

Report by Penicuik Environment Protection Association of Seminar for Midlothian Councillors on Auchencorth Wind Farm Proposal.

Midlothian Council held a seminar in Penicuik Town Hall on Wednesday 12th December at 10am. This was in order to give EON and the objectors represented by PEPA a chance to give their views to the Councillors prior to a decision on the Auchencorth wind farm proposal which is an application to erect 18, 100 metre high turbines on Auchencorth Moss. The Town hall was packed with some people having to stand. PEPA are grateful to Midlothian Council for this opportunity to make their views known.

EON presented first and explained how the proposal had initially been for 30 turbines but had been reduced due to visual considerations. They realised landscape and visual effects were a problem but that was inevitable if you were erecting large turbines. They said they had taken care in the siting of the turbines. It was suggested there could be a compromise on the present number if need be to appease objectors. They discussed community benefit of £100,000 a year and the benefits the construction phase would bring to the local economy. The issue of the Local Plan was raised and it was stated that national guidelines had to be translated into local policy - therefore it was their opinion the Local Plan would have to be changed as Midlothian had to make its contribution to renewable energy projects. EON told the Councillors that if the Councillors turned down the application EON would either appeal, or they might withdraw the application and make it large enough to go over Councillor's heads and be decided by the government as a Section 36 application.

The Councillors had a chance to question the applicant and discussed where the electricity would actually go, whether locally or into the grid. EON explained it would go into the grid. The distance from housing was discussed and EON explained that although the regulations said 450m from housing that was when turbines were smaller and they felt 900m from housing was reasonable.

PEPA gave five presentations which were well received by the public. Firstly an introduction pointing out the beauty of the site and the importance of the setting of Edinburgh as a world heritage site. Secondly, a comprehensive presentation covering the views of all the objectors, SNH, SEPA etc. and pointing out that nowhere in SPP6 does it say Midlothian has to erect turbines regardless of the environment, as Jim Mather said recently - not anywhere or at any cost to the environment. It was demonstrated that Midlothian is currently making a contribution in terms of renewable energies. Thirdly there was an illustrated talk briefly touching on a number of the planning reasons (landscape, peatlands, flooding, noise, amenity -TV reception, geese and safety) why this application should be rejected and pointing out the minimising of any problem in the Environmental Statement. Fourthly a view of history and the need to conserve for the future, remembering that Walter Scott said he thought he had never seen anything more beautiful than the view of Carnethy. Lastly a planning consultant restated the planning reasons for objection and reassured the Council that if they rejected the application and EON appealed then Council would have all the resources of PEPA at their disposal. He asked them to observe the adverse visual effects on the setting of Stirling by the Braes of Doune wind farm before making a decision affecting Midlothian.

PEPA were thanked by the chair for the relevance to planning policy of their presentation and it was felt questions were not necessary at this point. PEPA would like to thank all those who attended the meeting and for the wonderful support they have received over the two and a half years. Wishing you a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.