

Sir

Residents in Dumfries and Galloway may be interested to know what it is like to live with the giant Beaully Denny transmission line which marches through our area, the first place on the route of the new line.

We are left with a very bad taste since SSE/SHETL made no concessions to our request for limited undergrounding, but then successfully spun that they had, in fact, provided some undergrounding, in reality of some lengths of lower voltage lines coming in to the Balblair Sub-station – the starting point of the Beaully Denny line. These were not part of the Beaully Denny line and their removal was in no way relevant to the new giant line. They later undergrounded lines within the Cairngorms National Park, also not part of Beaully Denny, but SSE/SHETL continued to imply that these undergroundings represented mitigation.

The Beaully Denny proposal went to Public Inquiry at an enormous cost, which could have been avoided had the developers been in any way prepared to compromise on limited undergrounding in our and other areas. They argued that consumers generally should not have to pay for the additional expense of undergrounding. I understand the regulator accepted this argument - but they were able ultimately to apply to the regulator to raise their prices to consumers to cover their huge Public Inquiry costs! Meanwhile, community councils and individual objectors (we were all classed as 'objectors', even though we did not oppose the principle of the line, or indeed the route) appeared at the Inquiry at their own expense.

At the time there were many wind farm projects going ahead and much publicity about 'community benefit', whereby quite large sums of money were being handed over to communities similar to our own. It was soon made clear that pylon lines did not come with community benefit, because they were public infrastructure. Curiously this means a public utility is provided profitably by a private company, which then uses the line for further profit and obtains payment from other power suppliers using the line. So the position is that electricity producers beyond our community – wind farm owners, of which SSE, the joint line builders, was a big one – are now able to profitably supply power needy consumers far to the south. These two groups gain all the benefits of the line while we got the disbenefits of years of heavy construction and now look forward to a lifetime of ugly Eiffel towers marching across our landscape.

Are they really that bad an eyesore? I would say they are. An SSE spokesman, on the occasion of the erection of the very first tower trumpeted the achievement and claimed that they would soon blend into the landscape and indeed soon cease to be noticed. Well, that is certainly not the case here. To visit my local centre of Beaully I have to regularly enjoy the sight of a column of towers in line ahead marching up a wide ugly track through a once beautiful forested hillside. The heavy cables are always visible but at certain times of the day, winter and summer, they are illuminated and form a brightly shining intrusion in the landscape. A little further on you turn a corner on a narrow glen road and are confronted by a brutal giant positioned almost at the roadside. There is certainly no way they have blended into the landscape – or ever will. I can see one from my back garden, though in the distance. Folk living much nearer the line are worse affected. Health and wildlife dangers were argued by us and that proximity to houses would reduce house values. It's too early to assess these but the worry will always be with those potentially affected. Certainly one owner of a small estate who, before the line arrived, had invested huge sums to buy his land and build a new mansion house has now sold at a very considerable loss.

I stress that we did not oppose the need for or the route of the line but our request for some mitigation was rubbished from the outset. It's all been negative for us I'm afraid, right from the start.

Yours etc

Ronald MacLean