



## **Briefing note on the hydropower proposals for Allt Chaorainn, Allt Ceitlein, and Allt Mheuran, Glen Etive.**

March 2019

### **Introduction**

The Glen Etive mountains currently enjoy recognition as one of Scotland's top landscapes, lying as they do within a National Scenic Area and a Wild Land Area.

Seven hydropower schemes have been proposed by a developer for the side glens of Glen Etive, within the National Scenic Area. Although submitted individually they collectively constitute a Major Development in the glen, composed of seven elements. The cumulative impact of these proposals will undoubtedly have an effect on the landscape setting of the glen.

Four of the schemes in the already-developed forestry plantations have received approval. Mountaineering Scotland did not object to them as the setting, although in the National Scenic Area, was appropriate to this scale of development.

The three hydropower schemes under review on the Allt Chaorainn, Allt Ceitlein, and Allt Mheuran lie in the eastern glens, leading up to the high tops. This would spread the impact of development up from the glen floor and into the wild landscape of the eastern watershed which remains only lightly touched by land management.

### **Development & Planning Policy**

Wild land is a nationally important asset (National Planning Framework 3 section 4.4), and areas that show wild land characteristics are very sensitive to any form of intrusive human activity and have little or no capacity to accept new development (Scottish Planning Policy paragraph 200), although some development may be appropriate if it doesn't significantly impact on the wild characteristics of the setting.

The case for the development of renewable energy projects must be tested against the case for the protection of landscape and its qualities. In some instances, run-of-river hydro schemes can be accommodated within designated areas. The Highland-wide Local Development Plan recognises this in Policy 57 Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage; any significant adverse effects must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance.

Each of these schemes is a major civil engineering project in a fragile and sensitive landscape setting, where steep and undulating land will be very slow to recover its form and vegetation cover, unlike construction projects in lower-lying areas.

### **Appreciation of landscape and recreation**

Glen Etive is an area of Scotland that is of national importance for many people seeking outdoor recreation. There is no formal mechanism for the identification of recreational value, but the policies quoted above provide for the public enjoyment of special places, and for the care of these landscapes.

Beyond the floor of the Glen and the forestry plantations on the west side, the rugged eastern side glens and slopes leading to the high tops provide the wild character of the main recreational

attraction. There are 22 tops over 700m altitude within this area. This is a major walking and climbing resource, with tops of varying levels of difficulty and strenuousness.

The value of the wild land lies with the connection that people make with the quality and character of the fine mountain environment as they slowly walk through it. The local, small-scale detail is as an important feature for participants in outdoor recreation as the scenic backdrop of the mountains. It is these qualities that need the protection from disruption.

The digging of long trenches will be a major disruption to the wild qualities of the area, and coupled with the uncertainties associated with successful reinstatement gives pause for thought. We believe that it is in the national interest to take a precautionary approach here and choose strong protection for our wildest landscapes – a cultural and social resource of benefit to many for health and well-being.

## **Conclusion**

The three hydropower schemes in Glen Etive under consideration, on the Allt Chaorainn, Allt Ceitlein, and Allt Mheuran, are an example of the challenges facing wild land, of how we approach our much-loved landscapes.

The identification of two landscape designations within which these remaining three proposals sit shows how important this location is in a national context. Renewable energy developments are necessary and desirable, but the chief test in planning terms is the suitability of construction in any specific area.

It is our opinion that the landscape and recreational significance of the eastern side of the glen outweighs the benefits of the renewable energy generated by the three of the seven schemes that lie in the Wild Land Area.

The Highland Council would be justified in reversing the decision to approve them, protecting the wild character of that landscape, for generations to come.

## **Mountaineering Scotland:**

Mountaineering Scotland is a membership organisation with over 13,000 members and is the only recognised representative organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski-tourers who live in Scotland or who enjoy Scotland's mountains, and acts to represent, support and promote Scottish mountaineering. Mountaineering Scotland also acts on behalf of the 80,000 members of the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) on matters related to landscape and access in Scotland, and provides training and information to mountain users to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of our mountain environment.