

Planned Lammermuir Hills Wind farm faces opposition from council

A plan to install new 200-metre high wind turbines on the historic Lammermuir Hills is facing objection from East Lothian Council, who say the county has already taken more than its fair share of energy projects.

Belltown Power UK Wind Limited is the latest company to bring forward proposals for a wind farm on the hills but while their plans split opinion in the surrounding communities, they failed to win support from the council.

At a meeting of the local authority's planning committee this week council leader Norman Hampshire said residents believed enough was enough when it came to doing their part to tackle climate change.

He told representatives of the power company: "You can't have the whole of East Lothian covered in wind turbines."

His comments came after the company told the meeting that all potential green energy sites had to be developed and the plans for Newlands Hill, where 17 giant wind turbines are proposed, were a "concession" that would have to be made to deal with the crisis.

They said: "We are in a climate emergency and all sites that are viable need to be developed in order to tackle that emergency."

However Councillor Hampshire pointed out that the council had worked with other wind farm projects to keep turbines at the top of the hills away from the front of the landscape and that Belltown could have looked at a less intrusive area.

He said: "East Lothian has accepted a lot of sites along the top of the Lammermuirs. The county is contributing hugely to the climate change situation already and the capacity of the landscape is limited.

"It feels to people in East Lothian that we are being asked to take much more than other areas across Scotland.

"There is a limit to how much our landscape can take or it will be destroyed completely."

The plans for the new wind turbines and a battery storage facility are with the Scottish Government's Energy Consent Unit which invited a formal response from the council to the proposal for land which lies 6km southeast of Gifford on the northern edge of the Lammermuir Hills

The council's head of planning Keith Dingwall recommended councillors object to the development which he said would have a significant and adverse impact on the visual landscape and historic environment as well as potential impact on mountain hare population.

He also highlighted concerns about the proposed road route to and from the site which would go through prime agricultural land.

He said: "In our view the benefits of the proposal do not outweigh our conclusion that the proposed development is unacceptable. It is our recommendation the Energy Consents

Unit is informed that East Lothian Council objects to the granting of consent.”

The application for the 870 hectare site for the project brought 699 representations with more than 665 supporting it.

However councillors were told a petition online had gathered more than 744 objections to the application.

The committee heard from objectors who raised concerns about the impact on the biodiversity of the hills, the planned route for heavy construction traffic to and from the site and effect on their rural communities.

Councillors expressed support for green projects but questioned whether the balance was being met in the county.

Provost John McMillan told the committee: “I have been working, particularly since Covid, on improvement, aspirations and enhancements for the rural economy and while I support green energy I think we have to think about the wider effect and negative impact this development might have.”

And Councillor Cher Cassini said: “I am a huge supporter of green energy and wind farms however the supply of green energy does have a tipping point.”

Scottish Greens Councillor Shona McIntosh said: “I struggled with this because I am a big fan of renewable energy and am concerned about the climate emergency.

“However I am going to support officers, their report really does lay out why the impact on the landscape are more important and unacceptable.”

The committee voted unanimously to formally object to the project.

Councillor Hampshire said: “This planning committee has supported a number of wind farms already in East Lothian, both

onshore and offshore. We all accept there is climate change happening and we need renewable energy.

““However in this application and others before we have strongly defended the front face of the Lammermuir Hills. Not only is this application on the front of the Lammermuirs, it is the biggest turbines you can get to be on land with 80 metre blades to the tip of 200 metres, that is huge.”

By Marie Sharp Local Democracy Reporter