

Dear Avich & Kilchrenan Community Voter

You will have heard that SSE Networks (SSEN) came with a team of ten to present their Roadshow at Kilchrenan village hall on Tuesday 20th March.

You might wonder what all that fuss was about, so here is a proper briefing from your Community Council.

SSEN have identified their **preferred** route for a 275 thousand volt overhead power line to run from a new large substation above Port Sonachan/Cladich across to the Cruachan substation situated across the mouth of the Orchy river in front of Dalmally. This power line will be visible from our side of Loch Awe.

You will be wondering why they want to do this, something which is not at all well explained in their presentation, as the substation itself does not yet exist and has no planning consent.

Here is what your Community Council now believes is the true underlying explanation:

SSEN is the licensee for electrical power transmission in Argyll, and as such has an obligation to ensure that Distributed Generation of renewable energy from windfarms and hydro projects have viable pathways to export their peak power output to the National Grid.

All of that power needs to get out of Argyll somehow, which is tricky because Argyll is surrounded by seawater except up here round the top of Loch Fyne.

The only large capacity power lines used to be the 132kV ones bringing power **into** Argyll via Loch Sloy. (These are now run in “reverse” a lot of the time to get power out, obviously power lines are always fully bi-directional.). When Cruachan was commissioned, it needed its own dedicated 275kV line which sent short bursts of huge proportions instantaneously on demand literally to keep the Grid up to speed when national demand peaked. Almost all of the time it is not in use at all.

In the past couple of years a subsea line has been added by SSEN from Crossaig at the mouth of Loch Fyne across to Hunterston to feed the Grid through there.

However SSEN claim to see that the two existing pathways, Sloy plus subsea, will not be sufficient to handle peak output as more large windfarms are added in Argyll. They therefore wish to utilise the Cruachan line as well, as a third pathway in the first instance. They have also decided that they will upgrade their own transmission network within Argyll from 132kV to 275kV, which increases enormously the power carrying capacity of the lines. We believe they also have in mind in due course to remove the old 132kV Sloy line as their updated network standardizes on 275kV.

However, all that has been publicly declared by SSEN so far is the new 275kV line proposal with a cosmetic choice of routings on offer varying by a few hundred metres here and there.

You will also be wondering how all of this relates to the Upper Sonachan large windfarm application, which is about to be decided very soon. If this windfarm is consented, its peak output, in the 50-60 megawatts range, is too great for the present local network to handle in addition to Carraig Ghael. SSEN under their transmission licence are obligated to offer some kind of grid connection to the Distributed Generator, which in this case is EcoTricity.

Your Community Council believes that the 275kV power line proposal is SSEN's "two birds with one stone" solution. In the first stage, the new line makes it easy to get the new windfarm's power out to the grid, but at the same time it gets in place the first plank of a new 275kV "Superhighway", intended to supplant and replace the old route via Sloy. The new line's capacity would be sufficient for **at least ten** Upper Sonachan sized large windfarms.

The second stage would be the upgrading of the existing 132kV line from Inveraray up to the new substation at Cladich to operate at 275kV. The lines from Crossaig to Inveraray up the coast of Loch Fyne look set to be consented for a Reinforcement of the pylons to take 275kV cabling.

The final result of all this would be that the entire DG output of Argyll beyond Loch Fyne (but minus the subsea line's relatively modest capacity), will be routed past our noses across to Dalmally.

It also has to be understood that the new large substation, which has a twelve football pitch sized "footprint", will **not** become superfluous once the line back to Inveraray upgrades to 275kV, because the onward Distribution line which crosses Loch Awe will be retained at 132kV, and this is also used to get Carraig Ghael's peak power output back out.

WHERE DO WE AS A COMMUNITY STAND IN ALL THIS?

The public consultation process used by SSEN is so narrow that it makes a mockery of the term. A proper consultation presents true choices (not cosmetic ones) then makes the case for the preferred alternative to be chosen from those true choices.

It must be said that a great proportion of what we now know and which is explained above, has been gleaned from open and honest interaction and responses from SSEN. However, very little of it is addressed in the public consultation process.

In particular, they have admitted that the preferred option was developed using a basic presumption that because the old 132kV lines crossed National Park land, so the option to upgrade these lines to 275kV was rejected out of hand, without even contacting the National Park. The key point is that such an upgrade would render the Dalmally line superfluous.

However if Upper Sonachan windfarm is consented that would require a Reinforcement back down to Inveraray from 132kV to 275kV and that would necessitate the substation at Cladich (but **not** the new line across to Dalmally). **If it is not consented**, neither substation nor Reinforcement back to Inveraray would be needed **as long as the old Sloy lines are upgraded to 275kV** and remain as the main land pathway for renewables power export out of Argyll.

We as a Community Council already have experience in fighting and winning a case for proper public consultation, **which is defined as a human right** under the United Nations Aarhus Convention, of which the UK is a treaty signatory. We take that to mean that the Scottish Government and indeed Argyll & Bute Council as local government are also so bound.

In effect we are arguing that the entire process of developing electricity networks in support of Distributed Generation by renewable energy means, must be fully and properly thrown open to informed public consultation. In a representative democracy, such as we are, the final right to choose belongs to the government. That is what it is for. The Aarhus Convention fully supports that, **but only after proper, full, honest, and open consultation.**

If you are in agreement, please make your own response to the SSEN consultation, demanding that the process be re-booted back to square one, so that proper and full consultation can take place, by developing and presenting feasible alternatives.

You can do so by e-mailing SSEN's Community Liaison Manager, Kelly Scott. Her e-mail address is **kelly.scott@sse.com**

If you would like some help or advice in doing so please get in touch with me, by phone or e-mail. The SSEN deadline for responding to the latest round of “consultation” is 27th April. SSEN have provided a public document setting out their “preferred” proposal which is available for viewing in the Kilchrenan Inn.

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