construction traffic and delivery of wind turbine components will come south along the B709 'The Granites' Road, of which the final 7km is within the IDCC area. The most frequented location in close proximity to the proposal (i.e. within 1km) is the top of Priesthope Hill within Caberston Forest which is within IDCC area and visited annually by 1,000s of mountain bikers, as well as other hill users.

Given the communications and dialogue with FORL to date it is anticipated that a substantial proportion of the community benefit fund would be delivered in and around Innerleithen and Walkerburn.

#### Local Supply Chain

IDCC has asked FORL to clarify how it will ensure that the pledge that main contractors will spend at least 30% of the contract value locally will be enacted – i.e. what mechanisms and guarantees will be applied and what incentives will be employed for contractors, what is meant by local, and how will this be audited and demonstrated? We await a response on these specific questions.

Considering these elements together IDCC reaches a view that, if delivered, local and community socio-economic benefits will be achieved in line with the policy in National Planning Framework 4, although we are wary that these commitments must be realised to meet the high bar set by the policy.

### **Expected Impacts**

IDCC is conscious of a number of impacts and our concerns include, but are not limited to:

#### Disruption during the building process

While the turbines themselves will not be within the IDCC area, access routes to the site are. This will lead to an increase of heavy traffic through Innerleithen and on the surrounding access roads. The Traffic and Transport section of the EIA predicts that there will be over 4,000 HGV movements to build the Site Tracks, Crane Pads and Compounds, and Turbine Foundations. Some of these access roads are minor roads which are not designed to take HGVs. The application expects that the majority of

new stone for new tracks will be won from a borrow pit identified onsite, however importing all required stone is not ruled out. It is noted that there are commercial quarries which would be sources of aggregate and stone in various locations in the Scottish Borders including for instance Edston Quarry west of Peebles, and Cowieslinn Quarry north of Eddleston. Using these would result in a significant impact on the town itself, if more HGVs were to be rolling through it would definitely be noticed and felt by businesses, locals and visitors, particularly those who are housed or are trading next to a road. It is requested that any Transport Management Plan excludes these routes as much as possible to minimise disruption.

### Visual Impact

The Zone of Theoretical Visibility map suggests that the visual impact will affect a significant number of residents within IDCC area, albeit to varying degrees. Within the town of Innerleithen, with a population of c. 3,200, visibility will be experienced mainly in the western areas, and the elevated flank near the Wells, and visibility extends south including parts of Traquair.

What appears to have been overlooked is the visual impact on visitors to the area, particularly those who use the hills north of Innerleithen for recreation. The visual impact will be very significant for a considerable number of hill users, primarily mountain bikers, accessing Caberston Forest / 'Golfie' MTB trail complex. The Golfie is a big draw to the area, with 1,000s of users annually (<https://www.gotweedvalley.co.uk/downhill-mountain-biking>). Innerleithen and the surrounding areas has played host to the Enduro World Series final round in 2021 and first round in 2022, with of the over 1,000 mountain bike racers from over 35 countries at each event, and attracting thousands of spectators at the Tweed Valley. (<https://www.ssdalliance.com/sunshine-for-first-round-of-enduro-world-series-in-tweed-valley/> <https://www.ssdalliance.com/ews-tweed-valley-returns-to-innerleithen/>).

In particular the IDCC response to the Scoping opinion submitted on 28 July 2020 made the following reference: "Priesthope Hill is the 549m summit at the top of the 'Golfie' MTB trails in Innerleithen (<https://www.trailforks.com/poi/15536/>) that hosts some of the UK's best trails which has over 100km of trails, and ridden by thousands of mountain bikers each year (<https://www.mbr.co.uk/news/innerleithen-golfie-391422>)."

Following the response, Priesthope was included as Viewpoint 5 in the Landscape and Visual assessment EIA-R Chapter 6. This assessment concludes that Priesthope Hill, along with Viewpoint 8: Lee Pen; and Viewpoint 22: Cairn Hill Cairn Viewpoint 3: Core Path 41 near Scroof Hill:

*a total of 4 viewpoints, located between 1.2 – 4.0 km from the Proposed Development would receive very close views of the proposed turbines and supporting infrastructure during both construction and operation. These viewpoints have a High sensitivity due to the viewpoint locations being hill summits popular with walkers would result in a Major adverse and significant effect.*

While Lee Pen is very popular with walkers locally, mountain bikers are the main users of Priesthope (and Cairn Hill in Walkerburn Community Council Area).

However EIA-R Chapter 13: Socio-economic, Tourism and Recreation does not carry across the findings of the Landscape and Visual assessment on users of the Golfie/Caberston Forest as it concludes that there is a *Low adverse effect (not significant)* on 'Recreational activities in the open countryside'

We also acknowledge that Appendix 13.3 – Proposed Multi-Use Trails - contains plans for new trails within the Proposed Development Area, however it is stated that these trails are to be pursued through a separate planning application and that these will progressed post consent of the wind farm.

It is the IDCC view that the multi users trails should be included as mitigation as part of this application to offset the impacts to Caberston Forest users, and such as to incorporate the provision and delivery of multi-user tracks can be included in an Access Management Plan condition – we note FORL has already proposed one in Draft Condition 22 which can be expanded, and a planning application for the trails submitted as soon as possible.

Aviation lighting – It is our understanding that the need for visible aviation lighting is subject to ongoing research which may potentially result in the other technological fixes removing its requirement. We propose that a planning Condition is included so that FORL are required to investigate, follow up and deliver a solution to remove, or failing that, minimise as far as possible, the use of turbine night lighting during the period up until the commencement of construction, and throughout the lifetime of the wind farm.

Micrositing Allowance – IDCC requests that a planning Condition limits any micrositing move between 50-75m to require preparation of visualisations to be signed off by the Planning Authority to ensure the layout design assessed in the EIA report will not be significantly different from any resulting scheme.

## **Summary**

Innerleithen & District Community Council **supports** the application and trusts that our views and requests are carefully considered and integrated into any decision that the Scottish Government will make. It is hoped that the Scottish Borders Council will also consider this response when formulating its own response.