

## **COMMUNITY HEARING STATEMENT by ALAN CHESTERMAN.**

My name is Alan Chesterman. I'm a retired chartered engineer with 40 years' experience in major energy projects, and I'm speaking as a resident of Banchory and on behalf of community groups along the proposed route.

**I have worked very hard on a paper on socio-economics. It has been submitted. I hope it will be read and understood. This statement summarises its considerable detail.**

SSEN knows its investment in this proposal will reap highly profitable, risk-free rewards, through guaranteed public remuneration. It has a vested interest to promote the proposal. It paints a simple, clear, picture of urgent need that it claims that the proposal fulfils; it emphasises the benefits, and downplays the negative impacts.

But the proposal would be a small part of the solution to a highly complex, fluid, problem – decarbonising the UK electricity system. With many moving parts and constant evolution, the solution to decarbonise the system is anything but simple.

So I want to focus on issues crucial to the inquiry: **is the proposal the best way to help decarbonise the system? Is it justified, necessary; does it represent good value for all the stakeholders when all its impacts are considered.**

### **1. The key concern: the proposal is premature**

It's presented as urgent and essential to support rising renewable energy and demand. However, specific evidence for this is weak, unquantified, and ignores evolution.

Electricity demand in the UK has actually fallen by 29% since 2005, not risen.

Future demand is uncertain, dependent on factors like electric vehicles and heat pumps, which are progressing slower than predicted, and on a trend towards deindustrialisation.

At the same time, the scale and location of future renewable generation in Scotland is unclear. The NESO national Strategic Energy Plan, meant to guide decisions like this, will not be complete until 2027.

So approval of a large piece of infrastructure is being sought before the key data needed to justify and design it exists.

### **2. Lack of proper project development**

In major projects, there is a well-established process: define the need clearly, assess alternatives, select the best option, and design it to the right size.

That process does not appear to have been followed here.

There is no clear evidence that alternatives have been properly evaluated, including options not involving overhead lines.

There is also no clear definition of what level of capacity is actually required.

Without that, there is a real risk the project is the wrong solution, the wrong size or simply not needed.

### **3. The economic case is weak**

The economics of a project that may not be needed, the wrong solution, the wrong size are highly uncertain. Public and Private Funds are likely to be wasted.

The applicant's economic report highlights benefits from construction spending. Even on its own terms, these are modest: around £20 million and limited job creation locally, mostly short-term construction work. Few long-term jobs. These benefits are spread widely, while the impacts are heavily concentrated on communities along the route.

Looking beyond construction, there is little lasting economic benefit to local areas.

### **4. Negative impacts are understated**

In contrast, the negative impacts are significant and yet are downplayed.

Property values: clear evidence that homes near the proposed route are already losing buyers and value, with purchasers walking away once they learn about the pylons.

Tourism: The report assumes minimal impact, but this proposal involves much larger pylons than typical UK lines, up to around 70 metres high. It does not properly assess: cumulative visual impact, landscape change, reputational effects. There is a serious risk of harm to a key local industry.

Community impact: For those living close to the route, the effects are not minor — they are dominant. Visual intrusion, loss of amenity, and financial loss combine into a substantial burden.

### **5. The wider strategic case is uncertain**

Recent national developments actually weaken the case for urgency:

- Scotland is already at or above its targets for onshore wind
- Future expansion is expected more in England and Wales than in Scotland
- Some national energy pathways do not require this project at all
- Even where additional transmission is needed, alternatives — such as offshore transmission — may avoid many of these impacts

### **6. Conclusion**

- The need for this project is unclear and uncertain
- The development process is incomplete
- The economic benefits are modest and short-term
- The negative impacts are significant and concentrated

Taken together, this means the proposal is: not yet justified, not properly developed, and not ready for consent.

## **7. Recommendation**

The reasonable course is not to reject progress toward Net Zero — but to pause this proposal until:

- the national strategic energy plan provides clear data to justify it
- alternatives are properly assessed factoring negative impacts
- a solution is developed that delivers value while minimising harm

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