

21st August 2024

SSEN Proposed 400kV Overhead Line & associated Substations – Kintore to Tealing

This letter is being sent to you by a group of Community Councils who represent communities from across Aberdeenshire and Angus, on and around SSEN's proposed 400kV Overhead line and relevant substations, with a request that you support them by taking action to stop the current plans presented to us by SSEN and National Grid ESO until thorough investigations, including alternative options and meaningful discussions can be held.

It is abundantly clear that communities up and down the proposed route and from many other areas of Scotland, England and Wales, are angry and upset by the proposals being presented to build huge substations with hundreds of miles of overhead pylon lines (up to 70m in height) across the countryside. Many of these communities are actively objecting to the proposals and the message is very simple, our communities say NO, to what is being proposed.

Research undertaken by National Grid ESO, in 2012, resulted in The National Policy Statement for Electricity Networks announcing that overhead lines should be the strong starting presumption for electricity network development unless in nationally designated landscapes such as national parks. However, those figures are vastly out of date now; the cost of fabricated steel has increased enormously, and technology had seen major advancements. Indeed, in 2020, the ESO revealed that an integrated UK offshore grid could save £6bn in connection costs by 2050.

During the final adjournment debate in the House of Commons, 23 May 2024, Justin Tomlinson, Minister for Energy Security and Net Zero, declared that an urgent review is required to look at the long-standing presumptions for electricity networks to ensure that, 'communities voices have been listened to' and we couldn't agree more.

We are very concerned to hear that Keir Starmer, Prime Minister, is happy to make enemies to ensure critical infrastructure is built. On the contrary during Prime Minister's questions, 24th July 2024, we heard that Adrian Ramsay, Co-leader of the Green Party called for a 'pause' on a controversial pylon line being proposed across East Anglia, where there is huge concern from local residents to allow for proper options assessment to be taken so that things are done in the right way with a long-term benefit, which makes logical sense and something we very much support.

The Community Councils who endorse this letter, completely reject SSEN's assertion that they have carried out a legitimate consultation process.

As things stand, SSEN hosts events, labelled as consultation or engagement events but communities say that SSEN treat the project as fait accompli, and that this is being done to them, rather than that their voices are being heard. There is no effective or regular feedback loop or process employed.

Trust is a major concern between residents and SSEN, on too many occasions residents have been told incorrect information to try and pacify the plans presented to them.

Biosecurity, where measures are taken to prevent the unintentional spread of invasive species or pests which can destroy crops, is extremely important for farming in the North East of Scotland, where protection of this precious land is enshrined in British and Scottish legislation. Landowners in our areas already have major concerns about the proposals and the impacts on their livelihood: this is of particular importance to Scottish farmers who produce and export this highly valued seed potato crops.

However, the proposals and protocols presented by SSEN and Balfour Beatty to protect or safeguard this national resource, at this time are neither adequate nor sufficient and both organisations are reluctant to discuss this matter and the attendant damage prevention and mitigation costs with relevant parties and elected officials, which is concerning.

Residents within our communities feel they are being misled by the current proposals and supporting policies. Officials cannot currently tell them what the future could look like, how many more substations, how many more pylon lines, how many battery storage facilities and so on. The public are being told that this infrastructure is needed to meet 'net zero' targets and support our energy transition, however with the targets for net zero now in question and the disproportionate licensing and implementation of wind power generation accumulating to more than the projected energy demand for Scotland, we have to stop and question; the need, the driving force, the economic benefit, the negative impact on our health, our homes, our jobs, natural resources and the landscape and really understand what does the end result look like and what do we actually need?

Similarly, we need to highlight that we are extremely disappointed that our communities were not actively consulted on the wider overall plan by Westminster, Holyrood, and National Grid ESO with regards to the Holistic Network Design (HND). The HND and Beyond 2030 plans could have a catastrophic impact on our countryside and communities. It is simply unacceptable that this has not been publicly consulted on.

In general, people are supportive of the need to move towards renewable energy, however they are also aware that this transmission infrastructure is ultimately needed to export energy to England and beyond. This risks, lining the pockets of corporate companies without a thought for the area and people severely affected by it; the impact on food security, biosecurity, wildlife, tourism, cultural heritage, employment, health and wellbeing, to name but a few.

Each Community Council signing this letter requests that the UK and Scottish Governments (who are both directly involved) and their agencies and contractors, take urgent steps to halt the current process until thorough, timely, appropriate, and competent investigations can be undertaken.

Details of those sending the letter can be found on the page following this letter, please note each signatory would be more than happy to discuss the contents with you in more detail if required.

Kinds regards.

Community Councils from across Aberdeenshire and Angus.

Benholm and Johnshaven Community Council	Crathes, Drumoak and Durris Community Council	Echt & Skene Community Council	Glamis and Area Community Council	Inveresk Community Council
Kintore and District Community Council	Kirriemuir Community Council	Kirriemuir Landward East Community Council	Mearns Community Council	North Kincardine Rural Community Council
	Royal Burgh of Forfar Community Council	Stonehaven & District Community Council	Westhill & Elrick Community Council	