

STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS

acting with

FRIENDS OF THE OCHILS

as a Relevant Person Group

for the purposes of the

STIRLING SESSION

**of the Public Inquiry into
Scottish & Southern Energy's proposals for the
Beauly to Denny 400 KV Steel Tower Double Circuit
Overhead Electricity Transmission Line**

SUMMARY PRECOGNITION

Dr Nicki Baker

Context and Process

MY CREDENTIALS

1. My name is Nicki Baker. I live 400-500 metres from the proposed power line upgrade.
2. I have a first degree in Mathematics, and a PhD in human aspects of transport policy. I worked for 31 years in a number of analysis, research and statistics posts, with strong links to public policy-making and practice, in universities, the Scottish Health Service and Scottish local government.

SCOPE OF EVIDENCE

3. This precognition has two parts. The first sets the context for all the evidence brought to this Inquiry by Stirling Before Pylons and the Friends of the Ochils. It puts the major concerns expressed by people in the Stirling area into the context of the characteristics of the area, its residents' values and priorities. The area's responses to the Scottish Executive's formal consultation on SSE's proposals are shown to be congruent with the general public's negative attitudes towards overhead power lines. The main areas of concern are also shown to go counter to the policy priorities of successive Scottish Governments. The solution to the concerns in the Stirling area is seen to be either to put the power line underground throughout this area, or to put it under the sea.
4. In the second part of the precognition, I express my concerns about a number of inadequacies in the consultation process, and ways that the planning process and the Inquiry result in excluding virtually all participation by members of the public.

FRIENDS OF THE OCHILS

5. I am a founder member of Stirling Before Pylons, and the Chair of the Friends of the Ochils. My evidence gives an outline of the Friends of the Ochils.

THE STIRLING AREA & ITS RESIDENTS

6. The southern end of the Beaully – Denny power line runs right through the Stirling area. This would contain some 10% of the total length of the line, but as it has a much higher density of population than the other areas, it holds a far larger proportion of the people and the businesses that would be affected by it, including probably the large majority of all those within 5 / 10 km of it.
7. Stirling Council's Residents Surveys and Quality of Life surveys show the importance of the natural environment to the people of Stirling, and their generally high opinions of the environment of their area. They also emphasise the importance of health. The environment of the Stirling area must also be a significant factor in the success and growth of the area.
8. Half or more of all the properties located very close to (within 600 metres of) the proposed line are in the Stirling section, with large areas of the Eastern Villages unpleasantly close to the line, and some individual properties, particularly in the Logie area, potentially underneath it. The potential for negative visual impacts is obvious. And with the constantly growing evidence about the health implications of living near high-voltage power lines, and the importance of our health to us all, this too must be expected to feature strongly in the way people respond to the proposals.
9. The Stirling area is also important in national and not just local terms. It is a place of immense historical significance. Stirling Castle and the National Wallace Monument are iconic symbols, standing out against the backdrop of the Ochil Hills, visited by hundreds of thousands and seen by millions every year as they visit, move around and pass through the area. Several very important battles were fought here, including the one at Sheriffmuir. All of these stand to be significantly affected by the power line proposals.

OBJECTIONS TO SSE'S PROPOSALS

10. The Scottish Executive received 17,250 objections to SSE's proposals, compared with just 45 letters of support, most of which came from businesses involved in the renewable generation industry and/or from outwith Scotland. Nearly 4,000 of the objections came from the Stirling area.
11. The objectors in general rated 5 issues very highly: the impacts on landscape, tourism, recreation, health and archaeology / cultural heritage were included in up to 99% of responses. 96% of people saw undergrounding as a potential solution.
12. In the Stirling area, the same issues featured at least as highly, with even greater emphasis being put on health issues (94%), archaeology and cultural heritage (94%) and business and employment (88%).
13. The results from the Stirling area are readily explainable by the characteristics of the area, and by the ways the power line would impact on it.

PUBLIC ATTITUDES TO OVERHEAD POWER LINES

14. The very high negative response to the Executive's consultation, and the lack of support for the proposals, are entirely in line with the evidence that power lines are almost universally unpopular. This is illustrated by the VisitScotland research on perceptions of wind farms, and is supported by the President of the CPRE. Considerable additional weight is given by recent research by Prof Hanley and colleagues, who show that, in the Stirling area, the value that people put on the avoidance of the landscape impacts of the proposed power line amounts to some £6.5 million per annum.

PUBLIC POLICY PRIORITIES

15. The issues identified as priorities in relation to the power line proposals by the people of the Stirling area – landscape, tourism and the economy generally, cultural heritage, health - are all recognised as being of very high priority in terms of Scottish public policy. For many years now, there has been a broad political consensus about Scotland's policy priority areas, these being the economy, the environment, health and inequalities in health, and poverty and social disadvantage.
16. Under its Labour administrations, the Scottish Executive published document after document, setting out the main policy areas and the key strategic objectives. A number of quotes are given in the full precognition. The new SNP Government, while obviously wanting to distance itself from the previous administration, and to put forward its own detailed programmes for action, nevertheless inevitably endorses all the main areas of concern in its first policy document.
17. All the policies aspire to improvement and enhancement in the relevant areas; all recognise the fundamental importance of taking a sustainable approach. The concerns of the people of the Stirling area are that, in relation to each of these issues, the power line proposals would lead to adverse impacts, not improvement.
18. The witnesses appearing for Stirling Before Pylons / Friends of the Ochils will between them give evidence on landscape, recreation, history and cultural heritage, tourism and the economy, health, and the particularly detrimental impacts on the Eastern Villages. They will put their evidence into the context of national and local policies, and demonstrate the many negative impacts that would result in the Stirling area from the proposed project.

SOLUTIONS ARE UNDER THE GROUND OR UNDER THE SEA

19. Our evidence also shows the inadequacies in the process of route selection, including most of all the failure to address undergrounding as a

potential solution. SSE's proposals appear to have been based principally on a technical assessment of the options, with inadequate consideration and weight given to the environmental impacts. The need for the line appears to be to provide the capacity to export excess levels of renewably-generated electricity to markets outwith Scotland. Benefits accrue principally to the companies concerned (and their shareholders), and the consumers importing the electricity. But the very many environmental costs of providing for it via an all-overhead line fall on the people and businesses of Scotland and, as we will show, fall disproportionately on the people and businesses of the Stirling area.

20. Undergrounding may not be the only feasible solution. SSE's own evidence to the Strategy session identified that sub-sea options are perfectly feasible, and would be justified on a straightforward cost basis if the alternative costs of undergrounding parts of the Beaulay – Denny line were high enough. And that only takes into account the Beaulay – Denny upgrade: it looks likely that, if an appropriate overview is taken of all the current and near-future developments, then a sub-sea option could indeed be the best solution.
21. Stirling Before Pylons also continues to hold the view that there is a need for a Strategic Environmental Assessment.

INADEQUACIES OF THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

22. The precognition also comments on some inadequacies in the development and planning of these proposals; in particular, inadequacies in the consultation process. I contend that SSE should have heeded calls to inform all the people living close to the line – which nowadays is a straightforward process.
23. As it was, the spread of information was highly inadequate, and would have been far worse without the active efforts of local community groups. Even now, awareness of the proposals is still very patchy indeed.

24. Of particular concern to the Friends of the Ochils is the failure to make efforts to reach the users of the Sheriffmuir area, who number in their tens and hundreds of thousands, but who often live some distance away. This constitutes a democratic deficit in the process.

THE INTRINSICALLY EXCLUDING NATURE OF THE PLANNING PROCESS

25. There are very many ways in which the whole system, through which applications like the Beauly – Denny upgrade get considered and decided, serve to exclude and marginalise participation by members of the public. Examples of this in relation to the process before the Public Inquiry was called include:

- Inadequate levels of information, inappropriate language and insufficient spelling out of issues
- Failure to seek out the views of all potentially affected people, in ways that they can comfortably respond to.
- Requiring people to express their views repeatedly.
- Over-rigid restrictions.

26. In relation to the Public Inquiry, participation by the general public is made almost impossible as a consequence of many aspects of the process.

These include:

- The length of the Inquiry.
- Holding meetings about the Inquiry, and the Inquiry itself, during the working day.
- Requiring people to put everything in writing.
- Communicating with interested parties principally by means of long, complex letters, and expecting them to remember instructions given more than a year in advance.
- Relying on communication via a website.

- Frequent attendance at sessions is a minimum requirement for understanding how the evidence develops, given no written records or summaries.
- No guidance for observers of the proceedings.
- Formal and professionalized proceedings, using obscure and highly specialised language, without explanation for the lay person.
- The adversarial approach.

27. It would be hard to think of ways in which the system could in fact be made more inaccessible, or more off-putting, to the vast majority of people.

28. The inbuilt imbalances of the Inquiry proceedings are further magnified by the massive inequity in the resources available to the applicants and to third parties. The applicants appear able to expect reimbursement from consumers of all their costs. Third parties have to find a myriad of ways of raising funds, laboriously, yet end up with perhaps only 1% of the level of funding of the applicants.