



ORKNEY HERITAGE SOCIETY

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www.orkneycommunities.co.uk/ohs

Orkney Heritage Society's concerns deepened as a result of the 'consultation' events held by SSEN last week about the proposed substation at Finstown and the overhead cables. The Society's Board will meet mid month but those members delegated to attend the consultation wish to make clear their concerns.

Proposed substation at Finstown

Despite the Society making clear representations and suggestions to the Company following the last consultation in July the huge sheds are more visible than 3 months ago. 'We had been hoping to see that SSEN had taken the points being made about the need to lower the level of the site before building the substation. Last week we saw that this was not the case and we remain concerned that the consultation is a sham and the people of Orkney are being ignored.' said David Murdoch on behalf of the Society.

'We have repeatedly made the point that we are not anti renewables, or even this scheme. But we do expect SSEN to undertake genuine consultation.'

'Our members tell us that they want to have the substation. blending in as far as possible.' said David. 'Here in Orkney that involves a combination of finding a reasonable site, colours and shape and then getting it low enough in the landscape to allow it to be as unobtrusive as possible. It's difficult for a lay organisation to comment on site selection; they have spectacularly failed on the other points'



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The site chosen is a barley field opposite Binscarth and is not overlooked by many properties. The sheds will be prominent in the landscape. The field is at approximately 52m above sea-level and the site is able to be lowered by digging into the underlying rock. By lowering the site, the entire sub-station can be made much less obtrusive.

‘We have pointed out that the site will still be high enough to drain safely and that this area is known to be only thinly covered with soil.’ said David. He admitted this plan would result in a lot of rock excavation, but also pointed out that this would be useful. ‘The cable to the mainland is going to be covered in rock dropped onto it after the cable is laid. That rock needs to come from somewhere and at least some of it could come from the sub-station at Finstown rather than go and dig yet another hole somewhere in Scotland. This what was done to make the Barriers in the 1940s. This could be a win-win.’

The plans on display last week were the same as the leaflet in last week’s Orcadian and showed that there had been some movement by SSEN to underground cables in some limited locations. The cables planned to come in from the Lyde Road down towards Binscarth are now to be buried for the last 500m. In addition the cables on Flotta are to be buried so as not to interfere with the airstrip. Similarly cables are to be buried on Burray and across Barrier 4.

The Society was quick to thank SSEN for these changes. ‘It is good to see that some undergrounding is now proposed, so that shows it can be done.’ said David. ‘These changes show it is technically possible, so the issue now is why more cannot be undergrounded.’

SSEN has talked about costs and the Society has asked for full details of the relative up front additional costs and ongoing revenue savings.



David pointed out that if Orkney was part of Denmark then none of the newly proposed cables would be allowed to be hung on poles across the landscape. The Danes not only decided to bury everything up to 400kV (the size of the huge pylons further south), but they also decided to bury all the other clutter that had been put up over the years to supply power to farms and houses in the countryside. It took them 12 years but you only have to visit Denmark (or look on Google Streetview) to see how clear their landscape looks now that they have tidied up. 'It is disappointing that SSEN seem completely disinterested in offering Orkney an improved landscape, indeed they want to make it even more untidy by stringing poles and cables up from Costa to the southern tip of Hoy via Kirkwall and the Hope.'

'We have made a proposal that rather than ring 3 sides of Scapa Flow with poles and wires that a shorter and more direct line should be taken across the Flow from Flotta to Orphir. In addition we believe that all cables should be undergrounded. We realise this is a significant change in the plans, but we believe Orkney deserves better than the minimum capital cost option being touted. This would also improve service reliability and decrease revenue costs'

'We have also suggested that this could be combined with putting existing cables underground. This would immediately improve service reliability and the landscape. Could other community benefits flow- - for example fibre optic cables to improve broadband speed?'

'We fear that the project now has developed momentum and is showing no signs of listening to points made to it. Certainly the fact that the latest plans have gone back on some earlier progress is deeply disturbing. The disclosure that this will be a 'design and build' contract with SSEN able to claim it is 'nothing to do with them' when corners get cut is of great concern.' said David.



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OHS was set up in 1968. The Society campaigned hard in 1976-77 when Orkney was under threat from uranium mining and has managed in the past to achieve better balance between Orkney's heritage and the need for development. 'As we have been at pains to point out' says David 'we are not anti-renewables, but we are anti-jobs done on the cheap with little sense of duty to the local environment or people. We know renewables slow down climate change and create employment here; both are important to the future of the County. We firmly believe we need to ensure such developments benefit Orkney and are not a permanent blot on our critically important landscape.

Other members of the public also expressed their concern that despite repeated blandishments from SSEN staff that they would 'take that point back' there was no apparent sign of anybody noting the points.

'One of the recent SSEN publications said that 'The vast majority of the visitors were satisfied' but when challenged they were unable to offer any evidence for this. The last event followed the same format with people being asked to register when they attended an event, but without providing any opportunity to express an opinion upon leaving. We fear that SSEN are just going through the motions of consultation to satisfy OFGEM. If they are not going to gather opinions then I fear we will have to look at ways of doing so'