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Please pass this letter to:

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7 November 2017

Dear Mr Jeffrey

17/00838/FUL access track to Craigton and Spittalhill Wind Farm

I submitted the following objection through the Stirling Council Planning Portal, but the portal appeared to crash during that process and may not have recorded the objection.

Stirling Council ref 17/00838/FUL proposes a new access track to Craigton and Spittalhill Wind Farm in the Fintry Hills to run, on new and upgraded lines, from the B828 between Kippen and Fintry to the turbine site.

Mountaineering Scotland objects to the application 17/00838/FUL on the basis of intrusive visual impact and the fact that the proposed track is probably unnecessary, as an extension of an existing track would fulfil the purpose of the developer.

The Fintry and Gargunnock Hills are a popular recreational area in central Scotland and are particularly prominent from the Forth valley to the north, to which they present a steep, and largely precipitous scarp face. The scarp runs approximately from west to east, and the Fintry Hills are separated from the more easterly Gargunnocks by a bealach at Spout of Ballochleam. In contrast, the hills fall away more gently to the south to the Carron valley.

The bealach is traversed by a track running from Ballochleam in the north to Todholes at the head of Carron Reservoir in the south. This is a popular path, both in its own right and as access to the summits of Stronend and Carleatheran.

In 2015, a proposal (ref 13/00728/FUL) to erect 7 wind turbines, up to 125m in height, was allowed on appeal, having previously been refused by Stirling Council. The turbines are to be sited on the west bank of the Backside Burn, a headwater of the Endrick Water, which runs down a fold in the hills to Todholes. This hollow also contains the above-mentioned track, about 300m distant on the east bank. The approved scheme shows access to the turbines being taken from Todholes, with 2 kms of track, mostly on a new line, to the start of the turbines.

The appeal involved much discussion of visual impact, including cumulative impact due to the presence of other windfarms nearby. Access appears to have been the subject of very little debate and there does not appear to have been objection to the principle of access via the Carron valley.

The current application proposes an alternative access route, from the B228 between Kippen and Fintry, a length of around 5 kms of which around 4 kms are on or in the vicinity of existing tracks. The proposed track would leave the B228 close to the present access to Gribloch and would run past that farm to the single track public road to the south. It would then follow the line of that road ENE to the Easter Glinns access which it would then follow before striking across fields to the Ballochleam-bealach track referred to above. It would then follow the line of that track to the bealach and the start of the turbines beyond.

There can be no doubt, because of its greater length, high design standard (5m carriageway and associated earthworks) and the nature of the terrain through which it will run, that this route would have far greater visual impact than that previously approved.

The new route will impact on rolling farmland and involve loss of hedgerows in its first 4kms. Then, when it joins the existing bealach track, it will have a major impact due to its prominent and wide carriageway and the extensive earthworks required to create satisfactorily landscaped sideslopes.

Furthermore, the use of the scarp slope to provide access for many large vehicles during the construction phase would appear highly incongruous. By contrast, the previous route, contained in the more gently sloping and less sensitive moorland of the south facing slopes, would be much less visually intrusive. Whilst the new route may be more convenient for the developer during the construction phase, the previously approved route must have been considered acceptable by the Roads Authority otherwise this would have been established in the context of the previous application.

Moreover, as there is an existing windfarm to the north-east, on the south slopes of the Gargunnock Hills it would seem relatively straightforward and unobtrusive to extend its roads across the intervening moorland to serve the present site, rendering the current proposal unnecessary.

Mountaineering Scotland objects to the application 17/00838/FUL.

Yours sincerely

David Gibson
CEO, Mountaineering Scotland