

## Blair Hill Wind Farm Community Liaison Group (CLG)

27/02/24  
7pm - 9.10pm

<b>Attendees</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
	Clifford Smithers (CS)	Cree Valley Community Council
	Richard Kay (RK)	Cree Valley Community Council
	Mary Harkness (MH)	Kirkcowan Community Council
	Jamie Hyslop (JH)	River Cree District Salmon Fishery Board
	Alan Howatson (AH)	River Cree Hatchery & Habitat Trust SCIO
	Sarah More (SM)	Cree Valley Area Development Trust
	Craig McMilken (CM)	Ditch the Blair Hill Project
	Iain Service (IS)	Ditch the Blair Hill Project
	Scott Jones (SJ)	Machars and Cree Valley Climate Action Network
	Linda Woodfield (LW)	Newton Stewart Initiative
	Sarah McArthur (SMc)	RES
	Will Beresford (WB)	RES
	Graeme Kerr (GK)	RES
<b>Apologies</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Representing</b>
	Terence Flanagan	River Cree Hatchery & Habitat Trust SCIO
	Hazel Matthews	Kirkcowan Community Council
	Cllr Katie Hagmann	Ward member for D&G Galloway and Wigtown West
	Cllr David Inglis	Ward member for D&G Galloway and Wigtown West
	Cllr Jackie McCamon	Ward member for D&G Galloway and Wigtown West
	Cllr Richard Marsh	Ward member for D&G Galloway and Wigtown West

Agenda Item	Activity	Actions
Welcome, introductions & apologies	All members introduced themselves and advised which group or organisation they were representing.	
CLG membership/ enquiries from members of the public	<p>SMc advised that no new parties have requested to be a member of the CLG. It was unanimously agreed that membership of the CLG was confirmed as those parties present at this meeting or the inaugural meeting in January.</p> <p>An email was received by RES from a member of the public querying the involvement of Ditch the Blair Hill Project (DTBHP) in the CLG and who the group comprised of, given there is yet no online presence. The email also raised concerns around involvement of IS in the Newton Stewart Cinema given it was highlighted by members of the public as something they would like to see supported by community benefit funding.</p> <p>IS explained that DTBHP are not a constituted group but a movement claiming to speak for the large strand of local opinion that does not want to see a wind farm built on the site. IS also explained that he is not directly involved in the Newton Stewart cinema.</p> <p>SMc clarified that Newton Stewart cinema, as a potential recipient of the community benefit fund, was a suggestion received by RES by the community during the public consultation events in May 2023. SMC agreed that RES will get consent to name groups in any further communications.</p> <p>CLG members agreed that they were content for Ditch the Blair Hill Project to remain part of the CLG.</p>	
CLG Terms of Reference	Terms of Reference were unanimously agreed. RES to upload to Blair Hill project website.	RES

## Project Update

SMc advised that that RES are close to having a finalised turbine design as a result of consultation and site surveys. Supporting infrastructure is also being designed. RES anticipate the final turbine layout to be between 16-18 turbines, but this is still to be confirmed. Some of the reasons behind reduced turbine numbers include heritage, landscape and ecology inputs. RES

More detailed peat depth and sampling surveys will be conducted over the coming months and an updated plan will be shared once available.

RK noted that an intensive survey was done at Drannadow around the time of tree planting in 1980s.

JH asked if there was any deep peat on site and if turbines are sited on it. SMc confirmed that whilst there are pockets of deep peat on site, it is mostly shallow depths or no peat on the site. No turbines are to be sited on peat over 0.5m.

## Socio-Economic

RES provided a written response to the question raised by SJ at the previous meeting. The written response is appended to these minutes. SMc advised that IS had submitted a question on socio-economics and tourism ahead of the meeting.

Discussion followed around the socio-economic report being conducted for the project and SMc/GK confirmed that it will carry equal weight to all EIA documents in the planning application. RES to provide copy of the scoping report that outlines the methodology to be employed. RES

All members agreed that it would be useful to have a representative of BiGGAR Economics attend a future meeting as a guest speaker on socio-economics and tourism. RES to arrange. RES

SJ asked if a social impact assessment is being conducted and advised he could share a study commissioned by Marine Scotland on this that may provide a useful reference. He stated that socio-economic assessments tend to focus on what was relatively easy to quantify and monetise, while a social impact assessment (SIA) should also be undertaken, since SIA focusses more on the lived experience of people, their sense of place, what they value in their lives, and how these things might be impacted. SJ

**Traffic & Transport** RES provided a written response to questions raised by CM ahead of the the previous meeting. The written response is appended to these minutes.

JH asked what mitigation will be put in place to prevent watercourse pollution during the construction phase and SMC confirmed that RES are legally obliged to adhere to stringent pollution prevention measures, which will be included in the Construction Environmental Management Plan. An Environmental Clerks of Works will be appointed to monitor construction work. Water quality monitoring is typically undertaken to ensure the development does not impact on local watercourses.

Specific procedures such as sustainable drainage system (SuDS) will be implemented to provide surface water management techniques to mitigate any potential adverse impact on hydrology.

CM asked how much traffic will be travelling to the site and SMC confirmed that this will be included as part of the traffic and transport assessment submitted as part of the EIA.

SJ asked if the environmental impacts of the concrete used in the turbine foundations is considered and SMC responded that it would be included in the carbon balance assessment, which is an online tool provided by SEPA that all onshore wind developments have to complete. RES RES to share link to tool.

The swept path assessments for the A712 are still being finalised, but they will be shared with the CLG and wider public as part of the EIA.

#### **Grid**

RES provided a written response to questions raised by IS at the previous meeting. The written response is appended to these minutes.

SMC outlined that RES are awaiting a grid connection offer but expect to connect into Glenlee substation. RES will keep the CLG updated on the progress of the application and an indicative grid connection route will be included in the EIA.

**Community Benefit/Shared Ownership**

SMc outlined the proposed community benefits package for Blair Hill Wind Farm (£5k/ MW per annum) and advised that shared community ownership of the project was something RES were keen to explore. It was confirmed that neither of these are material considerations in the determination of the planning application and that shared ownership would be offered on top of community benefits. If there was interest from the CLG, RES could present more information on shared ownership at the next meeting.

SMc offered to connect the CLG with Local Energy Scotland who offer advice and funding around community shared ownership.

Previous CLGs on other RES projects have been involved in the administration of the community benefits package and SMC highlighted that this is something the Blair Hill CLG may wish to consider.

CLG members decided that they did not want to discuss shared ownership or community benefits until such time that the project was consented.

SMc/GK advised they respect the CLG's position although RES would continue to seek input and feedback from the community on local benefits and priority projects that they would like to see supported or delivered in their community from Blair Hill Wind Farm, should it receive consent.

CS advised that CVCC are remaining neutral on the proposed development at this stage and would not engage on the matter of community benefits as they feel it is not the appropriate time.

**Guest Speakers.**

It was agreed that CLG members would like guest speakers to talk to the group on socio-economics & tourism, heritage and pollution prevention.

RES

RES to arrange a guest speaker for the next meeting, subject to availability.

**Any Other Business**

IS requested that questions submitted by CLG members in advance of each meeting be shared with the rest of the group. SMC agreed to include these when sharing the agenda going forward.

CM asked if RES could share the results from the feedback received at the public exhibitions in Oct. SMC advised that this will be made available around the time of the second public exhibitions later in the Spring.

CS advised that CVCC intend to conduct a survey once a planning application is submitted to assist in identifying the views and opinions of the general public.

**Date and Time of Next Meeting**

The next meeting to be held in-person on 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024 at 7.00pm. RES to book venue.

RES

The meeting closed at 9:10pm.

The below questions were received by RES from Ditch the Blair Hill Project on 18/02/24.

## **GRID CONNECTION**

*What comments does RES have on the below?*

RES state on the Blair Hill website that the site was chosen because it was close to a viable grid connection. This is not correct. A grid connection for Blair Hill is not viable. The simple fact is that the site cannot be connected to the national grid until 2032, if at all.

Published by the Scottish Government in 2023, The onshore wind sector deal set out various commitments from the Scottish Government and the onshore wind industry to deliver upon their collective ambition of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030. Among the commitments made as part of the deal were;

“ By the end of 2023 we will provide clear information on the expected pipeline of new wind farms, extensions to existing wind farms, life extensions and re-powering projects expected between 2024 and 2030. This spatial vision for the delivery of the 2030 ambition will build on the pipeline analysis committed to under the Planning section of the sector”

And, a commitment;

“ To provide an evidence base to support National Grid ESO and Scotland’s network companies to deliver strategic network planning.”

Following on from these commitments, the dataset, spd-dg-connections-info was published on 26th January 2024. This dataset lists all of the local SPEN electrical substations and details the respective current capacity constraints that they are under.

At 3 miles distant the main Newton Stewart substation, or Grid Supply Point ( GSP), is the closest GSP to Blair Hill. The other nearby GSPs ; Glenluce, Glenlee, and Tongland; are all approximately 20 miles from Blair Hill. This makes Newton Stewart the only plausible place where the Blair Hill Wind Farm can connect to the National Grid.

The dataset referred to above indicates that the Newton Stewart GSP currently has no spare export capacity. As a consequence, contrary to their claim, there is not a viable connection to the national grid, available to RES, for the Blair Hill project. The reason given by SPEN for the current absence of additional export capacity at Newton Stewart is; “ No thermal capacity, requires significant transmission works for additional projects to connect” The timetable which also forms part of the dataset, indicates that the significant transmission works referred to are not targeted to be completed until 2032. Past experience of large construction projects in Scotland suggests that the 2032 target will be overshoot by several years.

## TOURISM

*Can RES issue an invitation to BIGGAR Economics to send someone to the next CLG meeting to speak as an expert on the effects of wind farms on tourism ?*

When the Blair Hill project pops up as a topic of conversation in and around Newton Stewart, the subject of tourism always crops up. Most people think that the project will damage the Cree Valley landscape and make the area less appealing to tourists. The attraction of the area was well summed up in a recent trip advisor comment..“ Beautiful scenery and woodlands , small lochs and plentiful wildlife. Of course if you are there at night you may get chance to see the wonderful stars. Popular place for cyclists but plenty of space for walkers.”

There is genuine concern in the local community that, if it is ever built, the Blair Hill Wind Farm will shatter the above perception and cause serious damage to the local tourism industry.

A simple tick sheet survey drawn up by DTBHP was placed in a few shops in Newton Stewart on 10th of February. It asked visitors to the area whether or not a large wind farm would make them; more likely, less likely, or make no difference to the likelihood of them revisiting Newton Stewart in the future. Of the 37 completed questionnaires collected in by 19th February, 17 said no difference, and 20 said less likely. Our survey was far from scientific and cannot be relied on. However it does prove that the local community are justified in being concerned about the effect of the Blair Hill Project on tourism.

In the December project update RES stated with confidence that “ It has been consistently found that wind farms do not impact tourism. The BIGGAR Economics Report Wind Farms and Tourism Trends in Scotland (2021), found that while the capacity of wind farms had more than quadrupled over the study period, employment in tourism related sectors had increased by more than 20%. It found no relationship between tourism employment and wind farm development, at the level of the Scottish economy, across local authorities nor in the locality of wind farm sites.”

RES has cited the BIGGAR Economics Report, as being “consistent proof” that tourism is not affected by wind farms. DTBHP consider that consistent proof requires reference to be made to several named and qualified attributable sources of evidence rather than one unidentified author working at BIGGAR Economics.

On close inspection the figures produced in the BIGGAR Economics Report for the Wind Farms near to Newton Stewart appear to be inconsistent with each other and completely wrong. DTBHP find it incredible that the BIGGAR Economics Report can suggest that over 2000 people work in tourism in the area around the Arecleoch Windfarm at Barrhill. While, suggesting that only 230 people work in tourism at the Mark Hill Wind Farm, which is literally next door, on the other side of Barrhill. The figures contained in the Biggar Economics Report do not appear to be credible

In order to shed some light on this DTBHP asked a local student to analyse the BIGGAR Economics Report. These are his findings

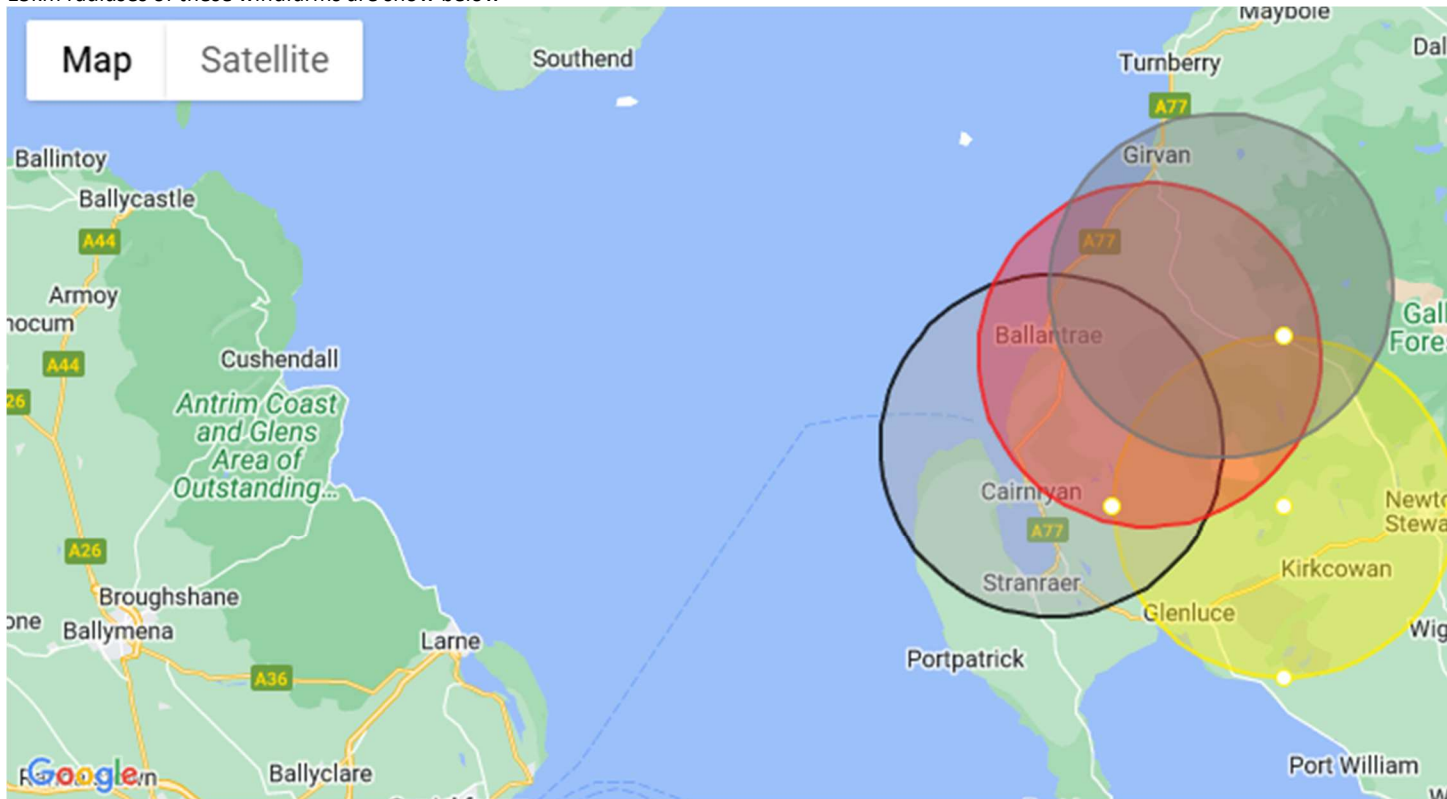
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Wind Farms & Tourism Trends in Scotland: Evidence from 44 Wind Farms

From Biggar Economics Published: 2021

On the first page in the final paragraph, it states that “study areas were based on a 15km radius”. This implies to me that in a 15km radius around each wind farm area is where the tourism employment data was collected from.

In tables 5-1 and 6-1 on pages 17 and 22 respectively there are 4 pertinent rows in the tables which are important to this information. In table 5-1 these rows are Airies Farm and Glen App and for table 6-1 these rows are Mark Hill and Arecleoch. The 15km radiuses of these windfarms are show below



- Black circle – Glen App
- Red circle – Arecleoch
- Gray circle – Mark hill
- Yellow circle – Airies Farm

In this study the information shows that in the surrounding area of each of these wind farms the tourism employment is as follows:

Wind Farm Area	Tourism Employment 2015	Tourism Employment 2019	Change from 2015-2019
Glen App	670	655	-2.2%
Airies Farm	375	405	8.0%
Mark Hill	110	230	109.1%
Arecleoch	2525	2125	-15.8%

From this data we can see that for both in 2015 and 2019 the sum of the tourism employment in Glen App, Airies Farm and Mark Hill is less than that of Arecleoch.



The study states the sum of Glen App, Airies Farm and Mark Hill for 2015 is 1155 and the sum for 2019 is 1290.

These figures are collectively both less than the 2525 and 2125 stated for Arecloch. This is where we run into an issue as can be seen from the map above. Here we see that the zones for data collection for Airies Farm, Mark Hill and Glen App all overlap the zone for Arecloch. This suggests that the sum of the tourism employment in Airies Farm, Mark Hill and Glen App should be greater or equal to that of Arecloch but this isn't what we see.

This suggests that the method for data collection must have some flaws leading to these skewed numbers which could suggest that the study may be flawed all together.

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DTBHP believe that it would be helpful if RES could arrange for an expert to attend the CLG to help narrow the gulf in understanding that clearly exists between many local people and RES on the potential impact of the Blair Hill wind farm proposal on local tourism

## **COMMUNITY BENEFITS**

*Have RES had discussions with Mr Inglis and other local councillors where it was decided that they would be the only community representatives in the negotiations to set up the community benefit fund, and have RES agreed to pay £1.4 million per year into the community benefit fund ?*

The official guidance on community benefits is contained in the 2019 publication, Scottish Government Good Practice Principles for Community Benefits from Onshore Renewable Developments, SGGPP. It states;

“Community benefits packages can take many forms, and decisions on the details are best led locally based on consensus between the renewable energy business and the community/communities concerned. The provision of community benefits (including flexible packages of benefits) is not a material consideration, and has no bearing in the planning process.”

And goes on to state;

“Consultation is an important component of identifying appropriate communities that will be involved in community benefits schemes. This can also help to avoid division and ill-feeling locally, helping to ensure the community benefits offer is viewed positively over the longer term. The Scottish Government encourages this process to begin at an early stage, pre-consent where possible, to allow community groups time to consolidate their available resource and build capacity, as well as to enable discussion and identification of an appropriate area of benefit.

The creation of mutual trust and strengthening of relationships is integral to the overall process. Consultation should be open, timely, fair and inclusive; enabling everyone with an interest the opportunity to be involved and heard. Although local opponents to the development itself may deem such conversations inappropriate, in the longer term it is the considered view of the Scottish

Government that early stage conversations help build engagement in and commitment to local renewable energy developments.

Discussions on the provision of community benefits are not a material consideration in the planning process. To maintain this distinction, Scottish Government recommends that discussions on the development itself and discussions on community benefits proposals are held in two separate forums or at separate times in the development process. However, it is recognised that this may not always be possible owing to the timescale of the project or available resource and capacity within a community. Therefore, when the concept of and approach to community benefits is introduced, it should be made clear to the community that it is independent of the planning process and is not a material consideration in deciding an application."

The above guidance is very clear.

DTBHP have played no part in the social media squabble which has developed around the Blair Hill project. However we are not unaware of what has been said. One comment made by local councillor, David Inglis, grabbed our attention. During an email exchange with a constituent on whether or not CVCC will object to the planning application for the Blair Hill project, he stated; " Whilst I have had many emails from constituents who are opposed to the current proposals. I have also had representations showing support or are neutral therefore they have no opinion either way. Some constituents believe that the £1.4 million community benefit fund will do a lot of good in the area. Cree Valley Community Council have said that they will carry out a survey of their constituents and the wider community, to gauge the views of the public and they will publish their findings This will determine the CC planning response as a statutory consultee"

The above comment by Councillor Inglis is out of line with the official guidance. He is saying that community benefits are a material consideration in planning matters. DTBHP wish to make it clear that, according to SGGPP, and the law, community benefits are not a material consideration in planning matters. Cree Valley CC must not take community benefit funding into account when acting in the role of statutory consultee for the determination of the Blair Hill Wind Farm planning application.

DTBHP are also concerned by the £1.4 million figure quoted by Councillor Inglis. Our calculations, from the information provided by RES, is that the amount being offered is less than £750000.

DTBHP also wish to make it clear that, not once in its 36 pages does SGGPP suggest that local councillors should be given the role of negotiating on behalf of local communities when community benefit funds are being discussed. Yet, the RES Blair Hill website states. "Should the project receive consent, the area of benefit for Blair Hill Wind Farm will be determined in consultation with locally elected representatives from the closest communities." It appears that despite the official guidance of SGGPP, RES have decided that councillors should represent all stakeholders within the local community

DTBHP wish to emphasise that we expect RES to follow SGGPP

We reiterate that. "The creation of mutual trust and strengthening of relationships is integral to the overall process. Consultation should be open, timely, fair and inclusive; enabling everyone with an interest the opportunity to be involved and heard"



RES has prepared this written response to questions received from members of the Community Liaison Group at the inaugural meeting on 17<sup>th</sup> January 2024.

## Socioeconomics and Tourism

*“Will a socioeconomic impact assessment be carried out for the project?”*

Yes.

The publication of National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) puts a greater emphasis on socioeconomic analysis outwith the standard Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) format. It states that *“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.”*<sup>1</sup> Therefore, a separate report on socioeconomics and tourism will be provided alongside the EIA. This report will contain a socioeconomic, tourism and recreation impact assessment, but this format will also allow for a fuller analysis of measures to enhance the beneficial socioeconomic impacts of the proposed Blair Hill Wind Farm.

In the Scoping Report submitted to the ECU in August 2023, it was proposed to scope out socioeconomics and tourism of the EIA. Consultees agreed with this approach and it is compliant with EIA regulations. Socioeconomics and tourism has been scoped out of EIA assessments for other wind farms across Scotland and the approach proposed for Blair Hill wind farm is not new.

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<sup>1</sup> Scottish Government (2023) National Planning Framework 4. Available at: <https://www.gov.scot/publications/national-planning-framework-4/pages/3/>

## Traffic and Transport

*“Is there a detailed plan of the works to be carried out on the road construction after leaving the A75? How long will the road be closed? Where will the materials come from? Has a carbon audit been carried out on the construction phase been carried out and can RES share a copy?”*

With regard to the proposed route from the A75 road to site, we’re still undertaking surveys and discussing options with landowners. A transport assessment will be undertaken as part of the EIA process and RES is currently consulting with Dumfries and Galloway Council and Transport Scotland on our transport plans. A detailed swept path analysis of the turbine delivery route, including the A712 is underway and will be available to view once it is complete. It will be included in documentation submitted as part of the planning application.

We aim to keep traffic movements to a minimum and will seek to use construction materials available on site wherever practicable. The A712 has been assessed as suitable to transport abnormal loads to the site, with some minor modifications required such as the temporary removal of signage or fencing in certain locations. No new road construction is proposed along this route.

A carbon balance assessment will be undertaken once the design of the wind farm is complete and provided in the EIA. The EIA will accompany the planning application and be available for public viewing and comment as part of the formal consultation period run by the determining authority once the planning application is submitted.

## Grid

*“Can RES provide more information on the proposed grid connection route for the project?”*

RES is awaiting a grid offer from the grid Transmission Owner (TO), in this case Scottish Power Transmission. We expect the project to be connected into a substation at Glenlee, approximately 20km from the site, although this will be confirmed by the TO in the coming months.

To enable Blair Hill Wind Farm to connect to the National Grid, the expected infrastructure will comprise one 132kV overhead wood pole line. The grid route application for this connection will be submitted by the TO, however indicative details of the anticipated route of the grid connection for the project will also be included in the Project Description chapter of the EIA which will accompany the planning application. RES envisages this would follow existing grid routes where possible.

RES will provide further updates to the CLG at future meetings when more information is received.



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