

STIRLING BEFORE PYLONS

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



Briefing no. 3

The implications for the Ochil Hills

The beauty and importance of the Ochil Hills are recognised in their formal designation as an Area of Great Landscape Value. Stirling and Clackmannanshire Councils, in their joint Structure Plan, state “Within [AGLVs], priority must be given to landscape quality, and any new developments will require to be sensitively sited and designed”.

Unfortunately, Scottish & Southern Energy’s proposals to route the Beauly to Denny line right across the Ochil Hills AGLV would be quite devastating to that precious landscape. Their route would go:

- from the A9 at Whiteston across to the Sheriffmuir forest
- right through the site of the important Sheriffmuir Battle (1715)
- on across the moor, a little to the west of the existing, smaller scale power line, and
- right through the most heavily visited part of the entire Ochil Hills AGLV, where people start on their walks to Dumyat and the Cocksburn Reservoir, before
- turning down through Yellowcraig Wood (community woodland),
- right beside Logie Kirk and the old and new cemeteries.

The detail of what is proposed is hidden within many sections of SSE’s 2,600 page Environmental Statement. However, what is becoming abundantly apparent is the degree and extent of devastation to the Sheriffmuir / Dumyat / Logie area, if these works are allowed to take place. At this point in time, our understanding is as follows:

- The pylons would be even bigger than foreseen by the developers last year – up to 65 metres high. This is almost the height of the Wallace Monument (67m), and more than two and a half times the height of the existing pylons on the old 132kV line. They would be much too tall to be “hidden” against backdrops of woodland and hill, and will stand out against the sky in a highly prominent manner.
- In the particularly sensitive Dumyat / Cocksburn Reservoir area, the one existing 25 metre high pylon would be replaced with 3 new ones, at least one of which would be an angle tower and therefore likely to be 65 metres high; the others might be lower, perhaps 47 – 55 metres.
- Where the existing pylons come down through Yellowcraig Wood, they are visible from very far away. However, only the upper half is currently visible – the lower parts being concealed within vegetation. If new pylons were put in, all vegetation would be cut down in the vicinity, and the *visible* height of the pylons would be around 4 to 5 times higher than at present.
- In addition to the permanent damage that would be done to the landscape by the presence of these huge steel structures, enormous amounts of damage would be done, over a very long period, in the course of constructing the power line.

- All trees would be cut down, within 80 metres of the pylon line. This would include the beautiful old beech trees at the Dumyat / Cocksburn Reservoir car parking area, a number of lovely old Scots pines in the area to the south, and a hugely visible swathe right through Yellowcraigs Wood.
- In the process of constructing the power line in this area, access for light construction vehicles to Sheriffmuir and the Logie scarp slope would be possible via the unclassified road running across Sheriffmuir, south from the A9 south of Greenloaning. New passing places would be added to the road. However, the road is recognised to be unsuitable for most of the construction traffic.
- A new access “track”, some 9km in length, would therefore be constructed, in parallel to the proposed route of the power line across Sheriffmuir, from the A9, across the moor, and down through Yellowcraig Wood (listed as “ancient woodland”, and managed as community woodland) to meet the A91 near Logie Villa.
- The exact route of the “track” is unspecified; rather, SSE indicate a 300m strip (narrower through Yellowcraig) within which they would be free to construct it, according to terrain and with cost minimisation a high priority. Where it goes through the Yellowcraig Wood, the track would have to zigzag around to accommodate the steep gradient – taking out even more of the ancient woodland, and leaving even more visible a scar. The non-technical summary (NTS) of the Environmental Statement recognises that the damage to this wood would be the worst impact on any area of forestry along the entire 220km line.
- The track would be (at least) 4 m wide, with additional passing places. By comparison, the existing road up from Logie Kirk is typically 2.3 m wide, and the road across Sheriffmuir typically 3 – 3.5m wide.
- It would be constructed in such a way as to be fit to take 100 tonne cranes and other heavy plant. The Sheriffmuir road, by contrast, has a weight limit of just 7.5 tonnes imposed on it.
- The surfacing would be of stone. The stone would be cut out of “borrow pits”, i.e. quarries, somewhere (unspecified) in the vicinity. No information is given as to where these quarries would be sited. If given permission, SSE’s contractors would be free to take stone from wherever they chose. There would also be compounds to store fuel and vehicles, and one or two helicopter landing areas within the Sheriffmuir area.
- There are hints that the power company might want the access track to be made permanent, so as to allow access for maintenance and to repair line faults. (Evidence: SSE say they are minded to apply for planning permission to make an unspecified 7km of track permanent. However, in another part of the ES, they state explicitly that the where the track crosses the Sheriffmuir battle site, it would not be permanent.)
- In addition to the access track, each pylon would require its own construction site. These would vary in size from an estimated 32m square for straightforward pylons (“line towers”), to 50m square for “angle towers” (such as the one to be sited

nearest the Cocksburn Reservoir and the Dumyat car parking area), to 77m square on each side of pylons which act as winch sites (and these are unspecified in the application).

- Excavations would be needed for each leg of each pylon. These would be a 4m cube (4m x 4m x 4m) for line towers, or a 5m cube (5m x 5m x 5m) for angle towers. Rock breaking would obviously be needed in many sites, particularly across Sheriffmuir and down through Yellowcraig Wood, where the terrain is rocky.
- Additional spurs would be built from the access track to each of the existing pylons on the old 132 kV line, to give access for demolition.
- Each existing pylon would require a demolition site surrounding it. As well as the demolition and removal of the steelwork, concrete bases would also be removed, to below ground level.
- Construction work for the whole line is at this stage expected to take 4 years. Work would take place simultaneously at various sites, up and down the entire line. The time taken for work on the Sheriffmuir / Logie section is not specified, but looks likely to be at the upper end of SSE's estimates, at 24 months. This however is not measured on a continuous basis, so Sheriffmuir in particular might be greatly affected by these works for several years.
- Work would be allowed to take place 7 days a week, between the hours of 7am and 7pm (on summer weekdays); slightly less at other times.

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Other Stirling Before Pylons briefings available or in course of preparation:

- 1. Summary of the proposals for the Stirling area**
- 2. Health impacts**
- 4. Planning issues**

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