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**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

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**FOR INFORMATION**

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

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**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 Beauly 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.
5. The scheme started in 2014 and completed in the summer of 2017 with the removal of the last towers between Ruthven and Etteridge. 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 so has been successful

## Beauly to Denny Line Restoration Progress

6. 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. The CNPA's peatland officer also provided advice on methods of restoration.
7. 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%).

8. The SSE Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) report of October 2016 confirmed that most of the compounds and tracks within the CNPA are now at 'Sparse' which was 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.
9. CNPA officers re-inspected selected sections of the main line in September this year and again with in late October 2017 with SSE staff. The SSE ECoW report for 2017 (year 2 of the five years) was shared with the CNPA in early December 2017. The summary of that report is provided as Appendix I.
10. The report is based on restoration within tower compounds but is generally representative of the restoration of the temporary tracks between the compounds. It concludes that 41% of compounds are in good or excellent condition. After two seasons this is encouraging and these areas seem likely to fully restore within the 5 year period. However the remaining 59% are mediocre or sparse and more than half of these were also sparse last year, with no significant improvement so are likely to required additional mitigation measures to ensure full revegetation within the five year period.
11. The report findings are broadly in line with CNPA officer's site observations of sections along Drumochter Pass and higher moorland areas showing poor levels of revegetation. In some sections the revegetation coverage is still as low as 10%. There appear to be two main reasons for this. Firstly, in some areas, the soil management and handling during construction as well as restoration was poorly executed, leaving little soil material or very wet ground and secondly, there has been no clear management for grazing sheep and deer. It is clear that even where some regrowth has occurred it is heavily cropped by mammals.
12. In other areas, for example Feagour Forest and at Dalnapsidal, there is a much better level of revegetation. In these areas the regrowth is between 40 and 50% which is acceptable at this stage.

### **Conclusion and Next Steps**

13. The vegetation over 40% of the reinstated ground is recovering well and we are confident that it will achieve the required level by year five of monitoring scheme. However, other areas are revegetating more slowly and 35% of the compounds (and associated track lines) have not begun to recover. Much of this ground is clearly visible from the A9 and Highland Rail line.
14. SSE has recognised that revegetation is not happening as fast as needed on some sections of ground and proposes to undertake a trial of three sections for additional mitigation during year 3 (2018). This will extend to between 700 and 1000 of track around the Drumochter area. The trial will consist of a combination of fencing for deer and sheep and reseedling with appropriate species for the locality. The results will

inform the future restoration management. The full details will be agreed with SNH and CNPA in January 2018 and implemented that spring. The trial areas will be monitored and included in the 2018 monitoring programme and reporting.

15. The CNPA Heritage Team will continue to monitor the line next year as well as the additional trial mitigation areas. Officers will report back to the committee in late 2018 following the submission of the SSE ECoW report for that year.

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**December 2017**

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