



# *Friends of the Ochils*

## **Newsletter**

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## Chair's report

*by Stuart Dean*

I trust that this latest edition of our newsletter gives you an up-to-date picture of the key issues that we have dealt with over the past year.

Once again the year has been dominated by campaigning against numerous attempts to damage the Ochils landscape and its enjoyment by so many people. However there have been some notable victories, not least the winning of the long running campaign to save Glenquey from a sand and gravel quarry.

Malcolm Best, who did such a brilliant job leading the Glenquey campaign, details in his article, the key events in the five year saga but it plays down the role that he undertook in collating all the arguments against approving the application for the quarry and the haul road. Without his attention to detail and perseverance we could have stumbled at a number of hurdles but so strong were the arguments put forward for refusal that



eventually PKC preferred the case put forward by objectors rather than those put forward for approval by the planning officer. Furthermore the Reporter who handled the appeal also came down in favour of the campaign arguments. A sweet victory indeed!

The decision to designate the PKC area of the Ochils as a Special Landscape Area was another resounding success and provides the basis for the further protection of the Ochils against unacceptable developments.

Nicki Baker's article on the impact of the now built Beaully to Denny power line across the western Ochils gets across so vividly the enormity of that impact. Nicki did so much, along with so many others, to fight the building of the line and, now that it is built, it's little consolation to be able to say, 'we told you so!' It will stand as a monument to all those in power who didn't listen when far more acceptable alternatives were available. We can now only continue to ensure that the mitigation measures promised by the developer are put in place, along with the removal of the unsightly track and the bell-mouth junctions.

We continue to have concerns about the potential damage that can be done in the Ochils by commercial forestry. David Scott's article gets across the damage that has resulted from the Jerah development and we must do all we can to work with the Forestry

Commission Scotland and other interested parties to ensure that, if and when more forestry is planted, it is done in ways that are sympathetic to the landscape, visual and recreational amenity, and historical features.

Finally we continue to oppose renewable energy projects which do damage to the landscape. Windfarm applications are still being submitted both for developments within the hill range and for areas visible from the Ochils. We must be eternally vigilant to ensure that no further damage is done; the Ochils have contributed more than their fair share of windfarms to national targets and we continue to reiterate that 'enough is enough'!

It's been a busy year and, with the death of Dave Prentice as detailed in the Annual Report, a sad one as well. But the support of our members continues to keep us going in the hope that one day we can draw a line under the campaigning and work towards the many improvements that are possible in the Ochils. On a personal note I cannot but be continually pleased with the ever increasing numbers who I see in the hills, particularly around my own village of Muckhart. All deserve to enjoy a landscape as free from industrial intrusions as possible.

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come down to Logie Kirk and on over the carse; and the Sheriffmuir Battlefield.

## The Beauly – Denny Power Line

*by Nicki Baker. Spokesperson on Beauly Denny*

Despite all our years of fighting and resistance, the Beauly-Denny power line is nearing completion on the ground. And it's every bit as ugly and as visually intrusive as we forecast.

SSE completed the construction work on their section, as far as the Wharry Burn, and including the Sheriffmuir Battlefield, towards the end of last year – but have yet to demolish the old 132kV line. Scottish Power got started on their stretch, south of the Wharry Burn, in the new year of 2015. To our surprise, the works have been leisurely; no one part has taken very long, or required very many men to construct it.

But the visual impact is enormous. The shiny giant pylons, and their thick cables, dominate the landscape, to an extent that the old 132kV line never did. Possibly the worst visual impacts are at the approach to Dumyat and the Cocksburn Reservoir – an area that our research in 2003 showed was visited by some 36,000 people per year, with probably substantially more in subsequent years; the scarp slope of the Ochils, where they pylons



***Shiny new pylons on the carse dominate the scarp face of the Ochils – compare, if you can make it out, the tiny shape of the old pylon just to the right of the new one***

Seen from the A91, there is a point from which the pylons can be seen climbing the scarp in a more or less straight line – each one so high that they form a ghastly jumble of shiny steel, stretching right up to and beyond the top of the scarp, neatly framed by the wide-felled swathe that climbs up



*The Beauly-Denny power line is every bit as ugly and as visually intrusive as we forecast.*

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around it, through Yellowcraig Wood. We have no idea what happened to Scottish Power's stated intention to find a paint that would reduce as far as possible the visual impact of the pylons up the scarp.



***The pylons are so huge that they dwarf the scarp – reducing the sense of grandeur***

On Sheriffmuir, the 8 km “access track” itself has an even greater impact than we expected, looking like a major, full-scale road, covering a width (including spoil banks) of up to 16m along its length. The old road across Sheriffmuir – the old drove road – is miniscule in comparison, with its paved surface stretching to a width of only about 3m, and flanked by well-vegetated verges.

We dearly hope that Stirling Council will stick firmly to its oft-stated resolve to reject any potential applications from landowners for the access track to be made permanent, and will insist on Scottish Power restoring the land to its previous condition – insofar as that is possible.



***The pylons climbing up the scarp form a ghastly overlapping jumble of steel and cables***

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***The access track, up to 16m wide, dominates the landscape to an extent that renders the old road virtually invisible; while the pylons demonstrate what is known as the “stacking effect” as they march across the landscape.***

Where all the cars used to park, to get access to Dumyat, there are two over-specified, urban standard, bell-mouth junctions, where the works tracks cross the old road. These too need to be removed and the ground reinstated, as far as possible.

The area near Paradise Pool, where the access track crosses the Wharry Burn, looks to have been irreversibly scarred. For a long time, there was no information about how the track would cross the burn – particularly as, at that point, the intended and agreed route would have had to go over a substantial rocky crag, very close to the Pool. The solution, never revealed to or discussed with interested parties, but just put in place, was to move the route of the track 100m closer to the Sheriffmuir road – and bulldoze a huge swathe, some 70m wide and 25m deep, through the gravel banks flanking the burn.

Paradise Pool itself was reduced of recent years to just a fraction of its previous size, by landowner action. But its remaining amenity is further damaged by being flanked on either side by giant pylons.

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***To cross the Wharry Burn, a wide, deep swathe has been cut through gravel banks***

Crossing the Battlefield, the giant pylons and access track detract greatly from the previous sense of place – of a battlefield situated in a setting of considerable beauty. Now, the line of huge pylons, linked by two sets of thick, shiny cables, create an industrial landscape where one is hard-pressed to summon up a sense of its history.



***It's much harder to gain a sense of the historic importance of the Sheriffmuir Battlefield...***

So, in all, is this once-lovely and much-visited area of the western Ochils, so well-known for so many good reasons, and such a significant tourist and visitor attraction, permanently and irreversibly ruined? The answer has to be “No” – it is damaged, for sure, but not entirely ruined. Dumyat will still be a hill worth climbing, even though the power line will dominate the start and finish of most people’s walk. Cocksburn Reservoir will continue to attract anglers and dog walkers, even though the middle distance views now suffer the visual intrusion of the pylons. Neither will be quite what it was – but an awful lot now hangs on the quality of restoration of all the land disturbed by Scottish Power’s construction works, and on the mitigation that we are told will be put in place, particularly at Friends of the Ochils’ and Stirling Before Pylons’ urging, along the line as it crosses the Ochils to the south of the Wharry Burn, in the Western Ochils Local Landscape Area.

This should include three categories of work. First, the restoration of significant stretches of dry stone walling along both sides of the old drove road, to enhance the visual amenity of road users. Second, the sensitive improvement of the paths up Dumyat and round the reservoir, to improve the footing and greatly reduce the potential for damage by mountain bikes, with the “ribboning” (widening) effect that causes, as new path routes are constantly made by walkers to avoid the old, boggy, damaged paths. And third, the planting of suitable trees in a number of locations, to soften the landscape a little and restore a little bit of biodiversity and colour.



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All of the mitigation work is being overseen, designed and implemented by Ironside Farrar whose recent development of The Helix in Falkirk – the site of The Kelpies – was so highly applauded. We must hope they achieve similar success with the best possible restoration and enhancement of the Dumyat / Cocksburn Reservoir / scarp slope.

To finish this article, my last picture is of a rare view of Castle Law from the Sheriffmuir road – a view that was temporarily free of both the old power line, and the highly visible cables of the new one. It illustrates, I think, just how peaceful and beautiful this area could have been, if only Scottish Governments of various hues had had the common sense, courage, and commitment to stand up to SSE and Scottish Power, and insist on the preservation and enhancement of the natural beauty of Scotland that is so badly needed and so richly deserved. They could quite easily, had they had the vision, have insisted on the Beaully-Denny power line being put under the sea (which would anyway have been the most cost-effective solution), or put underground through the Stirling area. What a terrible, lasting shame that they didn't.



***Castle Law, as seen from the Sheriffmuir road,  
in the temporary absence of either the old or  
the new power line***



## Jerah Forestry

*by David Scott. FotO Secretary*

It is now nearly a year since permission was granted by Forestry Commission Scotland (FCS) for the planting of commercial forestry at Jerah Farm, over an area of 640ha on the east side of Menstrie Glen.

The application faced stiff opposition by Friends of the Ochils and other parties given the profoundly negative impact the development would have on the historic landscape of the Glen, and which was so well documented in the report by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland 'Well Sheltered & Watered: Menstrie Glen, a farming landscape near Stirling'.

Not only was the historic landscape under threat, but the landscape would be irretrievably changed by what would largely be a monoculture of Sitka spruce, especially when viewed from the popular summit of Dumyat. Other parties had particular concerns regarding future access to the area.

What then has happened over the past year? Ploughing of the ground started in the winter of 2014/2015, with the furrows clearly evident against a snowy backdrop. At the same time, the old rig and furrow soon to be destroyed is highlighted by the snow (see photo below).



***Ploughing commences, February 2015. Old rig and furrow can be seen in the left foreground.***

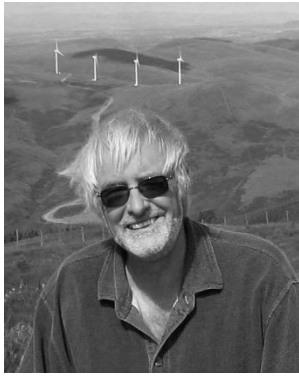
Access roads were quickly installed, including the new through route over to Sherrifmuir. Whilst the full visual impact of the forestry will not be evident for a number of years as the trees grow, the impact of the plough furrows on current access is profound. Ochil Hill Runners organise a popular hill race each year, the Ochil 2000s, which previously took a line through the middle of the now developed area. Efforts by the club to find a way through now that the ground has been ploughed and fenced proved virtually impossible, with the only realistic option being to follow a circuitous route along the main access roads. Paths that were promised by the developers in the pre-application

consultations have not been installed, including the much trumpeted archaeological trails. Perhaps these will come later? At least one access gate in the deer fence has been put in the wrong place, although the developers have promised to move it. In addition, the fencing of the forestry and the exclusion of grazing stock has meant that vegetation e.g. tussock grass is higher and denser than in the past, making access on unplanted ground including rides significantly more difficult. How will such access ways be maintained in the future? Unfortunately this was another issue that was never satisfactorily answered in the pre-application consultations.

FotO remain very concerned that the approval given for Jerah may set a precedent for other areas within the western Ochils to be developed for commercial coniferous forestry, thereby changing for the long-term the nature and enjoyment of the Ochils by visitors. In particular, FotO are concerned about the weakness of the planning system operated by FCS which can allow such significant changes to our landscape without proper scrutiny.



***Planting well under way, August 2015; new access road clearly visible in background***



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## **Glenquey Moss is saved!**

### **Deferred – Refused – Dismissed!**

*by Malcolm Best, FotO Vice-Chair*

The Quarry story summed up in 3 words –  
Deferred – Refused – Dismissed!

In December 2010 Cemex lodged a planning application with Perth & Kinross Council seeking permission to extend their licence to extract sand and gravel at Glenquey Moss, Glendevon until 2035. Permission had first been granted in 1963 and renewed several times. The site had never been worked.

On 27 July 2015 the Scottish Government's Reporter dismissed Cemex's appeal against the decision of the Development Management Committee (DMC) of Perth & Kinross Council. The Reporter's decision ended a 5 year battle to ensure the protection and preservation of a wonderfully scenic and environmentally important site in the centre of the Ochils.

In making her decision to dismiss the appeal, the Reporter referred to; adverse visual impact on the landscape; erosion of tranquil qualities of the landscape to the detriment of

its recreational value; adverse impact on habitats and carbon sinks, in particular the protection of peatland and said the site is not an essential part of the Council's current land bank for minerals.

There were 3 key milestones over the last 5 years – 7 March 2012 when DMC deferred a decision, 19 November 2014 when DMC refused permission and 27 July 2015 when the Reporter dismissed the appeal. The battle would have been lost and Glenquey Moss destroyed forever if we had not won on each of these dates! Throughout the last 5 years the Perth & Kinross Council Planning Officers had recommended approval. Winning was not a certainty! Losing was not an option!

Several factors contributed to the success of this campaign. Key factors were: we engaged with the community and kept them engaged; we embraced expertise whenever it presented itself; we got to know planning legislation and the planning system; we lobbied at all levels of Government; we provided the DMC with carefully assembled arguments that were technically valid; and we never gave up!

Following the dismissal by the Reporter Cemex had a right of appeal to the Court of Session. The deadline for such an appeal was 6 weeks and we are delighted to say that Cemex have not lodged an appeal.

Numerous people were involved in this campaign, too many to name here. There were the individuals that brought considerable

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experience of planning and related legislation at a Local, National and European level and the environment. There were the armies of people that turned up at the Perth & Kinross Council offices on 7 March 2012 and 19 November 2014. There were the people that

took the time to write to their Local Councillors, MPs, MSPs, MEPs and the press. Friends of the Ochils, thanks you all!

Yes we have won but Glenquey Moss is not safe yet. Cemex could decide to hold onto the land and hope that at some time in the future a fresh planning application for the extraction of sand and gravel will be successful. However an ideal solution would be for Cemex to sell, or even donate, the site to a charitable organisation such as Woodland Trust Scotland and we are working to try and achieve such an outcome!



***Glenquey Moss seen beyond the reservoir from the slopes of Whitewisp***



## Windfarm /solar farm report

*by Stuart Dean.*

During the past year we have had to deal with applications both for further windfarms in and around the Ochils, and for individual or small groups of turbines. Perhaps the most significant decision was the refusal by PKC, after an appeal to the Local Review Body (LRB), of the application for 9 turbines at Knowes Farm above Dunning. The LRB agreed unanimously with the officer's decision that not only were there unacceptable landscape and visual impacts, but it would give rise to unacceptable cumulative landscape and visual impacts. The decision helped to reinforce the perception that planners have come to regard cumulative impact as a key issue in the Ochils and that filling the gaps between the existing three windfarms is not acceptable.

However we are not out of the woods yet and further applications can be expected, including that for the North Hill project above Dunning which reached the scoping stage last year. But so far an application has not been submitted; can we hope that the developer has seen the light and following the refusal of the Knowes Farm application, it will be difficult to secure approval for windfarms that 'fill the gaps'?

We can also expect an application to be submitted shortly for an extension to the Green Knowes windfarm. Indications are that it would be for five additional turbines sited within the arc of the existing eighteen. We will take up a position on this development once we have seen the application but at least it doesn't stretch the windfarm eastwards towards Green Law and Sim's Hill as mooted in earlier public exhibitions.

We continue to have concerns about what is happening in the eastern Ochils above Milnathort where we have responded to a number of applications for single turbines. The problem is not so much the impact of just one turbine but the potential for what I call a pin-cushion effect arising from the approval of a number of such turbines. Often the cumulative impact analysis carried out by developers is not fit for purpose and underestimates the true overall impact of a number of turbines.

We were particularly concerned about the comments in the reporter's decision notice when he allowed the appeal for a turbine at Temple Hill. It would appear that he *"requested from the council [PKC] a list of operational, consented and pending applications for turbines within 10 kilometres and any conclusions he should draw."* He then noted that the council informed him *"that they were unable to provide a comprehensive list as the information was*

*not easily available". Understandably he found it surprising that "... the council is unable to provide an up to date base line of turbine proposals."*

When cumulative impact is such a key issue for the landscape we too find it very surprising and somewhat worrying!

Windfarm applications outwith the Ochils continue to give concerns as they can impact both on views of the range from afar and of views of the surrounding countryside from within the hill range and we respond appropriately to any such applications.

Finally, this past year has seen the first application for a large scale solar farm in the Ochils at Shire End, Path of Condie. The panels, spread over three adjacent sites, would have covered an area of 35 hectares, roughly equivalent to 50 football pitches. Each site would have required fencing 2.4 metres high with barbed wire on top and a number of CCTV cameras, each mounted on a 3 metre high pole. We objected on a number of grounds including the impact of the site, fencing etc on the landscape and visual and recreational amenity.

The PKC Development Management Committee considered the application in February and decided to defer a decision. Since then the application has not been re-submitted, possibly caught up in the changes to feed-in-tariffs etc. We will continue to

keep a careful eye on such developments as we are aware that other areas of the Ochils are being considered for solar farms.

The Ochils landscape continues to be under threat but FotO and other interested parties are doing what they can to protect the range. We will continue to monitor applications and respond in line with our primary objective of *"protecting and conserving the landscape, wildlife and natural beauty of the Ochils and their historical and social character."*

## **Special Landscape Areas in the Ochils**

*by Stuart Dean.*

Following a review of Local Landscape Designations within Perth and Kinross, Supplementary Guidance on Landscape was published this year following approval by Scottish Ministers on 17<sup>th</sup> June. FotO participated in the Review Panel set up to ensure the involvement of a range of stakeholders and we were extremely pleased when the whole of the Ochils within PKC was designated a Special Landscape Area (SLA). The purpose of the Supplementary Guidance is to reinforce Local Development Plan Policy ER6 *“Managing Future Landscape Change to Conserve and Enhance the Diversity and Quality of the Area’s Landscapes”* and help bring forward land management initiatives to protect and enhance the Special Landscape Areas.

Meanwhile, Clackmannanshire Council is carrying out a more limited exercise which involves reviewing the boundaries of its two SLAs, one of which is their area of the Ochils.

For the first time, the whole of the Ochils (with the exception of a small area within the Stirling Council area) is now designated as an SLA and that give opportunities to use the designation to further protect and enhance

the Ochils landscape. Early discussions have started with interested parties on achieving a more coordinated approach to the management of the Ochils.

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