P626 Donich Water

Clarification Note – Representations

The effects of the proposed Donich Water hydroelectric scheme on the natural environment are outlined in the Supporting Environmental Information (SEI), submitted to the Planning Authority as part of the planning application. However, following several representations from the local community, more information has been requested on a number of aspects of the scheme and this information is presented below.

Powerhouse Position
The proposed powerhouse position has been selected with the following primary considerations in mind:

- Access
- Trees
- Head
- Fisheries
- Landscape and Visual

Two alternative positions were considered and these are shown on Drawing No. P626 40112 Powerhouse Options.

The lower position was considered in conjunction with an old pipeline route option along the top forestry road and then taking the pipeline down the hill once out of the forestry block. This was rejected due primarily to the potential visual impact of the pipeline on the open hill side and the powerhouse on exposed ground but also due to the steepness of the descent, the length of the tailrace (in other words the distance of the building from the river) and the potential impact on the fisheries interests on the lower reaches of the Donich Water, by depleting a longer stretch of accessible river in comparison to the proposed position.

The upper position was suggested by several residents and was visited with the National Park earlier this year. Although it is theoretically possible to build a powerhouse here, this option is less preferred due to access difficulties (the location is quite tight) and difficulties getting the pipe down to the powerhouse (negotiating the existing Scottish Water infrastructure). This position would also result in a greater loss of trees and a loss of head in comparison to the preferred position.

Therefore, although there are viable alternative positions to the one selected, they are less preferable when considering all of the issues listed above. It is therefore proposed to stick with the original powerhouse position.

Landscape and Visual
It is fairly well accepted that the intake and the pipeline will be well hidden and will have a minimal landscape and visual effect. The powerhouse is more visible due to its proximity to the village and two dwellings in particular.

The powerhouse has been designed to be as recessive as possible and will be wood clad with a tin roof in order to help it blend in with its surroundings. Fortunately due to the tall nature of the trees in the locality, the height of the building will be absorbed to a certain extent or though it is acknowledged that it will be taller than the existing Scottish Water building.

A query was raised about the scaling of the powerhouse in the photoset and it is acknowledged that the building was shown to be smaller than it would be (this was not deliberate). The four corners of the powerhouse have now been marked out on the ground and the photoset has been revised to show the true scale of the powerhouse in situ.

Noise
The issue of noise has been the subject of much debate across a number of schemes in recent months and Hydroplan has carried out a significant amount of work in this respect. Specifically for Donich Water, a night-time background noise survey was carried out at the nearest dwelling to the proposed powerhouse and the results are presented in the attached report. In addition to this a separate clarification note has been prepared, which quantifies the effect of the proposed mitigation measures.

It is concluded through these reports, that the scheme is unlikely to present an issue with noise.

Access & Walkers
The Donich circular walk will be affected during the construction of the scheme; however the disruption will be short-term and temporary. The footpath will only need to be closed whilst the pipe is being laid in this area (approximately 50% of the pipeline); the intake, other 50% of the pipeline and the powerhouse can be constructed without affecting the footpath, due to the existing forest road higher up the glen. Moreover, access to half of the circular walk (on the left bank of the river) and the picnic area at the confluence, will remain unaffected during the construction of the scheme.

Following completion of the build, the footpath will be reinstated and most likely improved to allow access to the pipeline route for inspection. As the pipe will be buried, the scheme will become imperceptible to walkers along this route over time.

The Forestry Commission road from the public road to Inveronich will also be upgraded as part of the scheme for permanent access to the powerhouse. This road is currently in poor condition with many potholes.

Waterfalls
One of the attractions of the circular walk is the waterfalls on the Donich Water, near the confluence with the main tributary. Although the total flow of water over these falls will be reduced, both the high flows and the low flows (arguably when the falls are at their most dramatic and picturesque) will be protected. The scheme must deliver a constant compensation flow in the river before it can abstract, hence the river will never be dry unless this is a naturally occurring phenomenon. When the river is in spate the scheme will only abstract a very small proportion of the total flow, hence the reduction at the waterfalls will not be noticeable.

Landslide Risk
A smaller scheme on the Donich Water, abstracting water lower down the glen was considered by the Lochgoilhead community in the past but was abandoned due to the difficulty of getting the pipe out from the gorge and the risk of landslides from the proposed construction activities.

Hydroplan also considered a scheme lower down on the Donich Water (with an intake at the confluence with the left bank tributary) but this was rejected for the same reasons as the community scheme above.

The intake for the proposed scheme is much further up the glen and is accessed using the existing forest road, hence there will be no construction in the gorge itself. The pipeline route also makes use of the existing footpath and bench created by the existing forestry access,

reducing the risk of landslides. Hence, although it is recognised that there is a landslide risk, the scheme has been designed to minimise the likelihood of this occurring.

It is noted that there has been recent landslide activity in the area and the civil contractor will be made aware of this.

Water Supply

There is a public water supply on the Donich Water, downstream of the intake and the confluence with the left bank tributary. The Scottish Water intake feeds a reservoir and water treatment plant before being piped to the village.

This supply will not be affected by the proposed scheme. During construction, mitigation measures as outlined in the Construction Method Statement will be employed to ensure that dirty water does not enter the supply and Hydroplan will liaise with Scottish Water throughout the build process.

During operation, the supply will be served by the compensation flow, which is more than adequate for the purposes of the supply. An analysis of the effect of the scheme on the water supply is outlined in the attached report.