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Coldingham windfarm plan has £1M sweetener

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AN energy company has promised to pay £1m to communities surrounding a proposed windfarm if it gets the go ahead.

PM Renewables has said it will pay £40,000 per year for 25 years if it is allowed to build 22 windmills on Coldingham Moor.

A revised planning application for the 76m high turbines has just been put forward before Scottish Borders Council after a pl

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an to install 102m high turbines was withdrawn.

Although smaller, the number of proposed turbines has been increased from 16 to 22 for the site at Drone Hill, 6km west of Coldingham.

The company also proposes to build a visitor centre giving background information on the farm and promoting local attractions.

Now a public meeting has been called by Coldingham Community Council to gauge reaction to the plan.

The original application was backed by the villagers at a public meeting last year and they are also in favour of the revised application.

However the community council is now seeking the views of other communities

who will be affected by the plan.

Said chairman Ged Hearn: "This will dominate the whole of the moor.

"It will be huge and we want to make sure the public are in favour before it goes ahead."

Objections have been received from the handful of people who live at Drone Hill but the community of Coldingham as a whole is in favour.

"The money is an attraction but people were generally in favour out of principle," said Mr Hearn.

"However we want other communities to have their say so we are going to host a public meeting jointly with other community councils in the area."

The meeting will be held early in the new year at a date still to be arranged.

Explained Mr Hearn: "The proposal will see the beautiful and largely unspoilt area of Coldingham Moor dominated by these 80m high wind turbines for generations to come.

"Some find these dramatic and even magnificent, others find them hideously ugly and, for close neighbours, invasively noisy.

"In another area of debate, there are some opinions that the electrical output from wind is too expensive and that the money could be better spent elsewhere either on other renewables, better insulation in existing homes, flood defences or on nuclear power.

"Opposing that view are other opinions that renewables must be used and that wind will have to form a part of this solution (both on-shore and off-shore).

"We would like to give all local people – broadly the Berwickshire area - whose coastal strip is possibly to be dramatically changed for all our lifetimes – a chance to debate this change."

The public meeting will debate whether wind power is required and if Coldingham Moor is a suitable site.

Guest speakers from the pro and anti factions of wind power will speak before an open debate.

Mr Hearn said: "Local youths are very much encouraged to come to this meeting as the affects of wind farms and climate change will hurt you for longer than the generations that are responsible sadly bequeathing this mess upon you."

Although the revised application has only just gone before Scottish Borders

Council suggestions have already been put forward on how the money could be spent.

"We have had a lot of ideas about doing something environmentally useful such as lagging and double glazing people's homes in the community," said Mr Hearn.

SBC is in the process of changing how money from windfarms is distributed but Mr Hearn said the energy company had promised the money would go to the community council's surrounding the farm.

"It's a lot of money but we still have to think carefully about whether the farm should go ahead," he said.

Just last week, members of Scottish Borders Council's Berwickshire Area Committee were given a report by the director of planning and economic development on windfarms.

The report was mainly concerned with community benefits in relation to the installation of windfarms in the region and it proposed that a governance framework be set up to look at this particular issue.

The number of planning applications for windfarms in the region has dramatically increased over the past few years and concerns have been raised by members of the public and various community councils over issues of noise, landscape impact, a detrimental effect on tourism and a negative effect on wildlife.

There is also a perception that costs and benefits of windfarms are not borne equally. Landowners are set to receive large financial gains with the development of the windfarms whilst communities, who say that they would suffer the environmental impact, feel they stand to receive few of the benefits. It has been decided that communities should be given some financial reward and the idea of a framework is to monitor just how much each area will get and this will be reviewed initially after three years and then at four year intervals. Members noted the report and will discuss it in more detail at further meetings.

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