

## **Integrated land use in South West Scotland Pilot Regulation Project**

Meeting in Glasgow - chaired by Russel Griggs as of the Chair Regulatory Review Group

Present, Bob MacIntosh, John Glenn Buccleuch CEO, Lynn Burten SEPA, Michael McGlynn S. Lanarkshire Council, Graham Marchbank SG Planning Dept., Chris Miles SNH.

Apologies Alex Haswell DGC, David McDowall East Ayrshire.

The meeting had one purpose which was to look at a proposal from Buccleuch on behalf of a suite of large land owners Hopetoun Estate, Douglas and Angus Estate, Bute Estate and at least 2 farmers ( [REDACTED] ) spanning D&G, S Lanarks and E Ayrshire extending to about 40,000ha.

The proposal had been taken to Fergus Ewing who expressed significant interest due to the scale of the proposal.

See presentation at <https://erdms.snh.gov.uk:443/id:A1266712>

### **The proposal is based on the following starting point.**

The area covers land that has a number of open cast sites, some with major restoration challenges, including Glenmuckloch on Buccleuch ground and Powharnal on the Muirkirk SPA for which there is insufficient funds to restore.

It encompasses hill ground on which farming returns are low and there is no incentive to invest in sporting. There are wild life crime issues in parts of the area.

The area has extensive blanket peat land that is degraded.

It includes part of an SPA (the Muirkirk North lowther Uplands SPA) which is not delivering (4 out of 6 features on SPA are unfavourable) and there is no incentive for land owners to invest in it to help the conservation objectives.

The communities in the area (Kirkconnel, Sanquhar, New Cumnock, Cumnock) have low wage economies and unemployment challenges.

Work on Glenmuckloch restoration has suggested the creation of an energy park including creating pump storage reservoirs on the hills above the site and wind turbines to give a better energy mix. This is getting in principle support from the planning Authority (DGC).

### **The proposal makes the following proposition.**

A capital investment of £1bn would see the development of 500mw 160 turbine windfarm and a 130mw pump storage hydro scheme. A number of jobs arise from this both during construction and beyond. The scheme is economically attractive offering 12-15% return on investment overall (the hydro is lower but works because of the wind turbines).

Dumfries and Galloway Council have signalled a willingness to invest in the Glenmuckloch scheme and maybe the wider scheme.

The bird "issues" would be fixed by moving the N Lowther part of the SPA (which would have some of the turbines) to an area of moorland to the south where Buccleuch are actively managing moorland for low use grouse shooting (and on which they claim to have hen harrier). This is a part of the Estate where they are willing to invest in cultural and recreational use. The Powharnal restoration could be similarly addressed by amending the SPA boundary and the management of the whole SPA enhanced by the revenue stream created.

Peat land restoration over a 1000 acres would be undertaken.

Local communities would benefit from the community income generated.

The landowners have agreed in principle to work jointly as a single development entity. The current North Lowther section of the SPA area is needed because it binds 4 of the landowners into the scheme.

Ideal timescale would be everything in place by 2018.

### **In the discussion that followed the presentation**

Could this be done under a single consent? No obvious mechanism immediately to hand. It could not be a national development at least in the next NPF.

The scheme should be more of a community regeneration project than just an energy park.

The community benefits need to be more obvious. It will make money for the landowners and investors. Can the communities have a direct stake?

Is there community buy in? Will they have an opportunity to give their views on the proposal and feel involved in the long term intentions?

Such SPA changes have not really been done before, though we noted projects like Cardiff Bay.

There is no guarantee that conservation objectives will be delivered either on the existing SPA area or on a new area even with resources.

The main impact of wind farms would be in D&G. They would extend from the Clyde Scheme to Kirkconnel in a band across the hills. Is this acceptable to Civil aviation, Eskdalemuir, the community. Could DGC use the big scheme as a reason to be tougher on smaller schemes especially as there are many in Nithsdale in scoping.

At first sight the pump storage reservoir does not look to cause a problem for the SPA – the new lagoons would be in the forestry belt that separates the two southern SPA blocks.

### **Actions that arose for SNH**

Bob McIntosh wants to talk to Europe to test the water re the SPA issues and is visiting Brussels next month. He wants to talk to SNH ahead of this.

We do not know what the current state of the conservation features on the SPA and SSSI is nor whether the area proposed as "compensation" is supporting similar interests. We may be asked to advise on this at some point.