



£120,000 for wind farm silence

Homeowner claims he was offered 'contribution' to energy bills if he did not object to structures being built

Mark Macaskill

Scottish homeowners were offered £120,000 each if they agreed not to oppose a controversial wind farm close to Prestwick airport, it has been disclosed.

An Ayrshire resident said he and six neighbours stood to receive an annual payment of £3,000 from Community Windpower over the 40-year lifespan of its proposed Sanguhar II project on the border of Dumfries and Galloway and East Ayrshire.

Documents seen by this newspaper show that in return for a "contribution" to annual energy costs, residents would agree "not to make any complaint or raise an action for statutory nuisance or common law nuisance against the company". The residents would have been sworn to secrecy under a non-disclosure clause but none accepted the deal. One resi-

dent, who is expected to give evidence this week at a public inquiry into the Sanguhar proposal, said: "I regarded it as an insult. No money would replace the scenery and views of the area. Community Windpower were attempting to buy our silence."

A lawyer familiar with onshore wind schemes in Scotland said "cash inducements" were becoming more common as industrial-scale turbines crept closer to residential dwellings due to a paucity of suitable land.

Oliver Mundell, the Scottish Conservative MSP for Dumfriesshire, said there was "suspicion" that cash offers were widespread. "It looks as though this particular company is keen to game the planning system, and this could be the tip of the iceberg," he said. "At a time when we are constantly being told about the benefits of green energy, it is hugely disap-

pointing that the actions of this company have put a black mark against the renewables sector."

Campaigners fighting a rapid government-backed expansion of onshore wind claim that developers are riding roughshod over rural communities who often find they lack the money, expertise and legal support that energy firms have at their disposal.

Submissions to a parliamentary petition calling for greater support for affected communities include complaints that lawyers acting for energy firms have bullied objectors and "assassinated" their characters during public inquiries.

Audra MacPhee, whose family home is surrounded by 88 giant wind turbines, said birds of prey and endangered animals enjoyed more protection than rural residents and communities after Scottish

Power Renewables built the 54-turbine Black Law wind farm in North Lanarkshire in 2005 and added 34 turbines in 2017. "In our fight against these developments, we have found that human beings, families [and] communities seem to mean nothing when these developments are being considered," said MacPhee, who is among more than 100 people who have submitted responses to the citizen participation and public petitions committee.

Jerry Mulders, a community council member in New Cumnock, where more than a dozen wind farms in the surrounding area have either received consent or are in planning, told the committee: "Relentless multiple major planning applications, year after year, decade after decade are leading to overload and exhaustion by communities".

The Sanguhar II wind farm will consist

of 44 turbines, most of them 200m tall. In September last year, one resident received a "threatening" letter from a lawyer acting for Community Windpower after he tried to oppose the wind farm.

The lawyer asked him to refrain from writing to advise you that sees no justification or basis for actions. I trust that you will accept the request and no further action is required."

Community Windpower was aware that some residents were submitting to the public that the homeowner who details of a financial offer was of proposals for the Sanguhar II before he purchased his home. "We do not agree that affected in any way," said the woman.

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A home owner in Ayrshire Community Windpower offered residents the p...