
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

**Title: BEAULY TO DENNY TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT
PROGRESS UPDATE**

**Prepared by: Matthew Hawkins, Landscapes and Ecology Manager
Gavin Miles, Head of Planning**

Purpose of Report

To update the committee on the Beauly to Denny transmission line works in the National Park and the restoration and revegetation of the main line works.

Recommendation

That the Planning Committee notes the content of the paper.

Background

1. The Beaully to Denny transmission project started on site in 2012 following the 2010 consent from Scottish Ministers under Section 37 of the Electricity. The main line construction was completed in 2016.
2. One of the conditions of the consent provided a specific role for the CNPA as a member of an *environmental liaison group*. The group's purpose was to provide advice on appropriate mitigation and construction procedures and associated restoration and habitat management measures. The other members of the group were the planning authorities, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH), Scottish Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), Historic Scotland and Forestry Commission.
3. Another condition included a requirement for ancillary works including construction tracks and compounds around each tower, to be restored after construction via the approval of a Construction Procedures Handbook.
4. A further condition explicitly created the Cairngorms National Park Rationalisation Scheme as compensation for the main project. This project ran at the same time as the main project and has required the removal of approximately 93km of existing low voltage or redundant tower lines from Etteridge, through Boat of Garten Substation and via Tomintoul, the Lecht and Strathdon towards Tarland.

Progress

5. Site visits in 2015 and 2016 by CNPA showed that the restoration and revegetation on the main project had commenced but not in a manner that the CNPA considered would be successful. The adopted strategy for revegetation simply allows the bare ground to recover by natural processes, relying on seed in the soil and from adjacent areas. The CNPA has been clear that we don't consider ground will revegetate quickly of its own accord and needs intervention to speed up the process. Following discussion with SSE and Balfour-Beattie (the main contractor) a voluntary monitoring scheme was agreed with the CNPA to check on progress.
6. That monitoring scheme runs for five years from 2016. It includes a site inspection assessment of revegetation based on a 4 point scale of ground cover with appropriate species from Sparse (0-25% cover), mediocre (25-50%), good (50-75%) and excellent (75-100%). The SSE Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) report of October 2016 confirms that most of the compounds and tracks within the CNPA are now at 'Sparse' which is as anticipated for one year of growth. The target of the monitoring scheme is to achieve full revegetation by Autumn 2020. If the monitoring shows that the rate of recovery of the ground is too slow, then additional measures will be used speed up the revegetation.
7. The removal of tower lines as part of the Rationalisation scheme started in 2014 and continues with the removal of the last towers between Ruthven and Etteridge in spring 2017. Much of the new low voltage line has been undergrounded using a mole plough for cabling so there has been relatively little disturbance of vegetation. CNPA

officers have undertaken site inspections and advised upon some technical matters relating to natural heritage. There have been modifications to wayleaves and some tree removal during the project but the work has been undertaken in a satisfactory manner and with minimal disturbance.

Next Steps

8. This year, 2017 will be the second growing season for all areas and CNPA staff will undertake site inspections with the SSE ECoW in September to assess progress. Revegetation of at least between 40-50% of the ground surface is expected. However, if that has not happened, we will engage with SSE on more active intervention to ensure a faster coverage of the restored tracks and compounds.
9. We will take further reports to Planning Committee over the next four years following each September monitoring assessment with more detail on the state of restoration and what if any, additional interventions are likely to be required. The next report will follow the September 2017 site visits.

Matthew Hawkins

Gavin Miles

March 2017

matthewhawkins@cairngorms.co.uk

gavinmiles@cairngorms.co.uk