

Orkney's Community Wind Farm Project

Hoy Consultation Event – January 2019

A summary of the event and the feedback gathered from the public.

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1. Introduction

This report relates to the feedback received from members of the public on the current proposals for a Council-owned wind farm to be developed on Hoy. It covers some background to the project, explains the format of a public information session that was held on the island in January 2019 and summarises the feedback received at that.

It should be noted that the feedback received at the event is informal and a pre-application consultation will be carried out should the project reach planning application stage. This informal feedback is primarily being used to identify the main areas of concern to the local community, identify potential tasks for the team to carry out and inform future communications on the project.

2. Background

It was announced at a public meeting in April 2018 that, after assessing various potential sites, Orkney Islands Council planned to undertake a detailed investigation to see if land to the west of Lyness would be suitable for a substantial wind energy development.

The potential development forms part of the Council's enterprising approach to tackling its financial challenges –while Government funding diminishes, demand for Council services continues to grow. Severe cuts will be needed unless significant new sources of income are found and a large-scale wind farm could make a major contribution towards helping the Council to preserve and enhance key services that people value and depend upon.

Importantly, such a project could also serve as a transformational source of funding for projects of great value to the local community, supporting initiatives that boost the social and economic wellbeing of the county.

Initial assessments indicated that the site could house up to 30 wind turbines each of 3 to 3.5 megawatt (MW) capacity, generating more than 50 MW of electricity (meaning that any planning application would be considered and decided by the Scottish Government).

Between April and December 2018, a great deal of work was carried out by the Council's Strategic Projects team on the detail of any potential project, including bird and ground surveys, consideration of the site's proximity to the national scenic area and residential properties, and discussions with communications companies around the location of masts in the area.

In addition, a grid connection was applied for. As this can be a lengthy process, it was important to do this well ahead of any decision being made on whether to submit a full planning application. A grid connection for the project depends on upgrades between Orkney and the Scottish mainland.

Following this work, revised plans were drawn up, proposing to erect seven turbines compared to the 30 presented in the original plans. The proposed turbines have also been made taller, moved further away from local homes and have been focused

towards the north of the site. The potential output of the new layout would be in the region of 28MW – meaning any planning application will be determined locally.

3. Consultation event structure

A public-drop in session was held in Hoy on Tuesday 8 January 2019 at the North Walls Centre. This was advertised in the local press, through posters, on social media and in the Hoy Blether (the island's community newsletter).

The session allowed local people to view a series of display boards. These showed:

- A timeline of the work that had been carried out by the team since the project was announced.
- Concerns that had been raised by the community following the initial project announcement.
- The data that had been gathered over the course of the site investigations.
- The resulting layout changes.
- Visual mock-ups of how both the previous layout and the new layout would look from three different viewpoints on the island.
- Comments that had been made by the local community about potential opportunities that could arise from the project.
- A list of the work that would be carried out over the coming months on the project proposals.

Those attending the session were, in the main, accompanied around the display by a member of staff from the Strategic Projects team giving them the opportunity to ask any questions they might have about the proposals.

Attendees were then asked to take some time to fill in a feedback sheet. Twenty feedback sheets were filled in at the event, with some choosing to take them away to fill in at home.

An attendance tally was taken on the day and it is estimated that around 45 people attended. It was noted that all those who attended the event were extremely engaged with the process, asking questions or giving an opinion on the project. All attendees were spoken to by at least one member of the Strategic Projects team and many stayed at the venue for an extended period of time to talk with other community members about the plans.

Post-event the amended plans were emailed out on request to an additional 12 people and downloaded 54 times from the Council website. The event was covered in the local press, including a five-minute package on BBC Radio Orkney, featuring the Strategic Projects Director, the Leader of the Council and three local people with differing views on the project.

4. Questions asked of the public

The feedback sheet posed the following questions to members of the public:

- What's your opinion on the wind farm development?

- What do you think of the changes that have been made?
- What do you see as the positives of a windfarm on Hoy?
- What do you see as the negative aspects of a windfarm on Hoy?
- We want to keep in touch with the community as the project progresses – what's the best way to do this?
- Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

5. Feedback received

The written feedback on each of the questions was as follows:

What's your opinion on the wind farm development?

The feedback received on this point was mixed, with some respondents having a favourable opinion of the wind farm project and others being against it or feeling that more information was needed before they could form an opinion. The areas where people felt they needed more information were around the overall impact of the development, the effect on property prices in the area, whether other renewable energy forms had been considered and primarily how the community could benefit from the scheme. This final point was in line with the questions received verbally at the session.

What do you think of the changes that have been made?

Three quarters of those providing feedback said that they were happier with the new proposals than with the previous proposals – comments included that the changes were 'far more realistic', were 'going in the right direction' and were 'better than the original scheme'. Very few of those providing feedback were negative on the changes, but some raised concerns about the turbines being bigger than originally planned. This was in line with the verbal feedback received at the event, with almost all attendees reacting positively to the changes, particularly when they saw the differences in the visual mock ups that had been provided.

What do you see as the positives of a wind farm on Hoy?

The main positive that was identified by respondents was the potential for income generation and the subsequent benefit to the community. However, just over half of those who responded were either not convinced that the wind farm would bring any real benefit or felt that they needed much more information on potential community benefit schemes. One respondent suggested that an independent body would be better placed to advise on a community benefit scheme.

What do you see as the negative aspects of a windfarm on Hoy?

The main issue that was raised by the respondents was the potential visual impact of the wind turbines on Hoy's landscape. The potential noise of the turbines and the effect on the natural environment followed closely behind. Other key issues that were raised were the potential effect on tourism, extra ferry traffic, changes to the demographic of Hoy and any knock-on effect on property prices in the area.

We want to keep in touch with the community as the project progresses – what's the best way to do this?

Nearly three quarters of those who responded said they would like more public drop in sessions, where they could talk face to face with the project team. The second most popular responses were email and posts on the Hoy and Walls Community Facebook page. Other suggestions were through the Development Trust, through local press, through newsletters, through community meetings, through posters and through the Hoy Blether community newsletter.

Do you have any other comments you wish to make?

The comments on this question were varied and therefore are presented below:

- Management of the project key, from day to day running to how profits would be distributed - specialised role, not something that could be sustainable on a volunteer/community-led basis, especially in a small, busy community where there may not be enough folk with the time, willingness or aptitude to spare.
- I live quite near this proposal. What effect will this have on the value of our property?
- In the 20 years I have been here the island has just drifted along and no cohesive development plan has been put in place. I fear it is too late.
- Useful community engagement - thank you
- Are our concerns being taken seriously?
- Council should stay out of commercial business
- I have concerns re the supply of road materials and the impact that could arise from reopening of existing quarries on Hoy. I would like the Council to take into consideration any impact on local residents who live in close proximity to the quarry and along the road leading from the quarry to the site.
- Does the development promote a long-term input into the island? The tourist pound is on the increase - can this scheme capitalise on this. Is there a possibility of creating a tourist - perhaps adventure type activity on the site - mountain bike tracks - wayfaring - maze - even viewing platform - but bearing in mind comments about biodiversity overleaf - perhaps a yacht marina at Lyness be a further suggestion?
- I would prefer to see investment in other renewable energy ideas e.g. hydro-electric investigated.
- Full depiction of impact is not shown or indeed known, how can it be, roads, etc.

A number of verbal questions were also posed to the team during the session. These were noted down and are presented below:

- When will this be built?
- What's the benefit for Hoy?
- What jobs will be created?
- Are we doing economic studies on the potential tourism impact?
- Compensation for reduction in value of a house?

- How does this impact on the cable?
- How long will bird studies go on for?
- Will you be reopening the quarry?
- How can we determine our own planning applications?
- How much infrastructure will be required to support it?
- How will the turbines be managed?
- Have other forms of renewable energy been reviewed or explored?

6. Next steps

Taking into account the information gathered through the written feedback and the verbal questions noted the following key areas of concern and areas where more information is required have been identified:

Key areas of concern

- Potential visual impact
- Potential noise issues
- Effect on the natural environment
- Effect on property prices in the area.

Key areas where people would like more information

- Community benefit scheme
- Associated infrastructure
- Location of any quarrying activity to be undertaken