
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

FOR INFORMATION

**Title: BEAULY TO DENNY TRANSMISSION LINE PROJECT
PROGRESS UPDATE**

Prepared by: Gavin Miles, Head of Planning

Purpose of Report

To update the committee on the Beauly to Denny transmission line works in the National Park and the restoration and revegetation of the main line works.

Recommendation

That the Planning Committee notes the content of the paper.

Background & Context

1. The Beauly to Denny transmission project started on site in 2012 following the 2010 consent from Scottish Ministers under Section 37 of the Electricity. The main line construction was completed in 2016.
2. Following CNPA site visits in 2015 and 2016, where it became clear to CNPA officers that the restoration methods were unlikely to be successful in some sections of the line, Scottish and Southern Energy Networks (SSEN) and Balfour-Beattie (the main contractor) agreed to undertake a voluntary monitoring scheme of the restoration to check on progress. Some of the least successful restoration of the temporary access tracks and tower bases has occurred over a stretch of the line between Dalnaspidal in the south and Dalwhinnie in the north, on ground clearly visible from the A9 and main highland rail line. The monitoring scheme runs for five years from 2016 and includes a site inspection assessment of revegetation.
3. The Planning Committee last received a formal update in December 2017¹, following completion of the year two monitoring report. In that report, SSEN committed to undertake additional trial measures in 2018 to accelerate revegetation in some sections within the Cairngorms National Park. The year three monitoring report, received by the CNPA in June 2019 (Appendix 1), covers the first year of those trials. Many CNPA planning committee members undertook a site visit with SSEN staff to view the trial plots and examples of both successful and unsuccessful restoration in September 2018,
4. It is worth noting that in addition to the upgrading main Beauly to Denny transmission line, SSEN were required to undertake the Cairngorms National Park Rationalisation Scheme as compensation for the main project. This project, which completed in the summer of 2017, removed approximately 93km of existing low voltage or redundant tower lines from Etteridge, past Boat of Garten, Tomintoul, the Lecht and Strathdon towards Tarland. Scottish and Southern Energy Networks (SSEN) have also recently secured £32 million from the energy regulator OFGEN for the undergrounding of 12km of prominent overhead lines between in the Boat of Garten and Nethybridge as part of its VISTA (Visual Impact of Scottish Transmission Assets) project.

Beauly to Denny Line Restoration Progress

5. The CNPA received the SSE Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) report for the 2018 season (year three of the monitoring project) in June 2019. Members of the planning committee who attended the site visit in September 2018 will recognise the mixed picture it presents of restoration inside the Cairngorms National Park, having seen the ground conditions and ground cover at a variety of locations, including trial plots at close to the end of the year three growing season.

¹ [Beauly Denny Year 2 Monitoring Update December 2017.pdf](#)

6. The year three monitoring report shows a gradual improvement in condition with fewer tower bases and sections of track in the red and amber categories, with transition towards green categories or near complete revegetation. As the monitoring scheme continues, we would expect to see faster improvements as initial vegetation recolonisation improves conditions for further plant growth.
7. However, there remain areas where revegetation is extremely slow, and unfortunately, a number of these are within the Cairngorms National Park. The majority of those areas are where there was very little soil or vegetation over rocky ground and where the construction and restoration techniques provided less soil and organic matter for vegetation to recolonise. Revegetation has been compounded by grazing of sheep and deer along some sections and by vehicle damage in others.
8. The trial plots created 2018 were implement too late in the year to have a full effect. CNPA officers will visit in September 2019 to assess the first full year's effect, and the year four monitoring report should provide further data and comparison with other areas. Both will be reported to the Planning Committee in due course.
9. SSEN have acknowledged that further intervention may be required to fully address the restoration. This may also mean that the restoration work and monitoring must be extended beyond the current five-year monitoring scheme. Following the year four monitoring report, CNPA officers will seek agreement with SSEN over any further measures required to repair and monitor the areas that need further work and report the Planning Committee.

Gavin Miles

August 2019

gavinmiles@cairngorms.co.uk