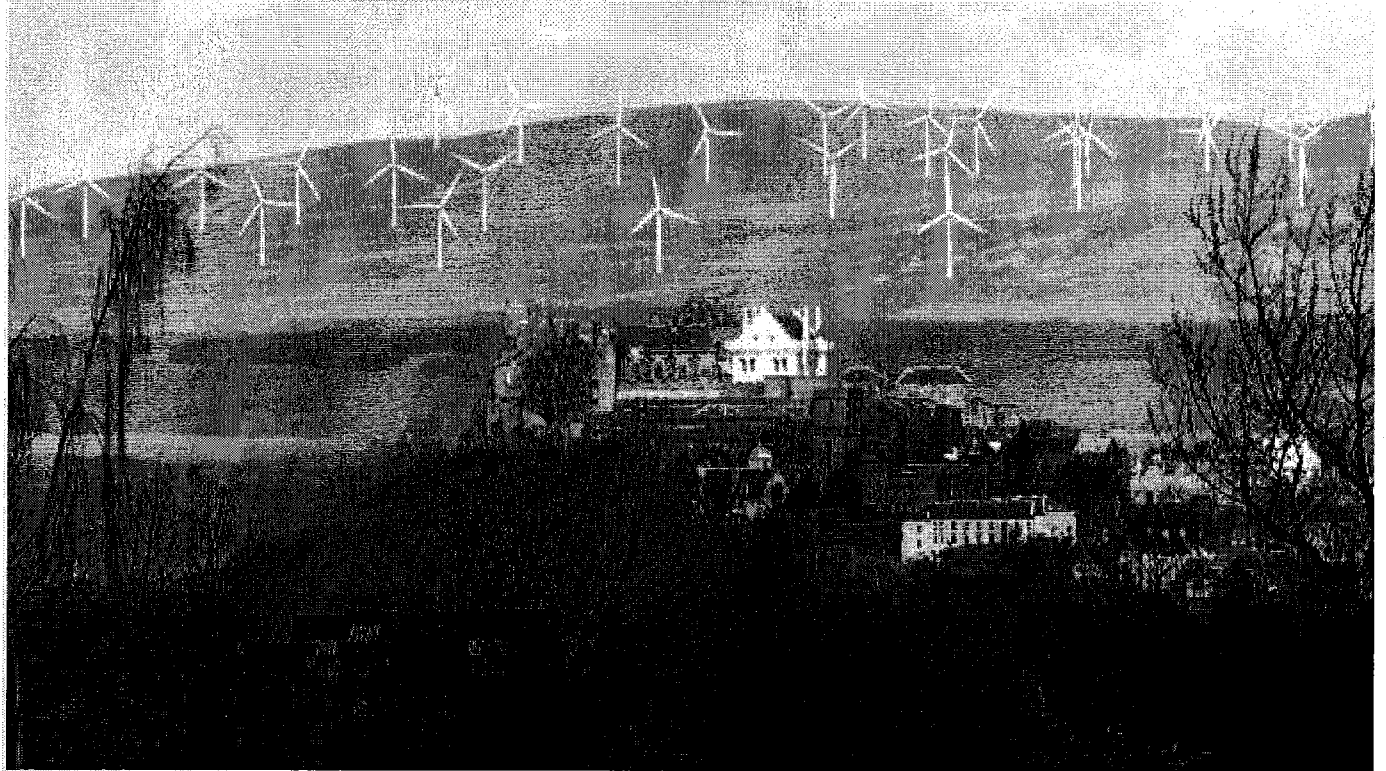


Speaker #3
Mark Prutekand

Tourists shun areas hit by wind turbine 'blight'

Mark Macaskill

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Dramatic change: Braes of Doune wind farm dominates the skyline above Stirling Castle

More than half of tourists to Scotland would rather not visit scenic areas dominated by man-made structures such as wind farms, a YouGov poll suggests.

A survey carried out on behalf of the John Muir Trust (JMT) found that 55% of respondents were "less likely" to venture into areas of the countryside industrialised by giant turbines, electricity pylons and super-quarries.

Just 3% said they were "more likely" to visit such areas, while 26% said such large-scale developments would make "no difference".

The poll has rekindled calls for Scottish ministers to increase protection for wild and scenic areas that, it is argued, will protect rural tourism businesses.

It follows a recent decision to approve the 22-turbine Creag Riabhach wind farm in Altnaharra, the first to win consent within a designated wild land area. Each turbine will stand 125m high.

JMT said the decision had "created uncertainty" over the protection of wild land.

“As schools across England break up for the summer this week and many families flock to Scotland, we must remember that, for many, it’s the ability to enjoy being outdoors in Scotland’s unique, unspoilt natural landscapes that brings them north,” said Andrew Bachell, JMT’s chief executive.

Campaigners fear new wind farm on wild land will be a Trojan horse

“When a clear majority of people say they’d be put off visiting wild and scenic areas by the existence of large-scale wind farms, giant pylons, super-quarries and other developments, policymakers have to pay attention, before it’s too late.”

Figures released by VisitScotland have highlighted the importance of scenic areas to Scotland’s tourism sector.

In 2015, outdoor attractions accounted for 19% of total day visits in Scotland. More than 800,000 trips were made by UK residents to Scotland’s national parks, generating more than £187m.

In June 2014, Scottish Natural Heritage, the agency that oversees nature and landscapes, published a map of 42 wild land areas covering just under 20% of Scotland’s total land mass. These areas are characterised by their ruggedness and absence of major human infrastructure.

The Scottish government promised protection for wild land areas at the time they were officially recognised in 2014, yet energy developers continue to submit applications to construct industrial-scale wind farms in such areas. Although a number have been refused permission, conservationists fear the Creag Riabhach wind farm could be a Trojan horse.

The YouGov poll, conducted in May, involved 1,028 Scottish adults. It found that 10% of respondents were “undecided” about the impact of large-scale developments, while 6% expressed no interest in visiting scenic areas. A YouGov survey in 2013 found that 51% of respondents were “less likely” to visit a scenic area which contains large scale developments.

Tom Campbell, managing director of the Highland touring route North Coast 500, launched in 2015, said it had become a top visitor destination and a showcase for wild land and seascapes.

He added: “We need to be aware of the balance between development to underpin the economy and the fragility of the tourism based on choices people make on Scotland.”