

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

Finlay Carson written submission, 27 January 2026

Without sounding like a broken record, for far too long, communities in my constituency have been largely ignored when it comes to key planning decisions regarding onshore windfarms and associated infrastructure projects.

It is something that I have argued long and hard about since first entering the Scottish Parliament as the Member for Galloway and West Dumfries more than a decade ago.

While some things have changed – and, hopefully, for the better – others have not despite powerful arguments being put forward.

A prime example of this, is, of course, the current system surrounding community energy which is, regrettably failing to deliver meaningful engagement and transparency while, tragically, falling short when it comes to delivering fairness.

It is abundantly clear that local voices are being systematically ignored by the Scottish Government in its relentless drive towards onshore windfarm developments. In Dumfries and Galloway alone, 30 large-scale energy projects including wind farms, pylons and battery storage have been approved by the Energy Consents Unit in the last four years alone – many turbines over 150 metres, some exceeding 200 metres.

These could never be described as being small-scale community-led projects but industrial-scale developments, often driven by external developers with local accountability.

Often many of them have simply bypassed local decision making through Section 36 consents, leaving councils and the communities they serve effectively powerless.

Critics could argue until they are blue in the face without gaining even a flicker of any recognition or consideration. Even well-organised campaigns like Save Our Hills and Galloway Without Pylons struggle to be heard.

As I have maintained previously in support of Petition PE1864 urgent reform is needed if the views of local communities are to be taken seriously – and NOT just as a token gesture!

One of the main drawbacks is, of course, the sad fact that local authorities seriously lack the resources, both in terms of manpower and finance, to properly scrutinise any planning applications within a restricted timescale.

Even when the planners do meet the targets, they are then often thwarted as local objections are routinely ignored – including the views put forward by independent reporters. Makes you question the decision to go down this route in the first place, given that it will often be kicked into the long grass at the end of it all?

Data from NatureScot reveals southern Scotland has more proposed onshore wind developments than any other part of the country, hosting 21 per cent of all such projects.

The Kendoon to Tongland Project demonstrates such disregard for local democracy when the Scottish Government recently approved 27 miles of new pylons across Galloway – following a public inquiry and a reporter's recommendation to refuse the application.

Normally you would expect such local opposition to be at the forefront of any decision – sadly no, with the community forced to go to a judicial review.

It is almost as if the Scottish Government knows best regardless of the outrage sparked locally. It will not give up until the critics finally surrender!

As I have maintained from the outset, it demonstrates complete disrespect to the views of the people in Galloway. Correct me if I am wrong but do they NOT have to live with the consequences?

This is, of course, not an isolated case, both in Galloway and West Dumfries but across the whole of the country – sparking serious concerns about transparency and accountability.

Being blunt, it makes a total mockery of the entire planning system, taxpayers' money and planning officials' time and efforts.

Why not save time by passing every renewable energy project to the Scottish Government for an automatic rubber stamp exercise?

My solution to this prickly problem is simple – instigate a moratorium on new energy consents until cumulative impacts are properly assessed. Reform Section 36 consents to restore local accountability, while ensuring adequate funding for local authorities in order they can properly manage future applications.

Is this too much to ask? A common-sense approach to restore a belief in local democracy?