

STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS

- *opposing the Beauly to Denny power line in the Stirling area*

FINAL BRIEFING : November 2009



WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF THE APPLICANTS GET THEIR WAY?

- In relation to the entire 220km of proposed route, the largest range and highest concentration of impacts would occur in the Stirling area, which also has a much larger number of local residents affected.
- The line would run close to hundreds of houses, through designated landscapes, close to nationally-treasured heritage sites, right beside graveyards, etc.
- The Stirling area would have *more* giant pylons than there are existing pylons, not fewer, with an increase from 74 to 78.
- The pylons would be nearly twice the height, and about 7 times the volume, of existing ones.
- The new line would be even more conspicuous due to double stringing with much heavier wires, and a requirement to clear-fell woodland to leave an 80m clear swathe along the line.
- Heavy construction traffic requires an 8-kilometre access track to be made across Sheriffmuir – required for the 4-year construction phase.

HOW HAVE STATUTORY BODIES RESPONDED?

- **Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH)** objected to the proposals in just 2 areas – the Ochils and the Cairngorms – on grounds of visual impact.
- They propose the line should be put underground instead. In the Stirling area, they rejected the route proposed for the overhead line as unsuitable for undergrounding, and instead identified and proposed a potential route to the west of Stirling, utilising the pipeline corridor identified in the Structure Plan and already in use for gas and oil pipelines.
- SNH's proposed route was accepted as feasible – and slightly improved – by the applicants' expert witnesses (power industry consultants) at the public inquiry.
- **Stirling Council** objected to the proposals, with unanimous, all-party agreement; this has been endorsed by the current SNP-led administration.
- Stirling Council endorsed SNH's proposals for undergrounding, at the public inquiry.

THE STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS / FRIENDS OF THE OCHILS POSITION

- All the many grounds for objection were set out clearly from day 1, and repeated many times, but have been systematically ignored or discounted by the applicants.

Heritage

- The **National Wallace Monument** (110,000 paying visitors annually climb to the top) would be significantly affected:
 - views from the top, towards the Ochils, would have around 10 new giant pylons prominently in view, marching up the Ochils scarp through a wide gash in the woodland, and visible as a “stack” going off across Sheriffmuir.
 - views of the Monument, from the A91 and the A907, would be framed by giant pylons and thick wires.
- Magnificent views from **Stirling Castle** (Scotland’s second most frequently visited tourist attraction) towards the Ochils and the National Wallace Monument would have the giant pylons highly visible as a backdrop to the Wallace Monument and an intrusion into the views generally.

History

- The line would go through the heart of, and right across, the site of the **Battle of Sheriffmuir (1715)**.
- This is a visitor attraction for thousands every year, with hundreds coming together, from across Scotland, to commemorate the anniversary of the battle.
- The battle site is due to become Listed in 2011, when Historic Scotland publishes its first formal list of battlefields to be protected.
- The site is of particular importance to Clan McRae, who lost most of their menfolk from the Kintail area at the battle.

Landscape

- The line crosses 8 kilometres of the **Ochil Hills Area of Great Landscape Value** – the only designated area it crosses (though it also goes through the Cairngorms National Park).
- It would be particularly visually intrusive where it comes down the **Ochils scarp**. This area is described by SNH as
 - “forming a stunning backdrop to the contrasting farmed, settled floodplains of the Devon and Forth rivers....”,
 - “one of the most visually sensitive areas in Scotland” and
 - “a landscape experience which is unique in Scotland”.
- Its visibility would be particularly emphasised here by the clear felling of an 80-metre swathe of trees through the wood that clothes the scarp.

- **Sheriffmuir** – including Dumyat and the Cocksburn Reservoir - is by far the most heavily-visited and heavily-used part of the Ochil Hills.

Recreation & leisure

- The Sheriffmuir area is used by walkers, cyclists, horse riders, runners, fishermen, picnickers, photographers, birdwatchers, as well as by hundreds of thousands just driving across to enjoy the views.
- The line would go right through the area from which 40,000 per year people set off to climb **Dumyat**. They come from far and wide: 60% live outwith the Stirling area, 18% from outwith Scotland.
- At least a further 10,000 visits (largely from the local area) are made annually to **Cocksburn Reservoir** – their views would be greatly impacted by the giant pylons – which would be much closer to the reservoir than the existing pylons.
- Construction works will render these areas virtually unusable for up to 4 years.
- The whole **AGLV** area will be greatly enhanced if the line is put underground, and the existing power line is dismantled.

Logie Kirk

- The line would go right next to the **cemetery** at Logie, as well as close to the very popular kirk. Evidence from the applicants' expert witness at the public inquiry confirmed that, during damp and wet weather, **noise from the line** (buzzing and spitting) would be clearly and intrusively audible to mourners at funerals.
- The line would also create substantial visual intrusion into the lovely setting of the church.

Community regeneration and social inclusion

- Community regeneration and social inclusion in the Stirling eastern villages. Cowie, Fallin and Plean, is "in the balance". These areas suffer from persistent low incomes, poor health, low educational attainment, high crime rate, and an unsatisfactory environment. The line would go very close to them.
- Residents have already suffered the health consequences of living close to the Norboard factory, which in the past was guilty of noxious emissions, and they are very concerned at the potential health consequences of the new power line.
- The new line would also deter potential incomers to the area, who might otherwise help to change the social mix and bring greater prosperity to the area.

Health

- Evidence on the impacts of high-voltage power lines has been building consistently over 30 years. Research in this area continues to attract substantial funding.

- It must be assumed that extra-high voltage lines may have considerably worse impacts than the lines which have been included in most of the research.
- Clear links have been established between childhood leukaemia and living close to high-voltage power lines. New research is showing many other associations, of which a significant increase in Alzheimer's disease is perhaps the most worrying.
- As the power line, once built, would be expected to be in use for 50-60 years, the precautionary principle should apply when considering how close it is allowed to come to houses.
- Stirling has some 600 households too close to the proposed line – by far the largest number for any section of the route.

IMPACTS ON TOURISM AND THE ECONOMY

- Impacts on **tourism** numbers are likely to be significant, given all the above. James Fraser, recently Area Director for Visit Scotland for Argyll, Stirling and Forth Valley, using evidence from the applicants' Environmental Statement, gave evidence to the public inquiry that first year losses to the Stirling area would be £25 million – £38 million, and **£66 million – £117 million over a 5-10 year period**.
- Nick Hanley, Professor of Environmental Economics at the University of Stirling, and an adviser to DEFRA, gave evidence to the public inquiry that the costs of the **environmental (landscape) damage** to the people of Stirling would be valued as at least £6.5 million per year, or **£325 million over the 50-year** life of the pylons.
- The economic costs estimated by these distinguished witnesses would be **easily sufficient to justify putting the line underground** through the whole Stirling area.

UNDERGROUNDING – THE SOLUTION

- Undergrounding is the solution proposed by SNH, and supported by Stirling Council.
- Its feasibility was confirmed by the applicants' expert witnesses at the public inquiry. They accepted that the line would need to go to the west of Stirling, through the much deeper alluvial soils there, and avoiding the near-impossible challenges posed by the very steep scarp slope of the Ochils.
- SNH propose that the line should come above ground for its last 4 kilometres before Braco sub-station; this would take it through an almost unpopulated and little-visited rural area.
- Stirling Before Pylons and the Friends of the Ochils believe that undergrounding is needed throughout the whole Stirling area – to avoid further extended wrangles over possible overhead stretches – but accept that having the most northerly 4km overhead would be likely to generate little controversy.
- The applicants have consistently and repeatedly quoted greatly exaggerated costs for undergrounding. They base their costs on the old, oil-filled cable technology. Their

experts acknowledged at the public inquiry that this is now obsolete, and that XLPE (cross-linked polyethylene) technology would in fact be used.

- Experience of using XLPE in Europe and North America suggests that its costs are typically around 2 – 5 times those of overhead lines.
- There are increasingly numerous European precedents for using XLPE undergrounding in sensitive areas – areas of high landscape value and/or close to settlements or individual houses, especially where the impacts of using overhead lines have held up decisions about new power lines for many years.
- Some £450 million is being spent putting an extra-high-voltage power line underground through the site of the London Olympics.
- The additional costs of using underground cables through the whole Stirling area would be readily justified by the economic costs of the overhead line, as estimated by James Fraser and Prof Nick Hanley in evidence to the public inquiry.
- Significant additional benefits will be gained by the dismantling of the existing power line, particularly where it goes through the AGLV, and close to houses.
- The costs of undergrounding are in fact easily affordable. They would be shared by all electricity consumers across Great Britain over a 20 year period, adding around £1 per annum to household bills.
- An earlier public inquiry in North Yorkshire set the precedents for the criteria to be used in reaching a decision to put power lines underground. The criteria are easily met, and well exceeded, in the Sheriffmuir – Logie – Wallace Monument area alone. Our briefing “Undergrounding – the North Yorkshire benchmark” gives more details.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE SEE THE FOLLOWING:

Stirling Before Pylons and Friends of the Ochils gave extensive **evidence to the public inquiry in 2007**. All the precognitions can be located at <http://www.beaulydenny.co.uk/DocumentLibrary/LocalSessions/Stirling/FullPrecognitions/ObjectionGroups.aspx>

1. Context and process	Dr Nicki Baker
2. Stirling's landscape and geomorphology	Prof Mike Thomas
3. Ochil Hills - Landscape, amenity, recreation etc	Dr Nicki Baker
4. Landscape and visual impact assessment	Geoff Sinclair
5. Willingness to Pay to avoid non-market impacts	Prof Nick Hanley
6. Stirling's artistic and literary landscape	Dr Elspeth King
7. The Battlefield of Sheriffmuir	Virginia Wills
8. A historic landscape at the heart of the nation	Dr Fiona Watson
9. Historic buildings	Peter Pearson
10. Tourism and economic impact	James Fraser & John Logan
11. The Eastern Villages: regeneration & social inclusion	Peter Pearson
12. The village of Fallin	Archie Bone
13. The village of Plean	Tommy Brookes
14. Local health concerns (1)	Ian Paterson
15. Local health concerns (2)	Caroline Paterson
16. An MSP's perspective	Dr Richard Simpson
17. Approach to route selection in the Stirling area	Peter Pearson
18. Undergrounding	Simon Allen
19. Hydrology (private water supplies)	Dr Nicki Bakler
20. Planning policy & related material considerations	Ian Kelly

Further evidence for the Stirling area, to be found at <http://www.beaulydenny.co.uk/DocumentLibrary/LocalSessions/Stirling/FullPrecognitions/IndividualObjectors.aspx>, included the following -

Community participation, national implications and public health	Keith Brown MSP
Logie Kirk	Rev Stuart Fulton
(Untitled)	Clare Clark

On the **Stirling Before Pylons** website, at <http://www.stirlingbeforepylons.org/meetings.php>, the following **briefings** can be found:

- Briefing 1 – The proposals for the power line in the Stirling area
- Briefing 2 – Health impacts of the proposed power line
- Briefing 3 - The implications for the Ochil Hills
- Briefing 4 - Programming and planning issues
- Briefing 5 – History and Tourism
- Briefing 8 – Homes and the proposed power line
- Briefing 9 - Undergrounding
- Briefing 10 – Key undergrounding questions

The following further briefings are attached:

- Undergrounding in Europe (March 2009)
- Undergrounding – the North Yorkshire precedent