

'BLOW THIS OFF TRACK'

Campaigners ask council to object to turbines

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Campaigners against a huge wind farm off many Argyll islands are urging councillors to object to the plan at a crucial meeting.

ScottishPower Renewables (SPR), a subsidiary of energy giant Iberdrola, has applied to the Scottish Government to build MachairWind Offshore Wind Farm, pictured, off the Isles of Islay, Colonsay, Jura, Mull, Iona, Tiree, and Coll.

If consented, the company would install between 91 and 144 turbines up to 335m high – taller than the Eiffel Tower – which would generate around 2GW, enough to power two million homes.

MachairWind Ltd submitted an application to Scottish Ministers on June 11. People could submit representations, in support or objection, until its August deadline.

A campaign group opposing the windfarm, 'Hebridean Horizon', said on its website that "an incredible 4,819 objections" had been submitted through its "ObjectNow platform



alone", alongside its 10,300 signature petition. Islanders are now calling on Argyll & Bute councillors to object to the proposal when the council's Planning, Protective Services and Licensing (PPSL) Committee considers it on September 15.

The call comes after islanders held "constructive meetings" with Holyrood and Westminster representatives.

A group spokesperson said: "We have been able to explain directly why the opposition across the islands and beyond is so broad and why this is not simply a question of people opposing renewable energy or resisting development.

"Now we are asking Argyll & Bute councillors to undertake the same

serious scrutiny. We are asking them to read the evidence, examine the concerns raised by the community councils and others, and make their decision based on the planning and environmental tests that apply."

After meeting residents and Iona, Colonsay and Islay Community Councils, the SNP MP for Argyll, Bute & South Lochaber, Brendan O'Hara, said: "What was striking was the depth of feeling which existed in every group and individual I spoke to.

"Equally striking was the unanimity that existed among them all, that they were in no way opposed to achieving the goal of Net Zero, and that our island communities have a part to play in reaching that target.

"What they were opposed to primarily, was the siting, the size and the scale of the current proposal, and that an area of outstanding natural beauty, which is home to important marine and bird life, has been earmarked to become an industrial zone, producing electricity, which, of course, would then be sold back to these communities at exorbitant prices."

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Wind farm call

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"Last week I met with SPR and relayed the communities' concerns to them.

"In fairness to SPR, they were well aware of the huge concerns that exist.

"What is abundantly clear is that this is not simply the 'usual suspects', those determined to protect their rural retirement idyll. This opposition is very, very different, and therefore any engagement with the communities, from local or national government, or from Scottish Power Renewables, should proceed on that basis."

Kiera Wilson, ScottishPower Renewables' MachairWind project lead, said: "MachairWind is a vital green energy project that will deliver more clean power to the grid, strengthen the UK's energy security and help drive economic growth. We believe it will deliver long and lasting economic and social benefits across the islands.

"There's still a lot of detail to be finalised in consultation with various stakeholders. We'll also be setting up a community benefit fund if the projected project is consented, shaped by local people for local people."

