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2018

18/04647/FUL | Proposal to construct and operate a run-of-river Hydro scheme (Scheme 3 - Allt Coire an Eoin) | Land 685M SE Of Nevis Range Torlundy Fort William

18/04648/FUL | Proposal to construct and operate a run-of-river hydro scheme (Scheme 5 - Allt Leachdach and Allt Beinn Chlianaig) | Leanachan Forest Torlundy Fort William

18/04649/FUL | Installation of hydro-electricity scheme, including intake structure, buried pipeline, powerhouse, borrow pits, construction compounds, laydown and storage areas, bridge and access tracks - Allt na Lairige | Land To West Of Allt Na Lairige 7220M NW Of Station House Corrou.

Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council support GFG Alliance's vision to maximise the existing smelter's output, and build an alloy wheel manufacturing facility utilising new sources of renewable energy. Such activity coupled with enhanced support facilities should provide much needed new employment, housing, infrastructure and leisure opportunities for the communities of Lochaber and beyond.

Whilst recognizing the benefits of these proposals they cannot be at any cost and we have some reservations about the Developer based on past and present performance.

SIMEC GHR prior to their acquisition by GFG Alliance planned and constructed a similar series of Micro Hydro Schemes in Loch Arkaig. They received a glowing testimony from a local group at the application stage, but the construction phase was anything but straightforward. There were numerous complaints about inappropriate behaviour by contractors, the lifeline access B8005 was often closed to recover HGV's from ditches in the Dark Mile and there were outages and electricity supply difficulties for residents during the grid connection phase.

To ensure no repetition in this new application we have had three meetings with the developer, and they have sought to allay our concerns with assurances that our previous experience would not be repeated, and that there would be minimal impact on the Corriechoille Road and the village of Spean Bridge.

Although Volunteers we have painstakingly read the many attachments to these three applications, and been extremely disappointed to find absolutely no mention of the fact that at this time SIMEC GHR do not have access confirmed for either construction vehicles or grid connection across the pivotal Killiechonate Estate. Furthermore they have suggested that in partnership with other Landowners including the estate in question they will use the iconic Puggy Line for grid connection and reinstate it afterwards. Once again a premature statement as they neither own the land nor have reached any agreement with the owner. Indeed from our discussions with the estate in question it would appear that they did not have permission to access the forestry roads to compile all the supporting information in this application. As a Statutory Consultee we expect Developers to submit Applications that are both comprehensive and accurate, and this reprehensible conduct by an arm of GFG Alliance does not inspire confidence or trust for the future.

In addition to our general concern about the manner of this application we have a number of specific concerns.

In **Highland Wide Policy 28 – Sustainable Design** it states that Developers should demonstrate sensitive siting and high quality design in keeping with local character. A larch clad concrete block building with steel roof is hardly either high quality or sensitive to the surroundings.

Policy 48 Tourism – Highlights the importance of Tourism to the Highland economy. The Forest roads, tracks and paths are extremely popular with walkers and cyclists, and we don't see how the implementation of this proposal will either promote or safeguard responsible access to the area.

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Policy 56 Travel – This policy states that the Council will seek to ensure that opportunities for encouraging walking and cycling are maintained. Whilst acknowledging their plans to improve walking on the old Puggy Line it would surely carry more weight had they first discussed their plan with the relevant landowner and then secured his agreement before submitting a planning application. Hopefully the Planning Officer will incorporate appropriate mitigation on and off site to include achievable improvements and enhancements to the walking and cycling network through developer contributions if necessary.

Policy 63 Water Environment – Having read the Water Framework Directive 2000/60/EU and recognized that the Loch Treig Tunnel extracts much more water from the many river basins on its journey to the Smelter than would be allowed under present legislation. The Planning Officer must ensure there is no further extraction to augment the tunnel supply under these schemes and prevent any damage to the various rivers and burns on its route.

Policy 69 Electricity Transmission Infrastructure – The present proposals are for underground grid connections to the Smelter, but if they cannot achieve agreement for their preferred route we would find any suggestion of an alternative overground route unacceptable.

Policy 77 Public Access – We do believe that an Access Management Plan should be a necessary requirement for this proposal. The suggestion that they would use the trunk road network to Spean Bridge, and then the Corriechoille Road to Inch and then the Drover's Road to Scheme 6 is unacceptable. The Corriechoille railway Bridge may be subject to a weight restriction whilst Network Rail repair it and Corriechoille Road is a popular single track road with passing places enjoyed by walkers, cyclists, and not suited for HGVs or Contractors vehicles.

The Community Council is not against these Schemes in principle but given our previous experience we want robust Planning Conditions to ensure that the developer is fully aware of his obligations and the Planning Enforcement Team to monitor their compliance.

John W Fotheringham
Chairman
Spean Bridge, Roy Bridge and Achnacarry Community Council