

Scawd Law Windfarm will be located 4km north of Walkerburn. At present the plan is for 10 turbines, 180 metres high, on the high slopes of Scawd Law with a possible access from the B709. The turbines will be visible from the south side of the river, from the bridge and park in Walkerburn but not from houses on the northern slopes (the majority of houses in the village). However, the turbines will dominate parts of the valley towards Clovenfords and the electricity connection will mean highly visible changes to the poles in the valley. We will not have details of the connection route and type of pole/pylon until after the planning decision on the windfarm itself.

The developing company, Fred Olsen Renewables (FOR), was formed some 20 years ago. It is part of the holdings of the Olsen family (Norwegian). They have 8 large windfarms in Southern Scotland. They have their own planners, construction team, and consent team and have proven to be expert at playing the planning system to their advantage. Sadly, it is normal for windfarms in Scotland to be built and owned by foreign companies. In spite of spending over £40 million over the last few years, the Scottish Government has been unable to kick start a windfarm industry in Scotland. (The CS Wind factory in Campbeltown which closed last year cost the government at least £5 million but the last owner, a South Korean company, still closed it. BiFab in Fife which closed last month cost the government £37 million.) Before Brexit, many companies also imported teams of maintenance engineers but this may now change if companies can find trained engineers in UK. The Scottish Government recently declared that they were now trying to establish a Scottish base for decommissioning windfarms since that is rapidly becoming a problem but also a possible opportunity for jobs growth. (Wind power developments in the UK so far have resulted in very few well paid jobs because UK plays little part in technical development or construction.)

The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP 26), the UN meeting of 196 countries which aims to tackle Climate Change, is being held in Glasgow this week. Everyone agrees that this will be a critical point in the fight to avoid the worst consequences of climate change. Economists and industry experts are agreed that wind power has a part to play provided that it is developed alongside other 'renewables' such as solar/hydrogen power, nuclear and new storage technologies for electricity. The leaders in windfarm development, however, are not convinced that small, scattered on-shore windfarms are a sensible way ahead – the environmental and climate costs of this type of windfarm probably outweigh the benefits. Large scale mega offshore projects are increasingly favoured. The Scottish Government, however, is currently still supportive of small on-shore developments such as Scawd Law.

### **Community Benefit**

If the windfarm goes ahead, Fred Olsen are proposing to offer community benefit of around £300,000 per annum to be shared between all the communities affected once the windfarm is operational (probably not before 2026). The company says it is keen to support communities to find legacy projects. They have said that they would be willing to sign up to a Memorandum of Understanding which will hold them to the commitment to create walking and cycling trails on the site, and to ring fence some of the community benefit to

operate and maintain those trails. This gives rise to a number of questions, which will be followed up by WDCC:

1. The amount sounds large but it is the minimum suggested by the Government and more is being offered to communities by some other developers. There are 8 communities in line for a share.
2. The developer is forming a community liaison group with representatives from all 8 affected community council areas to discuss possible projects. This may disadvantage Walkerburn as Peebles and Innerleithen, for example, are almost certainly going to try to dominate and they have different needs. It is crucial that our community reaches a consensus on how to handle any community benefit which will be available.
3. Walking and cycling trails sounds like a 'good thing' but how many in Walkerburn will actually benefit? From the point of view of the company, it is a cheap and easy solution to giving apparent community benefit since it would basically be a single project with little management cost and requiring little effort on their part since a local group could take over running/maintenance. However, the windfarm will be in rough, steep country which bluntly is unlikely to attract walkers particularly if the intention is also to have mountain biking. The maintenance costs of such trails is high and it seems likely that there would also be a need for some parking areas to be maintained. WDCC wants to make sure that 'community benefit' helps Walkerburn and is more inclined to seek investment in the village rather than in remote trails for walkers or mountain bikers which will only help a very few residents. There have already been a number of alternative suggestions for community benefit in the village including setting up an annual maintenance programme for the Public Hall, building and maintaining public toilets, building and maintaining some form of exercise circuit perhaps including the pump track if that project is successful, and developing further the recreational facilities in the village for all ages.
4. **The decision on whether or not to support the windfarm planning application must not take the possibility of community benefit into account – it must only be taken on planning grounds.** It will be very important to be clear on this at any meetings to discuss possible ways ahead for sharing community benefit between the communities affected.

**Apart from questions about community benefit, there are still concerns about this windfarm:**

- The site is in an area designated as unsuitable on environmental grounds and on the grounds of cumulative impact by the Scottish Borders Survey. There are also concerns that this is a 'stalking horse' designed to pave the way for it to be an even larger development. Scottish Borders Council planners indicate that they are not supportive.

- There are 3 other windfarm proposals seeking approval in the area. 14 turbines at Greystone Knowe south of Heriot, 8 at Wull Muir 3km west of Heriot and 12 more at Cloich near Eddlestone. The cumulative impact could be significant.
- By the time this windfarm is built, turbine heights will have increased further and it is highly likely that the eventual turbines installed will be much higher than 180 metres. Industry experts are expecting 200 - 300 metres to become standard. This will have a hugely different environmental impact from the current proposal but once planning permission is given, it is easy to change the turbine height.
- Access to the site will be difficult and will create problems whether it is via the A72 at Holylee or the B709. Of course, the problems will be largely during the construction phase but there will also be occasional problems throughout the life of the windfarm since replacement parts are regularly required and further development in turbine design will mean complete turbine replacements. De-commissioning the windfarm at the end of its life, possible in 30 to 35 years time, will also cause huge problems.
- Countries such as Norway are rapidly moving away from onshore windfarms in favour of offshore developments because of concerns about the environmental impact and the need to be more efficient in using wind power. This is putting pressure on countries such as Scotland where the government is still giving support. This windfarm would probably not gain consent in other countries because it is too small and the connection to the grid is too convoluted to make it efficient, except in providing revenue to the developer and landowner.
- Claims that windfarm developments impact tourism either favourably or unfavourably are frequently heard. There seems to be no clear evidence either way but it seems that the electricity lines from windfarms have more impact than the turbines themselves which seem only to impact unfavourably if they are highly visible in the landscape. These turbines will be highly visible from walking routes along the Southern Upland Way – they are even visible from Fife – but there is no proof that this will have an adverse effect that WDCC has found. However, the cumulative impact of the huge number of windfarms in the Scottish Borders is regarded by many as being problematic to attempts to attract visitors other than mountain bikers who are seen as unlikely to be affected.
- Claims that windfarms have a positive environmental impact are regular de-bunked. The impact of construction, however bad, is usually quickly recovered but there is an impact on birds and bats and the huge amount of concrete and road building materials required similarly has a lasting impact on nature long beyond the lifespan of the turbines. It is also of note that mining for the materials used in building the turbines has a huge negative impact which we tend to ignore because the mining takes place in other countries. Some sources quote 110 years as the time it would

take to 'pay back' the carbon cost of one turbine making this a costly exercise in providing a 'renewable' source of electricity!

### **What happens next?**

We understand that the formal Planning Application will be submitted later this year. SBC has indicated that they are not likely to support this project due to the significant adverse impact, however, the final decision is for Scottish Ministers, not SBC. It will probably take about 9 months for the application to be processed. If the application is successful then the developer will continue with preparatory work and start planning construction and applying for planning permission for the grid connection. If the application is not successful then the developer may choose either to drop the project or to appeal. An appeal would take about a year to progress.

No one can know what is likely to change in the meantime so nothing is set in concrete. It is important to note that any community benefit will only be agreed formally after full planning permission is received and that no cash will be forthcoming until the windfarm is operational – this would probably be 2025 at the earliest.

In the meantime, **please make your views known to WDCC by email, letter or in person.** We ask that you think through all the implications of this project – good and bad – and that everyone tries not to be led astray by casual remarks such as the windfarm will power 45,744 homes since it will not power any homes! It will put a certain amount of power into the national grid which will boost the overall electricity supply in Scotland. It is worth noting that Scotland currently produces more electricity than it uses but in future years current Government policy is to encourage more use of electricity so we will need more and onshore windfarms are one way of producing electricity – although not necessarily the most cost effective nor the most environmentally friendly.