

SSE's failed restoration of the Drumochter pass – the evidence from space and the jewels in the crown

Description



The unrestored powerline constructions track 1st December 2019. Photo credit Dave Morris

I have not blogged about the destruction caused by the Beaully Denny powerline construction since last July ([see here](#)). But each time I cross the Drumochter the scars left by SSE (formerly Scottish and Southern Electricity) appear just as bad and I have been meaning to go back and take a closer look at how the “restoration” is going.



A view of a short section of the scar, snapped from the passenger window, July 2021

An article on the A9 in the Herald magazine on Saturday (available [here](#)) was accompanied by a aerial photo looking south towards the Sow of Atholl and the summit of the Drumochter pass. The photo was taken just above the Beaully-Denny powerlines and provided not just a view of the A9, the railway and the River Truim but also of the impact of the construction. It is worth a look. The photo, however, was undated and could have been taken a few years ago, which prompted me to take a look on Google Earth:



Queen's birthday shot – 21st April 2021 – showing the towers and the swathe of destruction. Photo credit Google Earth.

I wished I had thought of doing this before! It clearly shows the extent of the destruction and that restoration hasn't worked!

Regular readers will recall that the Beaully Denny was constructed through the Drumochter Hills Special Area of Conservation, supposedly one of Scotland's most highly protected sites, and granted planning permission subject to the ground being restored to how it was previously. SSE announced the construction project was complete in July 2015, almost seven years ago.



Section of Beaully Denny just south of layby by Drumochter summit. Photo 21/04/21 credit google earth

Having granted the planning consent, the Scottish Government devolved responsibility for enforcing its own planning conditions to the Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA), while at the same time doing nothing to help them sort out the mess on ground ([see here](#)). In August 2015 SSE wrote to the CNPA Convener, absolving themselves of responsibility for what had gone wrong – they blamed thin soils rather than poor construction techniques – but committed to continuing to work on restoring the site:

The Beaully-Denny team and I will work closely with the CNPA and associated statutory authorities to close out agreed actions. We are currently reviewing the trial restoration proposals presented in your letter and will work with representatives of CNPA and SNH to identify appropriate techniques and locations for trial. There is a site meeting arranged with the CNPA for 27 August to develop the proposals further.

SSE in fact had no choice about this because condition 31(a) of the S.37 Consent for the Beaully Denny required that:

“the applicant (ie SSW) shall, in carrying out any activities associated with the construction of the overhead transmission line and the dismantling of the existing 132kV OHL, implement all construction methods, mitigation proposals and restoration measures detailed in that Final Report (Drumochter Hills Special Area of Conservation Habitat Restoration Final Report dated 26 June 2007).

And that report clearly stated:

“All temporary tracks used for construction of the new line will be fully restored [my emphasis] within 15 years from the start of construction”.

Based on the aerial evidence, at this rate of progress that is never going to happen unless the Scottish Government, NatureScot and the CNPA force SSE to do so.

With SSE forecasting profits of almost £1bn from soaring gas prices ([see here](#)), they have no excuse for not doing so. They could easily afford to employ expert landscapers, ecologists and contractors to restore the ground to its original condition instead of dragging their heels as they appear to have been doing the last seven years. The question is whether there is any political will in Scotland to hold the big energy companies to account even in our National Parks?

On Friday the Scottish Government Minister responsible for National Parks, Green MSP Lorna Slater, claimed they *“have become jewels in Scotland’s crown?”* If she took the time to look at the state of the land on Google Earth, perhaps she would stop making these rash claims and focus instead on what has been going wrong in Scotland’s National Parks?.

Category

1. Cairngorms

Tags

1. CNPA
2. NatureScot
3. planning
4. Scottish Government
5. SSE

Date Created

May 16, 2022

Author

nickkempe

default watermark