

**Kirkhill & Bunchrew Community Council**  
**Community Meeting to discuss SSEN Pylon Proposals**  
**26<sup>th</sup> June 2023 7.30 pm**  
**Venue: Kirkhill Community Centre**

Present: Community Councillors Karen Young, Eleanor Kennedy, Cameron Kemp, Ally MacNeill and Highland Councillor David Fraser. Approximately 60 members of the public were in attendance/joining on Zoom.

Apologies: Community Councillors Judith Rumbold, Lindsey Stout, Fred Geddes; Highland Councillors Emma Knox, Chris Balance and Helen Crawford; MSPs Kate Forbes, Rhoda Grant, Jamie Halcro Johnston, Douglas Ross, Ariane Burgess, Edward Mountain; Drew Hendry MP

**Introduction**

Cameron Kemp, Chairman of the Kirkhill & Bunchrew Community Council (KBCC) introduced the meeting/discussion and welcomed everyone.

Main speaker: Lindsay Ward, Founder Member, Communities B4 Power Companies

**Talk from Lindsay Ward (LW)**

*(verbatim)*

*www.communitiesb4powercompanies.co.uk*

*Facebook: Communities B4 Power Companies*

*"Good evening, everyone. Thank you, Eamon, for inviting me to speak to you today.*

*My name is Lyndsey Ward and I am one of the founding members of Communities B4 power Companies. A group that was formed in response to SSEN's shocking plans to industrialise the Highlands and our homes.*

*Unfortunately, my running mate Denise is working so I am going to try and cover what we each would normally talk about. So, I apologise in advance for all the information I am about to throw at you.*

*I, like most of you, only became aware of what we are threatened with earlier in the year when I went to a local public 'consultation' held by SSEN. Consultation used here in the loosest sense of the word. Of course, some never got notified and have only managed to find out what was going on by locals spreading the word, social media and the press.*

*I think most of us realised that we were being presented with something akin to a fait accompli.*

*Many felt SSEN's plans had already been a long time in the process and yet here we were, only being told now that our opinions mattered. We certainly were not helped by SSEN to understand what was going on and their replies to questions were slow to come if they came at all. I know others, like me, were not impressed with their actions. We are still far from impressed.*

*I have been to a few of these events with developers here in the Highlands and the set up was just as I have previously experienced. Their ducks were all lined up and ready to quack before we even got a look in.*

*So, how did we get here? Scotland was mooted as the Saudi Arabia of renewables (along with several other countries actually) and the welcome mat was put out for wind developers but there was no overarching plan. The siting of turbines appeared haphazard, too remote and cheap land, forestry and opportunist landowners allowed wind developments where there were few people to object to them. Few people = few voters. There was certainly no plan revealed to targeted communities as to how this electricity was ever going to be transported hundreds of miles.*

*Our group believes SSEN's transmission plans are being driven by the wind industry. SSEN is 75% owned by SSE – one of the most successful wind developers in Scotland and one of the biggest recipients of the constraint payments we pay on our electricity bills to turn turbines off in times of low demand.*

*We already have too many wind turbines for our needs in Scotland.*

*We have enough transmission now for the electricity we need in Scotland too.*

*SSEN's plans are not for us. It is for taking electricity from Scotland to England and it is for thousands more wind turbines. It is to produce energy to meet net zero requirements south of the border. Whatever Net Zero actually is or what it needs.*

*Our group is committed to stopping SSEN in full because if we do not object to this gigantic proposal in full, we will be bombarded with more and more wind farm applications and lots more infrastructure. WE have no option. Nowhere in the Highlands will be safe from industrialisation. We will become an industrial hub for England.*

*SSEN has already refused to confirm if these are the last lot of lines to come our way.*

*Scotland has no legal requirement to permit the infrastructure to provide England with electricity. The UK government cannot force Scotland to approve it. The Scottish Government has 100% planning powers devolved to them. Not one turbine or pylon can be constructed here without their say so.*

*Scotland does not financially benefit much from electricity production, except as consumers and the bits of tax SSEN, NG, and wind farm companies might pay.*

*The Scottish government does not own wind farms or have investment in them.*

*SSE and SSEN are private companies with shareholders to keep happy.*

*The other 25% owners of SSEN is the Ontario's Teachers Pension Plan.*

*This is about money. It is not for the good of the planet or you and I – it is about their bottom line. Pure and simple.*

*The Highlands are renowned for its beauty: it's majestic mountains, wild lands, lochs, rivers, and diversity of wildlife. It is also known for its people, many of whom make their living out of this amazing landscape. Industrialising it to the degree that SSEN's proposals will do will change that forever.*

*Do we want the Highlands sacrificed for the benefits of other nations and BIG energy? This is a question we must keep asking ourselves. We have been told relentlessly about the thousands of jobs, the influx of money, the lowering of energy costs, and how this industrialisation will not be detrimental to our landscape, quality of life, and our livelihoods. But has any of this become a reality?*

*Some of you may believe that there is a financial future for Scotland in electricity export. But here is the truth:*

*ENGLAND IS NOT OBLIGATED TO BUY SCOTTISH ELECTRICITY.*

*And it absolutely won't, if it generates enough of its own or buys cheaper from other countries.*

*England has backed nuclear and huge offshore wind developments off their own coastlines. There are talks of subsea cables between the south coast of England and Morocco, to import African solar and wind power.*

*England's infrastructure will not be able to take any more wind energy from us for many years. More wind farms will mean an even bigger bottleneck and more millions paid out by us for constraints to switch the turbines off. The current cost to us is nearly £1.4b. That doesn't include something called Forward Energy Trades – a sort of secret constraint. Despite efforts from many over several years we have been unable to get a figure from Westminster. We do know that in 2011 it was running parallel with the constraint figure in the public domain. We can only hope it is still not running parallel with an extra £1.4bn on our bills.*

*Where else could all this new wind power go if not to England?*

*A subsea interconnector between Scotland and Norway has just been refused by the Norwegian government so not there.*

*Into storage batteries? No industrialised nation can run off batteries. Certainly not for days when the wind doesn't blow as is common in the summer and in freezing winters. The production of large scale batteries has its own serious environmental and economic issues, and we are far from that being a reality for taking the power of thousands more turbines. Same goes for pumped storage.*

*Green hydrogen? There are so many conflicting reports as to whether this is truly viable, clean, or affordable on a large scale. Recent reports have shown that even environmental groups are not backing it because of its dubious credentials. It also takes a lot of energy so will the production plants be connected to the grid or only work when the wind blows?*

*So what are we actually doing as a group?*

*We are taking advice from a planning policy expert with decades of experience and successes. We are demanding evidence of need for all this. There was recently a challenge in Argyll and Bute on the needs issue, but SSEN are extremely reluctant to give anyone any data. It was eventually extracted that the Dalmally power lines had only 6% guaranteed customers and the other 94% was speculative. In other words, encouraging more wind connections with no guaranteed market for the energy.*

*We are told it is required but we have not been shown the facts or the figures. We want to have them and for them to be scrutinised by independent experts.*

*In April a formal submission from Communities B4 Power Companies was sent to the Scottish government, Highland Council, SSEN and Ofgem asking for this.*

*This is a massive and profound landscape change of national scale throughout the whole of the north Highlands. The piecemeal planning application approach to this infrastructure is both unfair and unsatisfactory. We want a consolidated approach – not confusing bits and pieces. A maximum of one planning application per line.*

*We are also asking for the overarching plan for the Highlands, Scotland and the wider UK to be made public to be able to assess more accurately what is being planned and if it is indeed necessary.*

*So far, we have had no response other than SSEN saying they are 'escalating' the matter when prompted.*

*If they had the details, we have asked for why are they ignoring a qualified professional? Apart from being disrespectful, if they simply gave us the needs data and it was shown to be accurate then it would mean we wouldn't be pursuing them on the issue and not be a thorn in their side by raising it at every opportunity.*

*The following figures are taken from the SG's own website and analysed by our expert.*

- *Currently Scotland's electricity demands: peak winter 4.5GW peak summer 3.4GW*
- *OFGEM predicts Scotland's peak demand will double in the next 20 years, taking it to 9GW in winter and 7GW in summer.*
- *Current ONSHORE WIND production in Scotland:*
  - *Installed 8.7GW*
  - *Under construction 1.2GW*
  - *Awaiting construction 4.5GW*
  - *In planning 5.5GW = 19.9GW*

*The SG is seeking a minimum installed capacity of 20GW of onshore wind by 2030. We already have 19.95GW in the system which is also double Ofgem's predictions for winter 2042.*

*We also currently have 13.3GW of onshore and offshore installed. That is 4.3GW more than Ofgem predicts we will need in the winter in 2042.*

*These figures do not include any other generating technologies like solar, hydro etc.*

*SG figures, plus reasonable assumptions on repowering and extensions allow an overall onshore and offshore 2030/32 future provision to be a total of 71.9GW made up of:*

- *Operational 15.2GW*
- *Under Construction 3.2GW*
- *Consented 7GW*
- *Awaiting consent 4.2GW*
- *ScotWind 2022 over 25GW*
- *Repowering & Ext. 11.3GW*
- *Future Auctions 6GW = 71.9GW*

*To be clear those figures do not include any current or future contributions from solar or other technologies. Just wind power. Nearly 72 GW – that is 8 times what Ofgem predict Scotland will need in the winter in 2042.*

*The UK Government's net zero ambitions rely, currently, on electricity generated in Scotland (on and offshore) being transferred to the rest of the UK in an integrated electricity system overseen by OFGEM.*

*The current ability to transmit electricity to England is capped, if everything is working, at about 7GW. The planned new interconnector cable, to be built in the next ten years, will only add another 2GW. That is 9GW – we will have 63GW to find a home for WITHOUT the thousands of wind turbines hooking into SSEN's new transmission!*

*There are also grid "pinch points" in England too that need major upgrades.*

*To repeat myself a bit - this infrastructure proposed by SSEN is NOT for transmitting electricity throughout Scotland. It is for transmitting electricity south to England and perhaps further afield. England have no hope of taking it now or for at least a decade – even if they want it!*

*Current constraints to stop wind energy being generated into the grid in Scotland and which we the consumer pays wind farm owners to do, is done because the energy cannot be transmitted south of the border. In a nutshell, Scotland has too many wind farms already, for its own good. SSEN's infrastructure proposal will not enable more energy to move to households in Scotland. That is already in place. There is simply too much energy being produced in Scotland for Scotland's needs. This is for England and as I have previously said Scotland does not financially benefit from electricity production apart some tax paid and our own electricity.*

*I am sure you have all seen the Beaully to Denny and the 42 acre sprawling industrial mess that is Balblair substation. That was once a small pretty inoffensive switching station built for the hydro dams some decades before. It is so huge now it can only be seen in its entirety from the air. It has had, until recently, a noise abatement notice slapped on it.*

*So noisy was this development that residents reported glasses of water rippling on their bedside cabinets, B&B guests asking for their money back and one couple had to take their touring caravan to a quiet location to get some sleep. One resident speaks of the vibrations felt through his pillow at night. Fishermen on the famous Beaully River also reported the noise from transmission lines as annoying and distracting. My family could hear the now famous Beaully Buzz at times and we live about four miles away.*

*This gives us a snapshot of the future. The Beaully to Denny sized pylons are huge, averaging 57m, and the new substations SSEN propose will be bigger than the Balblair substation. 60 acres (equivalent to 35 professional football pitches) at Fanellan in Kiltarlity, 120 acres near Aberdeen where a farmer has already been told he will lose a third of his family farm to a Compulsory Purchase Order if he refuses to 'hand it over'. This is despite SSEN telling people no decision of route has been made'.*

*A note here on CPOs. We have been told if you are a landowner and an unwilling host to SSEN's pylons and substations then it is probably in your financial interest to dig your heels in and not take SSEN's offer to avoid a CPO. We would advise taking independent advice but two people who know what they are talking about believe this is the likely scenario. SSEN won't want to CPO multiple landowners. They won't want the risk of losing. They won't want the delay. Delay is our friend because the more people who wake up to what is really going on the more objections they will face.*

*If you are a landowner who wants to stand up to SSEN join our list via our Facebook page – just message Denise.*

*The B2D was fought and lost on environmental issues. Nearly 20,000 objectors. The battle to protect the landscape and wildlife was lost.*

*Rumours at the time and since implied that the route was already broadly decided before the public got invited to comment, that it was a 'done deal' and it would never be stopped. Who knows if that is true? It was before my time.*

*I was living here when it was constructed though, and it was a dreadful disturbing and heartbreaking experience. Machinery rattling and beeping with engines roaring and helicopters buzzing in and out of our once peaceful glens. It went on for an incredibly long time as did the abundance of construction traffic speeding on our narrow and*

*previously quiet rural roads. It was simply horrendous. We are all now left with the visual pollution, and some are still affected by the noise from all this industrial hardware today.*

*Fergus Ewing, the then Energy Minister, told myself and others that the B 2 D had been built for wind farms and he was right. As soon as it was constructed, we were inundated with multinational wind developers proposing multiple massive turbines and all their infrastructure to connect into it. This wasn't for saving the planet because in 2015 when the Renewable Obligation Certificates (public subsidies) stopped it all went quiet and the multinationals went back home to Germany, Italy, France etc. etc.*

*Now it is ramping up again. With very lucrative constraints to not generate into the grid, operators get paid as if they were generating. It's almost as though constraints are the new public subsidy and more turbines will, of course, make that worse for the consumer.*

*Some, we are told, are putting that energy into batteries, and selling it back to the grid for inflated prices. Getting paid twice for the same electricity? Surely not.*

*Contracts for Difference are being awarded to the lowest wind bidder at, frankly, uneconomically low prices and contracts are being, quite legally, being delayed so that the wind operators can take advantage of the gas prices that wind power is linked to. So instead of selling their electricity at the £73 a MWh they bid to get the contract they have been selling it for more like £219 MWh. (Hornsea 2)*

*Nearly 3 times the amount they bid for their contract.*

*So, when you hear how cheap it all is look at your energy bill and realise that propaganda is based on the price bid by the developer not what they are actually getting. Nobody's energy bill will ever go down with industrial wind power of that you can be certain. Nor will it ever give us energy security as our recent importing of energy from England for days has proved.*

*There are other examples of other expensive loopholes that are being exploited but suffice it to say the UK consumer is getting a very poor deal from supposedly cheap wind power.*

*What is crystal clear is that we don't need these transmission lines or the thousands more turbines they will serve.*

*Communities B4 Power Companies have no wish to negotiate with SSEN.*

*To do so is to say you are okay with the infrastructure, thousands more onshore wind turbines, the wholesale industrialisation of the most beautiful, wild area of the UK, for England and potentially abroad.*

*You are ok with communities being thrown under Big Energy's gravy train.*

*And it is also saying it is okay for the consumer to pay for it.*

*SSEN knows exactly what they will be constructing. Energy companies propose a worse case scenario to the public, appear to consult, and then 'compromise', when all along they are giving you exactly what they had always planned to give you.*

*They are engaging in a required box ticking exercise.*

*OUR PLAN! To get the applications refused by THC and for them to question the needs case too.*

*This triggers a public inquiry.*

*At public inquiry level, SSEN has to demonstrate a NEED CASE for their proposals. They will have to show they have considered all options and their proposed pylon routes, substations locations, etc. are the best they can do. SSEN also has to demonstrate that the damage they will do to the landscape, wildlife, habitats, etc., is necessary and they will leave the landscape, etc. better than it was before the infrastructure was constructed. They have to demonstrate that the benefits of their proposals outweigh the consequences of the wholesale destruction of our environment.*

*We do not believe they can do this.*

*We have to make sure that Highland Planning Councillors don't just say this is 'an unnecessary evil' and not object as they did for Skye. We are currently supporting Skye communities and have submitted a formal objection to the scheme and raising the needs issue. We are encouraging residents to demand Highland Council call their decision back in because they did not have all the information in front of them to make a decision according to our expert.*

*We are urging communities up and down all these new lines to join us and not try to negotiate with SSEN. We are stronger with one voice. We firmly believe that SSEN will not do any meaningful negotiations. The Beaully to Denny has taught us that.*

*We are not interested in playing the pylon hokey cokey game. All that will do is impact somewhere and someone else and you will STILL have the wind developers targeting your communities.*

*There will still be substations in a rural crofting communities. The one at Fanellan will be the size of 35 professional football pitches with room for expansion.*

*Beaully and the surrounding areas will be severely impacted unless this is stopped. An 'unfortunate pinch point', 'spaghetti junction' as SSEN's own staff said. At the Beaully exhibition one even said that Beaully was 'death by location'. You may have seen our banners quoting them.*

*We haven't even touched on the potential health impacts of living close to high voltage power lines.*

*The truth is every issue that is brought up can be magically 'mitigated' by SSEN. If you tell them before they put their application in of any detailed environmental concerns it will be dealt with in their application. It will not cause them a problem.*

*It is far better these issues – all of them – are put in front of a public inquiry and that is our aim to achieve one. SSEN will aim to not have one.*

*To SSEN we say: We are not done until we have won.*

*It is time for communities to say enough. SSEN has refused to say if these are the last of their pylon lines to come. We want a halt called to all of this and a reset.*

*A conversation with the people and a serious look at more localised energy that's in the community's control not Big Energy's. That way all this horrific infra structure can stay on the drawing board where it belongs. We all want to look after the environment and those of us who care passionately about it has its best interests at heart.*

*Profit driven multinationals do not. Thank you for listening."*

### **Discussion, questions and considerations raised:**

- discussion of hydroelectricity and the expense of electricity, about being a backup for the sub-sea cable and for onshore wind.
- how can we help with approaches to the Highland Council?
- no planning permission, need a public inquiry
- discussion about Highland Councillors being held accountable
- onshore electricity ban in England, role of MSPs, need to explore help from MSPs etc.
- what can be used as evidence? SSEN needs to prove need – do they have the data?
- will this go to judicial review?
- who polices the mitigations?
- can KBCC help other Community Councils via Zoom/Teams?
- there will be no concessions from SSEN, short protection of areas, negotiation is pointless, overhead lines have been decided. Underground lines would still require substations and wind turbines
- please do not pressure planning representatives on Councils, just keep them informed
- fighting SSEN for over 10 years, fighting Beaully Buzz, need to lobby Ward councillors, Highland Councillors...need it to go to higher but the Beaully–Denny line still got built. Need to push MPs and MSPs...cannot be a foregone conclusion
- everyone wants green energy but not at the expense of local communities and countryside
- we need to wait for the planning applications to be submitted
- 80 Highland Councillors and MPs and MSPs – need to pursue these and write to them for a public enquiry
- only one bit has to have a public inquiry, this could scupper all the rest of the project
- if a substation is refused, then it is appealed before going to the Scottish Government
- discussion about rural communities and MSP debate – computer-generated “you’re not my constituent” response. Need to lobby MSPs as hard as possible.
- make this is a hot issue, protect communities
- do we need to create a “scoreboard” about all the MPs, MSPs, Councillors etc?
- Just Transition Commission advising the Scottish government, impact on communities (Post-meeting note: <https://www.gov.scot/groups/just-transition-commission/>)
- SSEN is currently lobbying the Scottish Government – an outrage to local communities?

### **ACTION POINTS:**

- (1) Petition/standardised letters for MSPs (argument for making individualised letters)
- (2) Get other Community Councils along the routes involved
- (3) Collect a list of landowners who do not want this; join the list of landowners – great publicity if need to compulsory purchase order affects a huge number of landowners
- (4) Needs funds for leaflets and banners – need money for professional advice
- (5) Letters need to be written, individual – not fancy, just a few bullet points
- (6) Sharing of the Communities B4 Power Companies talk (to be circulated by KBCC).



The meeting was closed and all thanked for their attendance and contributions to the discussion.