

An Investigation into the attitudes of Visitors staying in the local area close to the proposed Dorenell Wind Farm

A Survey completed between February and December 2008

Carried out by members of Dufftown 2000 and Glenlivet Highland Holidays, working for tourism in Dufftown, Glenlivet and Tomintoul



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Background

When news of the wind farm first broke, the reaction of many local tourism related businesses was one of shock.

They felt that the wind farm would not only threaten wildlife, but that an area that had been designated an Area of Great Landscape Value would be significantly blighted.

As the scale of the proposal became clear, it was evident that this industrialisation of such a wild area would be visible from miles around, including many of the most popular local view points and the Cairngorms National park.

Small businesses like ours were very worried as to how this proposed development would impact on visitor numbers. It is recognised, in other surveys, that the wild and unspoilt parts of the Scottish Landscape are one of the primary reasons why visitors come to Scotland.

We needed to understand how Dorenell would affect our visitors, whose main reason for coming here seemed to be for the enjoyment of the landscape in one way or another; walking, cycling, driving through or simply detaching themselves from the urban environment.

In short we needed to try to evaluate the potential costs and benefits of the proposed wind farm on our businesses. The only people who could tell us that were our own customers. So we decided to ask them what their attitude to the proposed wind farm would be.

A number of local businesses had already positioned themselves as eco destinations because of the importance of walking and wildlife in the area. Could a wind farm at Dorenell benefit local businesses by enhancing their environmental credentials and help to attract more visitors?

On the down side the potential costs could be the loss of visitors, who might perceive the wind farm as spoiling their enjoyment of the landscape and decide to go elsewhere if Dorenell were constructed.

Survey Method

A survey was drafted in late 2007. A number of drafts were rejected as we wanted the survey to be as unemotional as possible; that was important if we were to obtain an accurate picture.

In February 2008 the survey forms were put into 3 self catering businesses that bordered the proposed site of the wind farm (Moray Cottages – 2 cottages 9 beds; Easter Corrie Cottages – 4 cottages 18 beds and Bluefolds Cottages – 4 cottages 24 beds.) together with a couple of B&B's in Dufftown and the Whisky Castle shop in Tomintoul. The survey form was also sent out to 101 visitors, on 05/02/08, who had stayed at Moray Cottages in 2006/2007 with a covering letter.

After this, other than collecting the completed survey forms, the business owners took no part in promoting the survey to guests.

The Survey Format

The survey was broken down into four parts

Part 1 Introduction

Although this introduction has been branded as “leading” by the developer, we feel that it is simply stating the facts

- (a) Release of CO₂ is one of the major causes of Global warming
- (b) Northern Scotland leads the UK in its provision of renewable energy
- (c) The proposed site lies less than a mile and a half from the Cairngorms National Park
- (d) The Glenfiddich hills are dominated by peat bogs which are the most significant forms of long term carbon storage in the UK
- (e) Damage to peat deposits can increase CO₂ emissions reducing the environmental benefits of wind power by up to 64% (New Scientist 08, July 2006)

Part 2 – Two sets of questions that ask the respondent some general questions about the subject and then a final question to gauge how the development might alter their views about the area.

(A) Landscape

This asked people how they regarded areas of natural beauty and particularly the area around Glenlivet and Glenfiddich. Then a final question sought to see if the wind farm would affect their decision to revisit the area. Remember that most people who responded knew the area as they were actually staying here.

(B) Environment

This section asked about people's views on the environment and again had a final question to try and ascertain how a wind farm would change the areas appeal as a "green" tourist destination.

Part 3 – The final section asked people a simple question. "Would you like to see a large scale wind farm constructed on the Glenfiddich hills adjacent to the Cairngorms National Park?" and also invited respondents to add their own comments.

All survey forms were signed and dated by the respondents. Forms that had not been signed and dated were discarded.

The Survey Results

The survey results have been tabulated in a spreadsheet but essentially the results are as follows

Total respondents 304 (of which 53 had been submitted by post)

Geographically

England	158
Scotland	117
Rest of world	30

Answers to questions

1. About the landscape

Do you generally value beautiful landscapes			Do you think Glenlivet landscapes are a key tourism asset			Would a Wind farm would spoil your enjoyment of the area			Would you revisit the area		
Yes	No	NS	Yes	No	NS	Yes	No	NS	Yes	No	NS
100%	0%	0%	98%	0%	2%	68%	21%	10%	50%	23%	27%
303	0	1	297	0	7	208	65	31	151	71	82

2. About the environment

Do you generally support renewable energy			Do you think Glenfiddich is a suitable location for a wind farm			Would the presence of the proposed wind farm increase this areas appeal as a “green” tourist destination		
Yes	No	NS	Yes	No	NS	Increase	Reduce	No effect
89%	5%	6%	7%	73%	20%	5%	66%	29%
270	16	18	22	221	61	15	200	89

The final question simply asked; “Would you like to see a large scale wind farm constructed on the Glenfiddich Hills adjacent to the Cairngorm National Park?”

YES = 10%

NOT SURE = 13%

NO = 77%

Many of the respondents also added further comments. These can be examined on the completed forms.

Interpretation of the survey results

In our survey we have received a very clear overall indication as to what visitors' views are regarding the wind farm, the surrounding landscape and how it would affect their perception of the area and their decision to return.

The vast majority clearly felt that the wind farm would spoil the area in terms of scenery and would not enhance the area's "Green" appeal.

Half the respondents (50%) felt that they would either no longer wish to re-visit the area or were not sure they would - if the wind farm was built.

Displacement of tourism by wind farms is a concern that has been noted in other studies.

Our survey does throw up some interesting facts.

Respondents from Scotland (117); Scots were very clear that the wind farm would reduce the area's appeal and only 4% wanted the wind farm built – compared to 10% overall. It seems that perhaps the Scottish people do value their unique landscapes.

Also more Scottish visitors (26%) said they would not return to the area compared to the overall survey result (23%). However a number of respondents added comments along the lines that they would return to the area only as they have family here

Respondents from Overseas (30); One might expect overseas visitors to be more "in tune" with the idea of a wind farm. To a degree that is true. Out of 30 respondents, 30% approved of building the wind farm, compared with just 10% overall. However a much larger 33% said they would not re-visit the area (overall survey 23%) and again a clear majority would not like to see the wind farm built.

It is clear that visitors from overseas put a very high value on the unspoilt, rugged scenery that Scotland has to offer. The increasing blight of industrial scale structures across Scotlands' most scenic landscapes will have an effect on visitor numbers.

Finally, those who voted Yes or No to having the wind farm built.

Of those who voted "Yes" (30 respondents), fairly predictably every one said they'd return. But oddly, only a minority of 40% said it would enhance the area's green appeal.

Compare this to the replies to the same question from those who voted "No" (233 respondents) 196 (84%) were very clear that it would reduce the area's appeal as a green tourist destination.

As far as the question, "Would you return to the area?" those who voted "No" were fairly evenly split on this, with 30% saying they would not; 36% would return and 34% not sure.

Does our Survey give a true picture?

One can argue the merits, objectivity and neutrality of any survey and, in truth no survey can ever be 100% reliable.

However as the object of our survey was to gain an understanding the views of the people who chose to stay in the area and spend their money with us, it made sense for us to try and make sure that we got as accurate a picture as possible. We feel that we accomplished this and the results are not out of line with other surveys. That we obtained an accurate picture is also backed up by some interesting similarities with the results of the survey conducted by the Macaulay Institute on behalf of the developer, in 2007.

Macaulay Survey		Local Tourism Survey	
How would you expect the Dorenell wind farm to effect you in relation to your key recreational activities?	Negative 19% Positive 6% Neutral 70%	Would the presence of a large scale wind farm on the edge of the CNP and visible from many of the local footpaths and cycle routes, spoil your enjoyment of the area?	Negative 68% Positive 21% Neutral 10%
How would expect the Dorenell wind farm to affect you in relation to your willingness to revisit	Revisit 6% Not revisit 8% Neutral 82%	Would it affect your decision to revisit the area	Revisit 50% Not revisit 23% Neutral 27%

One interesting point is that our local survey has a much higher percentage of definite answers while the developers' survey has a much larger number of respondents who are Neutral. Why?

1. Location

(a) People who responded to our survey had, mainly, chosen to stay in the immediate area – within 5 miles of the site.

(b) The developer's survey was conducted at visitor attractions where visitors were canvassed for their views in some locations up to 19 miles away

2. Time Scale

a) Our survey was conducted over a period of 8 months, so as to get the views of not just summer visitors, but also those who came to experience the area at different times of the year. This is important since tourism is a year round business.

b) The developers' survey was conducted over the 3 day August bank holiday.

Conclusion

Our local tourism survey confirms our fears that the wind farm will have a negative effect on tourism.

1. A substantial reduction in repeat visitors choosing to stay in the area. Our current level of repeat business over the last 3 years is running at around 30%. This figure is similar to other self catering businesses in the area.
2. The majority of visitors say that the wind farm will reduce the area's "Green" appeal to tourists.
3. We have seen from many of the comments written by visitors that a wind farm close by will be off-putting to visitors. Since it is their money they are spending, why should we have any reason to disbelieve them?

This is the comment from a German Visitor

"We live in an area with several wind farms and they don't bother us too much. But we wouldn't like to come an area (sic) with a larger wind farm for spending our holidays. We loved the unspoilt character of the landscapes of Glenlivet and around our cottages."

Menzemer Family, Stadthagen, Germany 18/7/08

And one from England

"Every year I visit the Cabrach where my family come from. It is an absolutely stunning place. Please don't destroy it."

Pan Cook, Aylesbury 16/8/10