

## **October's Update and Briefing:**



*Site is on right beyond the first plantation on the far bank, Ben Alder group on left, Loch Erich is the blue stuff in the middle. (2.10.'14)*

You might think this is just a beautiful, wild and cherished landscape - but apparently you'd be wrong. Eventus BV and the owner of the bit on the right of this photograph claim that it is an appropriate building site for 24x 410ft-high turbines, 12.8km of wide bulldozed tracks, several buildings, a number of large compounds, a transshipment pier and masts, all to decorate the view from surrounding hills, paths, the West Highland Line and the tourist road through Glencoe. They even have the neck to claim that their proposed site is unobtrusive because it is a 'natural bowl' instead of – in reality - a shallow, peaty valley running down to the shores of Loch Erich and completely open to views, like this, from the west (Dun Daimh, the 'Fort of the Stag', as you ask). Eagles from nearby nests regularly hunt over the proposed construction site and the government's key adviser, SNH, estimates that, on average, at least one would be killed every 19 months. If anyone else did that they would be in jail, not rewarded with many million pounds of taxpayers' largess. While composing this photograph a peregrine hunted overhead and an osprey splashed into Loch Erich in pursuit of lunch. (... OK; heartfelt rant over, now returning to practical mode.)

### **Objections**

The level and quality of objection to this insensitive proposal are totally unprecedented:

- Approximately 1,000 individuals and conservation groups have objected (compared to 210 in the case of the recent Glenmorie scheme which was refused consent) and just c28 have supported the TaB scheme;
- Every statutory consultee (SEPA and SNH, plus the Cairngorms National Park Authority) has lodged fundamental objections - which will prove hugely expensive if not impossible to address;
- A survey of local electors showed 76% against the project and under 19% in favour, despite the legalised bribe of 2% of the revenue stream on offer for 'community benefit';
- nine major estates in Rannoch have formally objected and none have supported this application. Some neighbouring estates have foregone significant financial benefit to themselves rather than facilitate it;
- Several key players privately tell us that the scheme is just speculative and very probably doomed.

### **State of Play**

We currently await the response of Perth and Kinross Council, due in November. As Planning Authority, an objection by it would automatically trigger a public local inquiry (PLI), which would allow us to undertake an even more rigorous examination of what is a totally unconvincing and poorly planned scheme. 'Keep Rannoch Wild' was the first to point out that many crucial logistical issues – such as access to Loch Erich for the essential turbine blade movements, or road traffic routes from the A9 - had not been addressed in the application but simply kicked into the long grass for serious thought *following* the hoped-for consent.

*‘Typically’ this or that would be done’, not – ‘we intend to solve this logistical difficulty in this specific way’.* That key criticism has been picked up by others, in particular SEPA and SNH, in their trenchant objections. Evidence that there are firm arrangements on wayleaves with landowners and land managers are conspicuously absent from the application, which is very telling in such a challenging logistical context as Rannoch. Overall, however, KRW will follow the old, wise maxim: *‘pray for peace and prepare for war’*. Though increasingly hopeful that this scheme will be kicked out by Ministers, if not abandoned as hopeless by the applicant (who had already abandoned the earlier joint Rannoch Windfarm scheme at Craiganour) KRW will be fully prepared and determined to contest any PLI alongside its allies.

### **Is the application Procedurally Competent?**

This is a moot point: the Talladh a Bheith application was lodged on the very day on which Ministers had announced that they would launch new statutory guidance: Scottish Planning Policy and National Planning Framework 3, together with the SNH mapping of ‘wild land’. There may be grounds to challenge its procedural competence as the application is framed in terms of advice and regulations which were superseded on the day of its submission. The vagueness on many essential issues in this application might also lead Ministers to require a fresh submission as lack of firm detail will limit professional and public scrutiny of what is essentially just a draft or outline scheme.

### **Even if it gets consent, would it be commercially viable?**

Eventus BV and Talladh a Bheith Windfarm Limited are not ‘developers’ in any real sense and will not be building or managing *anything*: they are trying (hopefully without success) to assemble a viable project and the planning and other consents necessary to implement it, and will then aim to sell that package to another firm to implement - finance, build and manage. The market is cooling, however, with a lower level of subsidy (‘contracts for difference’) being put in place and due to apply fully to any scheme commissioned after 1 April 2017. The Scottish Government’s over-inflated renewables targets is anyway well on its way to achievement. SSE, hitherto the major purchaser of speculative wind farm consents, announced last February that it was abandoning the 27-turbine Dalnessie Scheme and the 12 turbine extension to the Fairburn Wind farm – for which it had already purchased the consents – and there has been considerable speculation that this will become a general trend. (see for example <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/energy/windpower/10670115/Wind-farm-plans-in-tatters-after-subsidy-rethink.html>). One possible explanation of the surprising persistence of the Talladh a Bheith applicant in the face of the widespread and unprecedented opposition to this scheme might be that the applicant here (rather unusually) is also the owner of the site and hopes to gain both from ground rental for the scheme and from a huge capital receipt arising from his shareholding in Talladh a Bheith Windfarm Limited. Thankfully, it now looks as though the scheme cannot withstand even preliminary scrutiny and is likely to be refused consent on the grounds of unacceptable damage to landscape and habitats.

### **Role of ‘Keep Rannoch Wild’**

‘Keep Rannoch Wild’ will continue to provide an independent, critical voice on behalf of the majority of residents and home-owners in Rannoch. It will never be personal in its criticisms but will do all that is required, in collaboration with the John Muir Trust, Mountaineering Council of Scotland, local estates and its many like-minded allies to have this insensitive and speculative scheme refused consent.