

PE1864/JJJJJJ: Increase the ability of communities to influence planning decisions for onshore windfarms

Finlay Carson MSP written submission, 8 September 2025

As the Member of the Scottish Parliament for Galloway and West Dumfries, I strongly support Petition PE1864. For too long, communities in my constituency have been sidelined in planning decisions for onshore windfarms and associated infrastructure. The current system is failing to deliver fairness, transparency, or meaningful engagement, and urgent reform is needed.

Dumfries and Galloway has become an “energy sacrifice zone,” with more than 30 large-scale energy projects approved since 2022. Many of these have bypassed local decision-making through Section 36 consents, leaving councils and communities powerless. Local authorities lack the resources to scrutinize applications effectively, while Scottish Ministers frequently override local objections and even the recommendations of their own independent reporters.

As I have said publicly:

“If the Scottish Government is serious about expanding community energy then it must reform the planning system to give local voices real power. It must also stop treating regions like Dumfries and Galloway as ‘energy sacrifice zones’ and redirect funding to genuine community-led projects instead of developer-driven schemes that gain only ‘tokenistic benefit funds.’”

Examples from My Constituency

Hands Off Our Hills (Cree Valley)

This campaign reflects widespread concern about industrial-scale wind farms in the Galloway Hills, including turbines up to 250 metres high. These developments threaten tourism, the Dark Sky Park designation, and the region’s natural heritage.

Glengap Community Group – Lairdmannoch Energy Park

The proposed Lairdmannoch Energy Park includes nine 180m turbines, solar panels, and a large battery storage system on carbon-rich peatland. Key concerns include:

- Peatland destruction and carbon release, contrary to NPF4 Policy 5(a).
- Public safety risks from battery storage fires.
- Loss of wildlife habitat, including for protected species.
- Inadequate consultation and failure to assess cumulative impacts. Over 500 objections have been lodged, and local residents feel ignored.

This campaign highlights the incompatibility of such developments with Scotland’s climate and biodiversity commitments. The project breaches multiple planning policies and threatens the integrity of the Galloway Forest Dark Sky Park.

Galloway Against Pylons – Kendoon to Tongland Project

The Scottish Government recently approved 27 miles of new pylons across Galloway, despite a **seven-year public inquiry** and a reporter's recommendation to refuse the application. This decision has caused outrage locally and is now being considered for **judicial review**.

As I said at the time:

"This decision is both shocking and unwanted given the strong public opinion and opposition to this proposal. It demonstrates complete disrespect to the views of the people in Galloway... For Scottish Ministers to simply over-rule that decision makes a complete mockery of holding a public inquiry in the first place. Was it simply a charade?"

Campaigners have raised over £25,000 to fund legal advice, but the cost of challenging such decisions is prohibitive for communities.

This is not an isolated case. Across Scotland, ministers have repeatedly overturned reporters' recommendations, including the Strath Oykel Wind Farm, where Highland Council is now pursuing a judicial review. The inquiry recommended refusal due to significant adverse impacts, yet ministers granted consent.

Such decisions raise serious concerns about transparency and accountability. Communities and councils are left in the dark about where and by whom these decisions are made within government. There is no clear explanation of why independent recommendations are disregarded, undermining confidence in the planning system.

As one commentator put it:

"It makes a mockery of the entire planning system; taxpayers' money and hard-pressed planning officers' time would be saved if every renewable energy project just went straight to SNP ministers for a rubber stamp."

Tourism is the leading private sector industry in Dumfries and Galloway, generating £330 million annually and supporting thousands of jobs. The cumulative industrialisation of our hills risks undermining this vital sector. Businesses reliant on visitors have expressed fears that the proliferation of turbines and pylons will deter tourists.

As I have warned:

"It is totally unacceptable that government ministers have not considered the potential impact on tourism. Do they honestly believe that tourists and visitors want to see these horrific blots on the landscape?"

I have consistently raised these issues in Parliament and with Ministers, calling for:

- A moratorium on new consents until cumulative impacts are properly assessed.
- Reform of Section 36 consents to restore local accountability.
- Funding for local authorities to manage applications and enforce conditions.

- Professional support for communities to participate effectively in planning.

To restore fairness and transparency, I urge the Committee to recommend that the Scottish Government:

1. Adopt English-style planning legislation giving communities a stronger say.
2. Provide resources for councils and communities to engage in planning.
3. Appoint an independent advocate to protect participants during inquiries.
4. Mandate cumulative impact assessments and enforceable monitoring of consent conditions.
5. Introduce statutory transparency requirements for ministerial decision-making, including publication of reasoning when overturning reporters' recommendations.

Scotland's renewable energy ambitions must not come at the expense of rural communities, landscapes, and biodiversity. Petition PE1864 offers a pathway to restore balance, fairness, and trust in the planning system. I strongly urge the Committee to support its aims.

Your Sincerely

Finlay Carson MSP

Member of the Scottish Parliament for Galloway & West Dumfries