

Attachment 2 to WDCC Minutes of 19th March 2025 Meeting

Cross Border Connection Report March 2025

The second round of consultation undertaken by SPEN PR agents on the latest route proposals has been very selective. No letters out to the north side of the river except to Thornielee for example. The new route is much closer to Walkerburn village and takes the line of pylons along part of the Southern Upland Way rather than just crossing at one point.

As was the case in the first round, the mapping seems designed to confuse since it does not use standard OS mapping. However, we hope to see a good overlay from the Borders Alliance soon and the secretary will forward it to everyone.

The PR agents and Marlene Marimbe from the SPEN Cross Border Connection Team have also been trying to speak to individuals and to persuade them that an overground line is inevitably going to happen. This seems aimed at anyone who might live close to the route rather than to whole communities and they are certainly not speaking to Community Councils, although our Chairman was offered a one-on-one briefing from them. He declined.

SPEN are also targeting 'difficult' communities such as Thornielee and are meeting some of the residents there in a local house on 26th March. We are hopeful that Cllr Pirone will attend this meeting. The difficulty is to persuade people that 'saving' individual houses is not good enough: we want the whole route re-thought and preferably run underground in every sensitive area.

The A7 routing is being dismissed by SPEN on the grounds that it would not go 'in the right direction' and would be too expensive. Any proposal of routing underground down roads in places rather than across open countryside is also being dismissed without any real explanation. There is more of an attempt to route through commercial forestry in places which seems reasonable but the Pylons will be around longer than the trees!

In general, there are a number of abrupt changes of direction on the new route which suggest that community/local action has been successful, eg Ettrickbridge and Thornielee, but this is almost always at the expense of another small community and sometimes makes the visual impact more intrusive, eg on the Southern Upland Way.

A motion is being put to Council to try to persuade SBC to sponsor a proper mapping exercise covering the numerous existing, planned, proposed electricity and renewable schemes in the Borders. There is a feeling that we need to be more aware and joined-up in our thinking about current developments.

Motion to Council 27th March 2025

Cllr Leagh Douglas (Selkirkshire, Executive Member for Finance, IT and Corporate Performance) is putting this to Council backed up by Cllr Julie Pirone and supported by Jenny Linehan.

“This Council:

NOTES there are several major proposed electricity generation, storage and transmission developments, which have been or are likely to be presented to The Scottish Borders Council for planning permission, or for a response as a Consultee, in the near future.

ACKNOWLEDGES that, without prejudice to future determinations, our communities have genuine concern about such major infrastructure developments, and consider they are very likely to have significant scheme specific and cumulative environmental and socio-economic impacts upon rural communities and landscapes within the Scottish Borders.

RECOGNISES it is desirable that communities across Scottish Borders are fully engaged in the consultation and planning process and are suitably empowered to respond on an equal basis given the resources deployed by the developers, SPEN and statutory consultees.

THEREFORE, this Council AGREES:

(1) REAL TIME MAPPING

Calls for a report on the possibility and costs associated with the **development of a/expansion of the** publicly available online map to include up-to-date information showing all the major renewable energy related developments within Council’s knowledge, existing and proposed, including those which are or will come to Council for planning and or the Energy Consents Unit, be they operational, permitted developments or otherwise. In so far as legally permissible, the map will also include an indication of anonymised approaches made to Scottish Borders Council for pre-planning advice. This map will therefore present a holistic overview of the applications that are currently in the pipeline, including but not limited to, all proposed electricity generation, storage and transmission developments, grid connection, energy generation stations, Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS), and wind farm so that communities can visualise what is planned across the Scottish Borders in context.

(2) THE APPROACH TO APPLICATIONS

(i) The Leader agrees to continue dialogue with the Scottish Government to ensure that the full cumulative aspect of developments, including the potential grid connection, is considered within the submission of an application under S36 of the Electricity Act for an energy generation station, and for all BESS applications of whatever scale.

(ii) The Leader on behalf of this Council writes to the electricity regulator, Ofgem’s Chief Executive and Board, inviting them to meet with officers and councillors to explain its role in these developments such as cross border pylons and whether it will, as a government body, listen to the voices of local communities.”