

Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee
Wednesday 11 February 2026
4th Meeting, 2026 (Session 6)

PE2095: Improve the public consultation processes for energy infrastructure projects

Introduction

Petitioner Margaret Tracey Smith

Petition summary Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- review and seek to update section 3.2 of the [Energy Consents Unit: Good Practice Guidance for Applications under Section 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989](#) to address the concerns of communities about the lack of meaningful, responsible, and robust voluntary and pre-application consultation by transmission operators on energy infrastructure projects
- explore all available levers to strengthen community liaison and public participation for the lifecycle of energy infrastructure projects.

Webpage <https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE2095>

1. [The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on 4 June 2025](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Scottish Government.
2. [On 14 January 2026](#), the Committee took evidence on thematic energy issues raised across a number of petitions, including this petition.
3. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
4. The Committee has received a new written submission from the Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy, which is set out in **Annexe C**.
5. [Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the petition's webpage](#).
6. [Further background information about this petition can be found in the SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
7. [The Scottish Government gave its initial response to the petition on 22 May 2024](#).
8. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 3,638 signatures have been received on this petition.

Action

9. The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

Clerks to the Committee
February 2026

Annexe A: Summary of petition

PE2095: Improve the public consultation processes for energy infrastructure projects

Petitioner

Margaret Tracey Smith

Date Lodged

10 April 2024

Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to:

- review and seek to update section 3.2 of the [Energy Consents Unit: Good Practice Guidance for Applications under Section 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989](#) to address the concerns of communities about the lack of meaningful, responsible, and robust voluntary and pre-application consultation by transmission operators on energy infrastructure projects
- explore all available levers to strengthen community liaison and public participation for the lifecycle of energy infrastructure projects.

Background information

Communities across North East Scotland have serious concerns about the quality and transparency of the public consultation accompanying SSEN Transmission's East Coast 400kV Phase 2 project.

SSEN's engagement with communities has been rushed, and insufficient effort has been made to understand and communicate the full impact of the proposals to impacted communities. There have been inconsistencies between information presented in SSEN's published material and their contact with community representatives. Many affected residents were unaware of the plans and it has fallen to local campaigners to raise awareness.

These concerns have had a detrimental impact on the wellbeing of residents, who are worried about their health, businesses, property value, cultural heritage, and the loss of prime agricultural land.

The Scottish Government must use all available levers to improve the public consultation processes for energy infrastructure projects and ensure they are carried out with the consent of the affected communities.

Annexe B: Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE2095 on 4 June 2025

The Convener: PE2095 seeks to improve the public consultation processes for energy infrastructure projects. The petition calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to review and seek to update section 3.2 of the energy consents unit's "Good Practice Guidance for Applications under Section 36 and 37 of the Electricity Act 1989" document to address the concerns of communities about the lack of meaningful, responsible and robust voluntary and pre-application consultation by transmission operators on energy infrastructure projects, and to explore all available levers to strengthen community liaison and public participation for the lifecycle of energy infrastructure projects.

We last considered the petition on 11 September 2024, when we agreed to write to the Acting Minister for Climate Action, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets and the National Energy System Operator.

I should have said that the petition was lodged by Margaret Smith, who I understand is with us in the public gallery.

In its response, Ofgem underlines that planning consultation does not lie within its remit. Development of the options, scope, design, planning and delivery of projects are the responsibility of the relevant transmission owner, NESO and other relevant authorities, prior to Ofgem's final decision on cost efficiency. However, Ofgem's expectation is for transmission owners to engage effectively with local communities, and it states that stakeholders who are interested in infrastructure projects are welcome to submit responses to any relevant Ofgem consultations on efficient funding for transmission projects.

The response from NESO indicates that it balances any proposed new network infrastructure against four high-level objectives, one of which is the impact on communities. While NESO puts forward a recommendation, it is the responsibility of the transmission operator, at the next stage of project development, to decide on potential route corridors and types of infrastructure to use. NESO's expectation is that operators will consult with local communities and planning authorities on the proposals.

The response from the Acting Minister for Climate Action highlights that a joint review that was undertaken by the UK and Scottish Governments has concluded, with a consultation expected to launch. He states that proposals include a statutory pre-application community and stakeholder engagement process, which would apply to all transmission infrastructure projects. That consultation was launched, and has closed, since the minister's response was sent in October last year, so it is now historical.

The minister also refers to some additional Scottish Government work on developing guidance for pre-application engagement with communities. The minister says that the Government aims to engage with communities on their views before the guidance is finalised. At the time of the minister's response, which was whenever, that work had just started.

We are joined by two of our parliamentary colleagues: Tess White, who is a veteran of the committee in the early months of this parliamentary session, and Douglas Lumsden. I know that you would both like to say a few words to the committee, which would be gratefully received, although it is not a speech to the chamber. Have you tossed a coin as to which of the two of you feels that they would like to speak first?

You have nominated yourself, Ms White.

Tess White (North East Scotland) (Con): Fine—I will go first, convener.

I thank the committee for its consideration of the petition. The petitioner, Tracey Smith, is with us.

As campaigners across the north-east fight tooth and nail to prevent a vast network of super pylons, battery farms and substations from vandalising our countryside, the petition remains vitally important. The community engagement by the monopoly transmission operator, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks, has been nothing short of disgraceful, especially when the cost to life, land and location for my constituents is so high.

There are huge fears over the loss of productive farmland and farmers' livelihoods, plunging property values and the impact of transmission infrastructure on long-term health, and massive frustration and anger over SSEN's unwillingness to explore undergrounding or offshoring.

Meanwhile, the energy consents unit has given the green light to 236 separate applications for major electricity schemes across Scotland since May 2022, while only eight have been rejected. Scottish National Party minister Gillian Martin has met with SSEN 16 times, but has refused point blank to meet with campaigners.

We still do not know what action the SNP Government will take now that the consultation for reforming the consenting process has ended. In fact, since the petition was lodged, even the right to a public local inquiry and local democratic input is under renewed threat, against a backdrop of the SNP and Labour working hand in glove to strip communities from Kintore to Tealing of their democratic rights. Constituents in the north of Scotland feel that they are bearing the brunt of transmission infrastructure projects and that there is a deeply unjust transition.

As the committee considers the next steps, I urge members to address the wrecking ball that the SNP Government is taking to local democracy in the name of net zero.

The Convener: Thank you, Ms White. You referred to the petitioner as Tracey White; I note that the petition has been lodged by Margaret Tracey White, but I take it that Tracey White is the petitioner's given name, so I am delighted that Tracey White is with us in the gallery today.

Mr Lumsden, would you like to say a few words?

Douglas Lumsden (North East Scotland) (Con): Just to correct you there, convener, it is Tracey Smith. [Laughter.]

The Convener: It is Tracey Smith; you are correcting my correction. That is rarely necessary, Mr Lumsden, but I am very grateful to you for your support and assistance in my senility. Anyhow, please proceed.

Douglas Lumsden: I am happy to help in any way that I can, convener. I thank you, and the committee, for giving me the opportunity to speak to the petition today.

11:00

The petition is of huge importance to not just the north-east but the whole of Scotland. In the rush to net zero, our electricity system is changing, in relation to not just offshore and onshore wind but the associated network infrastructure, whether that is pylons, substations or even the dreaded solar battery storage that we see appearing all over the country. A lot of that is appearing without much thought as to capacity and what we need, and little in the way of regulation.

In all those developments, the local communities seem to be ignored. It does not seem to matter how many objections there are to a proposal; there is a feeling that, if the Government wants something to happen, it is going to happen anyway. That is turning the consultation process into a tick-box exercise, especially when we consider the amount of effort and time that our communities have to put into responding to such consultations.

We are moving to a position in which communities think, "Why should we bother?" That happened at the Net Zero, Energy and Transport Committee. When we put out a call for views on the proposed changes to the consenting process that were mentioned earlier, the community groups that we went to responded by saying that they were not going to waste their time, as they would just be ignored, as they always are.

Looking at the specifics of the petition involving SSEN, I think that part of the problem is that there is so much work planned that people are genuinely confused as to whether or not it affects them. The campaign groups have been doing an excellent job of finding their own money to compete with companies that have very deep pockets; we really are going down the road of a David-versus-Goliath situation.

We need meaningful consultation, and the Government needs to start listening to communities. The Government will claim, no doubt, that the pre-application changes that are being proposed, which were mentioned earlier, will fix everything, but the truth is that most developers are undertaking such pre-consultation anyway, as per the "Good Practice Guidance".

I note that the minister's May 2024 response to the petition states that new pre-application guidance for electricity lines would be brought forward. It is interesting to hear that that process is only just starting now.

The key change that is being proposed is the removal of the automatic public inquiry, so we are now in a position in which we are weakening, rather than improving, the consultation process. Changes to that guidance are urgently required, and I urge the committee to keep the petition open to try to force the Government to come forward with new guidance, because it is sorely needed.

The Convener: Thank you, both. Would anyone else like to comment?

Maurice Golden: It might be helpful to set out the context for all that before we actually look at the petition. I want to clarify one point. Tess White said that the consultation was disgraceful, but Douglas Lumsden suggested that the relevant organisations were undertaking pre-application consultation anyway, which would be good practice. Was Mr Lumsden referring to other organisations? If an organisation is undertaking good practice, that would strike me as not being disgraceful—does that make sense?

The Convener: You can put that in the form of a statement rather than a question, because our colleagues are not here to act as witnesses.

Maurice Golden: Okay, sorry.

Tess White: I am happy to speak to that, convener. I am happy to elaborate—

The Convener: No, no—it is okay. I am sure that you are, but that would lead us down the route of goodness-knows-what precedent; I would have every MSP turning up at the committee.

Maurice Golden: Quite. With regard to the context for all this, all Scottish Conservatives, in the 2021 manifesto, wanted to showcase Scotland as world leading in tackling climate change, so candidates were very much standing on the agenda of tackling the issue of net zero and being ambitious in doing so.

I appreciate that communities are up in arms regarding the infrastructure. There was a very simple way in which we could have avoided building the infrastructure, and that was by not building the generation at a point where we need to transmit electricity via said infrastructure. That happened under 14 years of UK Conservative Government.

There are ways to unpick that, but it is much more difficult, with regard to the context of the petition, to do it from this point. Nevertheless, there are possible follow-ups with regard to the Scottish Government aspect, which is only a part of the entire project. One would be to ask the Scottish Government what action it will take, now that the consultation on reforming consenting processes in Scotland has closed, specifically with regard to implementing the proposal for a statutory pre-application community engagement process, and what mechanisms it will put in place to strengthen community participation for the life cycle of energy infrastructure projects beyond the pre-application stage.

The Convener: As there are no further thoughts, are we content to agree with Mr Golden?

Members *indicated agreement.*

The Convener: We are, so thank you very much. We will keep the petition open and progress on that basis.

Annexe C: Written submission

Cabinet Secretary for Climate Action and Energy written submission, 10 July 2025

PE2095/E: Improve the public consultation processes for energy infrastructure projects

Thank you for the letter of 5 June 2025, which highlighted that the Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee considered the petition PE2095 at its meeting on 4 June 2025. Please accept my apologies for not meeting the 3 July deadline.

The joint UK and Scottish Government review of electricity infrastructure consenting has concluded, with public consultation completed in November 2024 and the UK Government response published in March 2025. Reform is now being implemented through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill, currently progressing through Parliament in Westminster.

At the earliest opportunity, the Scottish Government will publish guidance for measures taking effect two months after the bill receives royal assent and consult on the additional measures enabled by Scottish Ministers' new regulation-making powers. The Scottish Government is committed to engaging stakeholders during the development of any regulations, ensuring they are practical and proportionate.

The proposals to implement statutory pre-application community engagement processes will require secondary legislation to be laid in the Scottish Parliament. Measures included in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill provide for parliamentary scrutiny of regulations to be made under these powers, with the level of scrutiny tailored to the significance of the regulatory powers.

On 22nd May 2024, the then Minister for Climate Action responded to the committee regarding this petition, acknowledging that the scale and linear nature of electricity transmission development may require a more detailed approach to public engagement prior to submission of applications, and that pre application guidance specific to transmission line applications requiring EIA would be taken forward, to provide that affected communities will have clear and meaningful opportunities to influence the process of developing route options. On 7 May 2025, we published this guidance, known as [Pre-application Consultation and Engagement Guidance for Transmission Line Projects](#).

Beyond pre application stage, it is intended that there will be an application acceptance stage, during which the Scottish Ministers will assess the completeness of an application including whether all pre application requirements to engage with communities have been carried out effectively. This will ensure that only projects which have fully considered the views of communities, as well as consultees in the pre application process, are accepted and processed.

Members of the public will be given notice that representations may be made on any applications that are accepted, and community councils will be consulted. It would be possible to consider in any future consultation whether current public notice

arrangements are up to date and provide suitable public awareness of the submission of applications. Material issues raised in representations and consultation responses will be given full consideration before any determination is made, as is the case at present.

The UK Government's Planning and Infrastructure Bill proposes the implementation of a new reporter-led examination process where a relevant planning authority objects to applications within a specified time period. The examination procedure to be adopted by a reporter would be published, interested parties would be notified of the proposed procedure and written representations on it would be invited by the reporter. The reporter may even decide it is appropriate to hold a meeting to hear representations as regards procedure. The reporter would then publish a decision on the procedures to be adopted along with reasons for the decision. This would strengthen community participation in the processes to be adopted for examining the application and would increase transparency of decision making.

The reform provides for a range of options for examining the application and allows for it to be tailored to the development under consideration, while crucially retaining the important option of a public inquiry where this is deemed appropriate.

I hope that this reply is helpful.

GILLIAN MARTIN