

Renewables & Tourism: A Sustainable Partnership

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The far-reaching benefits derived from the renewables and tourism industries cannot be overstated; presenting an opportunity which only strengthens when these two exciting sectors work together.

Earlier this year, RES became the latest organisation to support Highland Tourism CIC's Highland Renewables activity, a group that has come together to help pave the way for the Highlands to become one of the world's leading sustainable destinations through protecting the environment and showcasing the region as a prime location in which to live, visit, study, work and invest.

Many studies over the years have dispelled the misconception that onshore wind turbines negatively affect tourism. In fact, the growth of onshore wind farms in a particular area often correlates, coincidentally, with an increase in tourism.

One of the most referenced studies on this subject is BIGGAR Economics' 2021 study titled 'Wind Farms & Tourism Trends in Scotland: Evidence from 44 Wind Farms.' This detailed piece of work found that 'in the majority of cases, tourism-related employment in the vicinity of wind farms had outperformed the trend for Scotland as a whole and for the local authority area in which the wind farm was based.'

For example, in relation to Aberdeenshire, the BIGGAR study

found that between 2009 and 2019 the installed capacity of onshore wind farms in the county increased from 61MW to 495MW. During the same period, employment within Aberdeenshire in tourism-related sectors increased by 28% - exceeding the Scottish average of 20% over that decade.

Earlier studies also support the fact that onshore wind farms do not negatively affect tourism, with VisitScotland's 2012 'Wind Farm Consumer Research' study finding that 83% of Scottish respondents would not be discouraged from visiting or staying in an area by the presence of a wind farm.

Furthermore, onshore wind farms can even become tourist attractions in their own right - offering safe and scenic places for visitors to enjoy a walk or cycle ride in the area they're visiting - or hosting annual running races, for example.

Many wind farms are specifically designed to improve access and recreation opportunities, such as the Hill of Fare Wind Farm proposal near Banchory which was submitted into planning last year by British renewable energy company RES.

Hill of Fare is a 16-turbine wind farm proposal which lies in an area identified by Aberdeenshire Council as having 'potential for wind farm development'. If consented, it would

be capable of reducing the equivalent of 69,000 tonnes of carbon emissions each year within the grid-mix of fossil fuels and delivering a £150 million boost for the local economy.

In partnership with the landowner, Dunecht Estate, RES is proposing to create car-parking facilities on the east side of the hill to improve recreational access to Hill of Fare Wind Farm; and establish a cultural heritage trail with designated pathways and interpretation boards to link key heritage assets in the local area. Land rental income from the Hill of Fare Wind Farm will also open the opportunity for Dunecht Estate to potentially renovate the shooting lodge on site - making it an off-grid shelter for visitors to rest and discover more about the Estate.

RES has been developing, constructing and operating wind farms across Scotland since 1993 with its first wind farm in the Highlands becoming operational in the early 2000s. RES has continuously invested in the region through partnerships with the local supply chain, supporting apprenticeship initiatives and more recently partnering with the University of the Highlands and Islands (UHI) to support their Student Development Fund, demonstrating the British company's long-term commitment to this area.

For more information, please visit www.hilloffare-windfarm.co.uk