

Dear

Holyrood debate on energy infrastructure: Motion S6M-12842

I would like to request that you attend this debate to represent the views and interests of your many constituents deeply affected by the proposed Spittal to Beaully 400 kV overhead line.

It has been clear from the outset that finding a satisfactory route through our area was going to be difficult; there are multiple statutory protections, areas of high recreational and scenic value, non-designated areas of high ecological value, and the villages of Strathpeffer, Contin, Jamestown, Marybank, Tarvie and Scatwell. We are an inhabited part of the Highlands, this is not open country where huge infrastructure can be easily 'hidden', so the consequences on residents of insensitively planned development will be significant.

This area is considered the gateway to the North Highlands, and tourism is a vital part of our local economy. Underpinning the visitor economy is the quality of our natural, landscape and cultural heritage – all assets that will be damaged if the energy industry is simply given free rein and local people not involved in decision making. None of these concerns appear to have been considered by SSEN or policymakers. The company act as if public consultation is a mere formality, planning simply a rubber stamp, and their preferred option has already been agreed. We are losing faith in the political and planning process to deliver a fair and balanced outcome.

We have expressed to SSEN our interest in being involved in a co-design process to find an agreed 'least worst' option, or even better, a good option, which might not be an overhead line along the proposed route, but something very different.

However SSEN's engagement with us has been lamentable. The people who live in the area that will be affected by the proposals appear to have negligible weight in SSEN's assessment process. This cannot be right, especially since we will be deriving no benefit whatever from this scheme. The electricity is not for us, it is for others further south. Profits will go to investors, many overseas. Local employment will be negligible. Where is our 'just transition'?

The compensation proposed by the UK Government does not go nearly far enough to make up for our marred environment and quality of life, the likely impact on tourism businesses, or the drop in property values that homeowners here will inevitably suffer. We feel insulted, stressed, despairing. It is telling that the possible cost of compensation is not affecting SSEN's routing process.

Driven by ambitious deadlines, delivery of the grid upgrades to date has been rushed, a situation unlikely to lead to the best value or the fairest long-term solution. Since the Scottish Government has now stepped back from its target-oriented Net Zero policy there may be an opportunity to pause, reflect, and build consensus within a more inclusive process. This is what I would urge you to support.

Since this debate involves a matter on which your constituents feel strongly, and in which we feel our voices are routinely ignored, I hope that you will engage with it and speak for us.

A debate briefing note developed by my Community Council [can be downloaded here](#).

Yours faithfully