

TORPHINS COMMUNITY COUNCIL

Response to proposed wind farm development on Hill of Fare by RES

Torphins Community Council (TCC) have serious concerns over the proposed development.

Our concerns are reflected in the community survey undertaken by TCC. This was made available for completion at the RES exhibition on 12 October 2022 and subsequently on the TCC webpage and facebook page. Responses received by 5 November 2022 show that 73% are opposed to the development, 10% are neutral, 10% are undecided and only 7% are in favour.

While TCC recognise the urgent need to increase the generation of renewable energy, including by the use of onshore and offshore wind turbines, all driven by the climate crisis, members are of the firm view that there is no locational imperative behind the selection of the Hill of Fare. Accordingly it should be seen as an opportunistic development, resulting from the willingness of the landowner to consider positively a development of this type and scale.

There is a convincing argument to be made for wind farm developments on this scale to be restricted to an offshore context. The costs of offshore developments have come down significantly in recent years; this, combined with a more consistent wind supply, make offshore turbines an increasingly viable and effective solution.

Further, TCC would expect to see independently produced calculations for *all* CO2 emissions caused by the proposed development in order to understand its emissions impact as a whole.

Aberdeenshire Council's Strategic Landscape Capacity for Windfarms assessment, published with the support of Scottish Natural Heritage in 2014, is the most recent independent consideration of Aberdeenshire landscapes' capacity for wind farm development. The Hill of Fare falls within the Moorland Plateau category; capacity for wind farm development in this landscape typography is assessed thus:

These areas would be unsuitable for wind farm development beyond a domestic scale, less than 15m, associated with farm buildings or tourist facilities.

The study, undertaken by Ironside Farrer on behalf of the local authority, remains a robust and comprehensive assessment of the capacity of important landscapes to accept further windfarm developments; its conclusion is unequivocal.

Concerns from the community, supported by TCC, centre on the landscape, visual, amenity and safety impacts of a development on the scale proposed - 17 turbines to

a tip height of 250m. These are the largest onshore turbines proposed to date in Aberdeenshire and will have, beyond question, highly significant, even unprecedented, impacts.

Further concerns relate to the negative impacts of associated development - tracks, cabling and infrastructure. In addition, in an area where many households rely on private water supplies, there are concerns about potential negative impacts on these essential supplies.

TCC welcomed the exhibition arranged by RES as an opportunity to understand the detail of the proposal. However, TCC remains dissatisfied by the displays and diagrams which showed visualisations at 90'. TCC's requests for 53'/55' images and diagrams have not been met to date. It is felt that 90' imaging does not accurately demonstrate the visual impact of the turbines. TCC also has concerns about the layout and distribution of the proposed turbines.

The western areas of Aberdeenshire, including the Cairngorms National Park (CNP) depend on tourism to a very considerable extent; it is a vital sector to the local economy. Visitors value the open, uncluttered and undeveloped landscapes which have, hitherto, remained free of wind farms. Along with the CNP, this is one of the few areas in Aberdeenshire, Moray, Angus and the Highlands that has not seen such developments. A proposal on this colossal scale will lead to highly significant landscape impacts, not least because it would be the first. It should be noted that the Hill of Fare is little over 15km from the CNP boundary and therefore likely to have unacceptable impacts on its landscape character.

The Hill of Fare is widely recognised as an important area for biodiversity and recreation. It is easy to access and is highly valued by the community and beyond. There can be no doubt that the amenity enjoyed by so many will be very significantly diminished were this proposed development to proceed. Further, the Hill of Fare is highly prominent in the landscape, visible to receptors over a wide area, from the Cairngorms to Bennachie, from the Grampian outliers to hills such as Tap o' Noth and northwards into Moray.

There are serious concerns regarding safe access to the Hill of Fare in winter, due to the risk of ice throw, particularly when the scale of the turbines is considered. As noted, the hill is a widely used area for outdoor access; there would be a real and substantial risk to the many individuals walking on the hill.

In conclusion, TCC is firmly of the view that the scale and location of this proposed development, for the reasons outlined, is of great concern. TCC has considered whether a major reduction in turbine height could be more acceptable; however as the Strategic Landscape Capacity for Wind Farms study concludes, there is only capacity for domestic-scale turbines in this part of Aberdeenshire. Further, it would

be likely that a reduction in turbine height would lead to an increase in turbine numbers and therefore little mitigation of the overall impact.

Finally TCC would expect to be fully and positively engaged in any and all discussions and negotiations over community benefit which may be offered by RES and/or the landowner. TCC would welcome your absolute commitment to engage with TCC on the Local Electricity Discount Scheme and the 'Right of First Offers' to local contractors. Any such discussions should, of course, include all communities impacted by the development, regardless of whether or not they object to the principle of the development.

It would be unacceptable for the promoters of the scheme to exclude any community from full involvement in these matters, which are designed to mitigate, in financial terms, the impacts of this potential development.

Peter J Argyle
Chair
Torphins Community Council

10 November 2022