An update from Rev Richard Baxter, on the work of the Devon Wood Wind Farm Community Liaison Forum

You may be aware that a company called West Coast Energy has developed proposals and sought planning permission for a seven-turbine wind farm at a site on the southern side of Clatto Hill. Planning issues around this are the responsibility of Fife Council, and they will make the decisions on these.

There is no single pre-existing body or organisation which represents the whole of the area likely to be most impacted by this proposal. Kennoway, Kettle and Star community council areas are all potentially affected in various ways. I was therefore invited, as an independent person with no connection to West Coast Energy, no declared view on wind farms in general or this proposal in particular, to assist with a series of discussion groups and public meetings leading to the creation of Devon Wood Wind Farm Community Liaison Forum.

The main purpose of the forum has been to ensure that in the event of any development proposal being approved, an appropriate community benefit package would be put in place. The forum does not directly take part in the planning process, and as a group it expresses no joint view on the proposal. Contributors to the forum have a wide range of personal views. Some are opposed to the development, some neutral and some in favour.

West Coast Energy's initial community benefit fund proposal was £3,000 per megawatt (MW) of installed capacity. The capacity of the development is up to 17.5MW so that would have given a fund of £52,500 per year for 25 years. Following the discussions between the forum and West Coast Energy, this proposal has been improved to £3,500 per MW of installed capacity, which would give £61,250 per year. This sum would also increase in line with inflation, and the obligation to pay would transfer to anyone who bought or leased the wind farm. It would be payable regardless of whether a wind farm operated to full capacity or not. If the wind farm continued operation beyond 25 years payments to the fund would also continue. The proposed figure is understood to be higher than that proposed for other developments in Fife, although some higher figures are under discussion elsewhere in Scotland. It is normal practice for a planning authority to put in place a legal agreement covering any community benefit package to ensure it is binding.

The fund would be available for a range of community based projects in the area impacted by the development. It would be administered by a Community Development Trust to ensure an open and fair process. The exact area to be included, the nature of projects which could benefit, and the process for appointing trustees would be the subject of further discussion if the company's planning application were to be approved, and opportunities to contribute to this process would be advertised if a trust is required. At our request, West Coast Energy have agreed to meet reasonable legal costs for setting up such a trust, as part of the community benefit proposal, and to meet the cost of updating the community on the forum's work.

I hope this will clarify the work which has been done to make sure the interests of the neighbouring communities are taken into account. Regardless of your individual view of the desirability or otherwise of the wind farm proposal, I hope you will feel that the forum has taken a responsible view on protecting local interests, should a development proceed.

Rev Richard Baxter Chairperson -
Devon Wood Wind Farm Community Liaison Forum

If you have questions on the work of the forum my contact details are as follows:
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