The background of the cover is a photograph of a rural landscape. In the foreground, there are rolling green fields with a small stream or ditch winding through them. In the middle ground, there are more fields, some with trees, and a few buildings. In the background, there are large, hilly mountains under a cloudy sky. The bottom of the cover has a dark grey gradient overlay.

Save Bennachie Campaign Report

January 2018

Photograph courtesy of Fennel Media

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With grateful thanks to our members and friends of Bennachie who have contributed to this report.

- For Bennachie -

Executive Summary

The Save Bennachie Campaign is a hugely popular, ever-expanding and must-win cause to protect Bennachie from the new A96 dual carriageway. Aberdeenshire's finest, Bennachie is beloved locally, nationally and internationally. Stretching back as far as Pictish times, mankind has loved and needed Bennachie, and it is our responsibility to protect it **-unspoiled-** for future generations to enjoy.

The Summary Report outlined below encapsulates the support we have gained, and why a dual carriageway in the Bennachie area would be wholly inappropriate: by contrast it demonstrates the real and meaningful opportunity Transport Scotland has to add value to the whole area by siting the dual carriageway to the east of Inverurie. Finally, it highlights the need for Transport Scotland's design consultants, Amey Arup Joint Venture, to engage with the Campaign Team in a proper consultation, and calls for Scottish Government Ministers, at the earliest opportunity, to rule out both route options, which would impact Bennachie.

Background:

The A96 Inverness -Aberdeen will be upgraded/re-routed to dual carriageway status by 2030, two of the route options around Inverurie will impact upon Bennachie and its surrounding areas. Amey Arup Joint Venture have been appointed for the full Design Manual for Roads and Bridges (DMRB) Stage 2 Route Options Assessment - part of a 20 year, up to £50 million contract covering the design and delivery of the Eastern Section of the new road. They will present detailed route options within 2 years of the contract award. The Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work will take the final decision on the actual route to be taken forward to DMRB Stage 3 Detailed Design and Assessment.

Bennachie represents the very best of Scotland - iconic Aberdeenshire-beloved locally, nationally and internationally.

Save Bennachie Campaign:

The Save Bennachie Campaign, whilst supporting the need for a dual carriageway is working to protect Bennachie and its surrounding areas from any encroachment by the new A96 dual carriageway.

The Save Bennachie Alliance has massive and ever expanding public support-as over 1000 individuals who have subscribed through our web site to receive our newsletter join forces with local and national organisations including conservation, community, outdoor and business groups. The Alliance membership represents tens of thousands of people. On social media we currently have over 2500 Facebook followers which is ever expanding and our reach is over 24,000 on a monthly basis.

The Save Bennachie Campaign ethos is to run a positive and constructive campaign to engage with and influence decision makers.

We are in a unique situation whereby ALL North-east MSPs MP and House of Lords representatives are united in their support for protecting the Bennachie area from the dual carriageway. Alexander Burnett, Gillian Martin, Bill Bowman, Peter Chapman, Liam Kerr, Lewis MacDonald, Jenny Marra, Tom Mason, Mike Rumbles, Colin Clark, Andrew Bowie and Lord Bruce of Bennachie all supporting the Save Bennachie campaign. The campaign also has considerable support from Local Councillors as they are canvassed.

Bennachie:

Recently awarded Special Landscape Area status, it is completely inappropriate and unacceptable to site a dual carriageway in the Bennachie area:

The public's affinity with 'the most loved hill in Britain'-150,000 visitors annually for recreational purposes-walking, running, cycling, riding. Regular events on and around Bennachie include hill and cycle races, Great Inverurie Bike Ride and Suie Classic, triathlon, duathlon, and orienteering events, torchlight runs, rambling clubs, mountain biking, educational walks, school outings, sponsored walks, Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme, John Muir Awards, equestrian endurance events, Ministry of Defence training, Bailies of Bennachie volunteer work parties, geo-archaeology events, Google data collecting.

Bennachie is an unspoiled wilderness area-free for the public to use; the wildlife, ecology and geology of Bennachie-it is home to several rare and protected species; it's unique folklore, history and archaeology, make Bennachie Aberdeenshires finest.

An unspoiled Bennachie is a valuable and massively used resource at a time when Scottish Government policy is to encourage the public to be active and outdoors. Consequent savings to the NHS through reduced incidence of chronic conditions. (Scottish Health Survey, 2014, 'Let's Get Scotland Walking', 2020 Challenge for Scotland's Biodiversity, 2013).

The role of outdoor education is firmly established in the Curriculum for Excellence-last year alone around 1000 children from 29 schools visited Bennachie. Events also promoted cultural and natural history, biodiversity, health and wellbeing and Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

The economic value of an unspoiled Bennachie as a tourist resource - it is increasingly important to protect and preserve Bennachie as the tourist industry becomes more important with the decline of the oil and gas sector.

Inverurie Business Association regards Bennachie as extremely important to local businesses.

Unacceptable Route Options near Bennachie:

Apart from the environmental, social, educational, community and health benefits of Bennachie, there are other reasons for opposing these routes:

- The safety, costly maintenance and winter resilience issues of such a high-level route, at a time when the Scottish Government's target is to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by 66% by 2032. The Scottish Government's policy is to promote the use of ultra-low emission vehicles (ULEVs). To create such a route over higher ground would increase emissions during the build process and would result in additional energy requirements for vehicles using it, both directly and through associated energy generation.
- Siting this new arterial route at such a distance from centres of population and industry would have a negative impact upon economic growth and offer no opportunity of promoting an integrated transport network and the use of public transport.
- Route C, over 15 miles in length, which would impact Bennachie most severely, would have to be built in its entirety, accounting for a huge portion of funds expended in a single phase.

Siting the new dual carriageway to the east of Inverurie:

As per calls from Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services Committee, Transport Scotland has a rare opportunity through joined up thinking with Aberdeenshire Council to implement the most effective and economically sound solutions for the A96 and A947 projects.

Each working day, 68% of traffic approaching Inverurie on the A96 from the south turns off at the two roundabouts entering Inverurie, causing major traffic congestion and safety concerns in the town. Any route to the west of Inverurie is a missed opportunity to alleviate this major problem.

Next Steps:

Given our ever-expanding level of public and political support, coupled with our ethos of working positively and constructively, the Save Bennachie Campaign calls upon the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to instruct Transport Scotland and Amey Arup Joint Venture design consultants to engage meaningfully and involve the Save Bennachie Alliance fully in the process to arrive at a preferred route choice which will both protect Bennachie and add real value to the Inverurie area.

We call upon the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to take cognisance of the myriad of reasons outlined in this report to ensure that Route Options C and B (South) are ruled out at the earliest opportunity in DMRB Stage 2. In particular, to recognise and act upon the overwhelming level of public and political opinion to protect the Bennachie area from the new, re-routed A96 dual carriageway.

THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WILL BE CRITICAL FOR THE FUTURE OF BENNACHIE AS WE HAVE ALL COME TO KNOW IT. DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THAT THIS IS A VERY REAL THREAT TO OUR HILL. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT, FOR ALL WHO VALUE THIS SPECIAL PLACE AND WHO WANT TO PRESERVE IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, TO SUPPORT THIS CAMPAIGN, LOBBY THE KEY INFLUENCERS, TAKE PART IN THE CONSULTATION EVENTS, AND SAY A HUGE NO TO THIS PROPOSAL WHICH IS ILL THOUGHT THROUGH.

1 Background and Introduction

1.1 In line with Scottish Government policy of dualling routes between Scotland's cities, Transport Scotland is currently progressing the programme to upgrade/re-route the A96 to dual carriageway standard by 2030.

A number of route options near Inverurie are being considered, two of which will impact upon Bennachie and its surrounding areas.

1.2 "Is this the most loved hill in Britain?", Royal Geographical Society, 2013.¹

A route close to Bennachie would have a huge detrimental impact on the visual landscape.

An unspoiled wilderness area, rich in biodiversity and history, Bennachie is a unique range of hills near Inverurie. Aberdeenshire's most iconic landmark, Bennachie has inspired generations of people to fall in love with it. Over 150,000 visitors come to Bennachie annually, whether to walk, run, cycle, ride or otherwise enjoy the environs. There are over 40 miles of waymarked trails on the hill and surrounding area, some of them offering disabled access.²

1.3 Formed in November 2015, the Save Bennachie Alliance is working to protect and defend Bennachie and its surrounding areas from any encroachment by the new A96 dual carriageway.

Whilst respecting the decision to dual the A96, the Save Bennachie Alliance aims to demonstrate, through positive means, the factors which make it inappropriate to site it in the Bennachie area, whilst highlighting the very considerable opportunities which would be created by siting it to the north and east of Inverurie.

The Save Bennachie Alliance is a rapidly expanding group, including conservation groups, community associations, outdoor organisations, both local and national, the local business community, as well as hundreds of individuals, who are all joining forces to protect their beloved hill. Alliance member groups currently comprise the Bailies of Bennachie, Oyne Community Association and Kemnay, Kintore, Cluny, Midmar and Monymusk Community Councils, Mountaineering Scotland, North East Mountain Trust, Cosmic Hillbashers, Cairngorm Club, Ramblers Scotland, the Woodland Trust, Aberdeenshire Environmental Forum and the Inverurie Business Association, with others discussing joining. The groundswell of public opinion backing the campaign has been overwhelming.

Details of the Save Bennachie Alliance and Campaign can be found at www.savebennachie.com and our Facebook page, Save Bennachie, and our Twitter account, @SaveBennachie. With support growing on a daily basis, hundreds of people and groups have signed up. e.g. Facebook followers are now at over 2,500 and our reach is over 25,000 on a monthly basis, and over 1000 people have subscribed through our web site for our regular Save Bennachie newsletter.

¹ Royal Geographical Society, Discovering Britain Walks (2013). Walk entitled, "Is This the Most Loved Hill in Britain?"

² Forestry Commission Scotland

1.4 The Save Bennachie Campaign is an organisation which works with all political parties and groups. Following discussions with all North East MSPs including Alexander Burnett, Gillian Martin, Bill Bowman, Peter Chapman, Liam Kerr, Lewis MacDonald, Jenny Marra, Mike Rumbles, Tom Mason, Colin Clark MP, Andrew Bowie MP as well as Lord Bruce of Bennachie, we are delighted to say, “These politicians all agree it would be both completely inappropriate and unacceptable to site the new dual carriageway anywhere likely to impact adversely on the integrity of Bennachie and its surrounding area.”

There has already been considerable detailed media coverage of the Campaign with STV News, BBC Radio Scotland, BBC Reporting Scotland, Aberdeen Press and Journal, Evening Express and Inverurie Advertiser all approaching us and running articles.

2 Route Options

2.1 Please refer to the attached map to view the potential routes, discussed below.

Having completed DMRB Stage 1 of their assessment and public consultation, Transport Scotland, through their design consultants Amey Arup Joint Venture is now engaged in a DMRB full Stage 2 Route Options Assessment. The following options will be taken forward, with the preferred route to be chosen at the end of Stage 2 in 2019:

- 1 Route B- Inverurie Bypass (Inner)
- 2 Route B Inverurie Bypass (North)
- 3 Route B Inverurie Bypass (South)
- 4 Route C Huntly-Blackburn
- 5 Route D Inveramsay -Glens of Foundland in combination with Option 1 or 2

Routes B, Inverurie South, potentially Route B Inverurie Inner, and particularly Route C would have a devastating impact upon the Bennachie Massif.

Option Q has been removed from the list of route options as it fails to meet the following criteria:

1. To provide opportunities to grow the regional economies along the A96 corridor
2. To facilitate active travel in the corridor
3. To facilitate integration with public transport networks

2.2 The Save Bennachie Alliance believe that the following factors make it inappropriate to site the A96 dual carriageway in the Bennachie area:

- The local, national and international iconic status of Bennachie as an unspoiled wilderness area
- The wildlife, ecology and geology of Bennachie, which has led to Aberdeenshire Council receiving ratification from Scottish Government Ministers to establish it as a Special Landscape Area
- Bennachie's unique folklore, history and archaeology
- The public's affinity with Bennachie, including recreational use by over 150,000 visitors annually, through leisure pursuits including walking, running, cycling and horse riding
- The physical and mental health benefits provided by the Bennachie area
- The educational benefits of Bennachie, across the generations
- The economic value of an unspoiled Bennachie as a tourist destination
- The safety of journeys and costly maintenance issues and winter resilience of such a high-level route
- The additional climate change impact of increasing emissions by creating and using a route over higher ground
- The detrimental impact upon sustainable economic growth of siting the A96 dual carriageway at such a distance from centres of population and industry
- The lack of integration between different forms of transport, including the bus and rail networks.

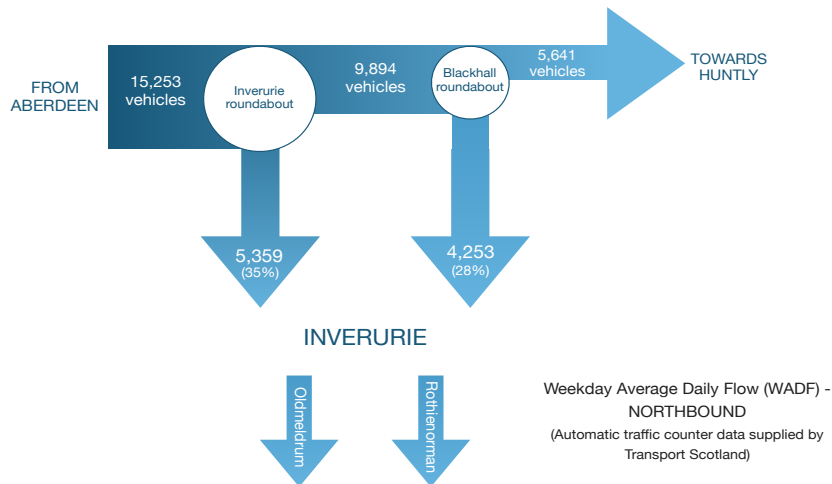
2.3 Whilst DMRB Stage 1 report has taken into account the traffic densities on the A96 itself, it has not factored in the traffic flows off the A96.

In 2016, an average of 15,253 vehicles approached Inverurie on the A96 from the south each working day. Of these, 5359 (35%) left at the roundabout leading into Port Elphinstone/Inverurie, and a further 4,253 (28%) left at the next exit (Blackhall Road). A similar pattern exists for vehicles joining at Inverurie travelling towards Aberdeen each day.³

In addition, a significant proportion of the traffic using the A96 passes through the centre of Inverurie to/from the Oldmeldrum and Rothienorman routes to the north, over 8,000 vehicle movements each way every working day, causing major traffic congestion and safety concerns in the town.⁴

³ Automated traffic counter data, Transport Scotland

⁴ Permanent traffic counter data, Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services



Figures indicate that only 1% of traffic makes the entire journey between Aberdeen and Inverness. The highest volumes of traffic are between Aberdeen and Inverurie at the Eastern end, and entering Inverness on the Western end.⁵

This means that Routes B Inner and South, as well as Route C would not alleviate the major problems experienced by traffic flowing north off the A96 to and beyond Inverurie.

2.4 Route C, which could be in excess of 15 miles, would have to be constructed in its entirety to link with Route B. This would divert a considerable portion of funds to an offline route which would neither resolve the chronic traffic problems in and around Inverurie, nor facilitate effective phased construction.

2.5 Aberdeenshire Council are currently considering options from AECOM to improve safety on the notorious A947 Aberdeen-Banff road. One of their options is to dual carriageway the route at a cost of £500 million. (Press and Journal, 17.02.2016)

Integrating Transport Scotland's programme for the A96 along with AECOM's report to Aberdeenshire Council on the A947 would offer a long term, cost effective solution for the traffic problems for Inverurie and the wider Garioch area and beyond. The alternative would be to generate a massive burden on the public purse.

2.6 The Save Bennachie Alliance has been contacting Local Councillors. There is overwhelming support for our aims, both in terms of protecting Bennachie, and for 'joined up thinking' between Aberdeenshire Council and Transport Scotland to get the most effective and economically sound solutions for the A96 and A947 projects.

⁵ Transport Scotland

2.7 Councillors at an Aberdeenshire Council Infrastructure Services Committee meeting called for Transport Scotland to consider how the dualling of the A96 could help plans to improve the A947 Aberdeen-Banff road. Councillors said a route to the east of Inverurie could alleviate concerns about the effects on the landscape around Bennachie, while improving safety and journey times on the A947. (Press and Journal 22.03.2016)

2.8 Scotland's National Transport Strategy introduced 3 key strategic outcomes:

- Improved journey times and connections between our major cities and towns and our global markets, to tackle congestion and the lack of integration and connections in transport
- Reduced emissions to tackle climate change, air quality, and health improvements
- Improved quality, accessibility and affordability of transport, to give a choice of public transport, better quality services, and value for money, or alternatives to car use.

2.9 Siting the A96 to the North and East of Inverurie would readily meet each of these strategic outcomes.

However, Routes B Inner and South and Route C would cause:

- A detrimental impact upon sustainable economic growth by siting the dual carriageway so far away from centres of population and industry
- The lack of integration between different forms of transport including the bus and rail networks
- A high-level route would impact upon climate change and air quality through increased emissions both directly and through associated energy generation. This at a time when the Scottish Government has outlined a new target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 66% by 2032⁶. The Scottish Governments policy is to promote the use of ULEVs with a target to phase out the need for petrol and diesel cars and vans by 2032, while promoting low carbon energy infrastructure solutions.⁷
- A serious reduction upon Bennachie's appeal as a tourist destination contributing to the economy of the area
- A disastrous impact upon the wildlife, ecology and geology of the Bennachie area, which has led to Bennachie being adopted as a Special Landscape Area
- A public outcry at permanently ruining their much loved hills
- A significant reduction in the recreational use of Bennachie, with negative impact upon physical and mental health and educational outcomes.

⁶ Scottish Government Climate Change Plan 19-01-2017

⁷ A Nation With Ambition: The Governments Programme for Scotland 2017-18

3 Government Policy and the Health, Educational and Recreational Uses of Bennachie

3.1 Policy

The Scottish Health Survey 2014 states,

- The health benefits of a physically active lifestyle are well recognised. Being active on a regular basis puts a person at reduced incidence of chronic conditions of particular concern in Scotland. The benefits of being regularly active extend beyond physical health, with evidence that certain forms of increased activity may also improve mental wellbeing, another key priority in Scotland.
- Exercise is now recommended by the Royal College of Psychiatrists as a treatment for depression in adults, and the Scottish Intercollegiate Guidelines Network (SIGN) national clinical guidelines for non-pharmaceutical management of depression states that structured exercise programmes may be an option for depressed people.
- Among older people, physical activity is associated with better health and cognitive function and can reduce the risk of falls in those with mobility problems.
- 2003, Scottish Government publishes, “Let’s Make Scotland More Active”
- 2014, publication of National Physical Activity Implementation Plan
- 2014, “Let’s Get Scotland Walking” is key element in the Implementation Plan

The following sections summarise key aspects of, and quote directly from, “Let’s Get Scotland Walking”, relevant to public use of Bennachie.

3.2 Aims

- To create a culture of walking
- Better walking environments throughout Scotland: By developing and managing attractive, well designed places and signed routes close to where people live and work, we will encourage people to use them on a regular basis for health, recreation, sport and active travel. Our modern access rights and range of paths, parks and reserve assets also need to be effectively promoted if more people are to be encouraged to use them on visits to enjoy the outdoors.

3.3 Benefits

- Increased walking opportunities contribute to each of the five objectives in the Scottish Government’s National Performance Framework; Wealthier and Fairer, Healthier, Safer and Stronger, Smarter and Greener, helping to achieve at least ten of the Scottish Government’s fifteen National Outcomes and a large number of the National Indicators
- Walking as a regular activity, improvement of the walking environment and the use of walking for mental and physical health improvement, transport and community empowerment can help to realise the four pillars of public sector reform; partnership, person-centred, prevention, performance-set out in the Christie Commission Report, Commission on the Future Delivery of Public Services (2011)

- Walking can prevent illnesses, improve and save lives. Physical activity is both a prevention and a treatment e.g. it reduces the relative risk of disease progression/mortality for coronary heart disease, breast, prostate, colorectal and lung cancers, and reduces the recurrence for breast and colorectal cancers. Evidence shows that physical activity can reduce the risk of depression, dementia and Alzheimer's. It also shows that walking can enhance psychological wellbeing, by improving self-perception and self-esteem, mood and sleep quality, and by reducing levels of anxiety and fatigue. Many of these benefits are enhanced by doing exercise outdoors in the natural environment

3.4 Cost Issues

- Physical inactivity contributes to over 2,500 premature deaths in Scotland each year (that is around 7 a day) and costs the NHS in Scotland £94.1 million annually
- There are numerous economic benefits associated with walking including reduced costs to the NHS through reduced chronic ill health, and improved productivity due to reduced sickness absence and reduced mortality and morbidity among people who are currently irregularly active
- The economic benefits associated with increased physical activity levels far outweigh any initial costs. Cost Benefit Ratios for walking developments show significant value for money. Social Return on Investment (SROI) evidence shows a return of approximately £8 for every £1 invested in health walk and path developments

3.5 Recreation

- Walking is an important sport and recreation activity. Hillwalking, rambling and long distance walking are hugely popular activities in Scotland with a wide range of opportunities to participate. It is also integral to sporting activities in themselves, such as a round of golf
- Walking is three times more popular (57%) as a recreational activity among Scottish adults, than the next most popular activity, swimming (18%) and football (7%)
- (Walking) is also the most popular activity for UK visitors to Scotland, with 88% enjoying long walks/hikes and 69% short walks/strolls, and is an activity that is more accessible to all ages and social groups, religions and cultures

3.6 Education

- Evidence shows that walking can improve performance, concentration and learning
- Learning can take place in the outdoor environment and community
- Regular visits for outdoor learning to local woodlands, beaches or other green spaces incorporating opportunities for walking help young children learn healthy and active habits and make connections across all curriculum areas

3.7 Curriculum for Excellence

One of the outcomes of “2020 Challenge for Scotland’s Biodiversity” (2013) is improved health and quality of life for the people of Scotland, through investment in the green space, nature and landscapes...provide opportunities for everyone to experience and enjoy nature regularly....the role of outdoor learning is firmly established in the new Curriculum for Excellence.” A key message from this strategy is that “Scotland’s nature and landscape are key assets for public health....there is a strong case for investing more in nature close to where people live, work, or go to school as this can improve public health and reduce pressure on health budgets in the long term”.

3.8 How Bennachie puts all these Strategies into Action

Bennachie has been providing the ideal environment for all of these strategies to be put into action, attracting over 150,000 people annually; 36% of visitors access Bennachie from the Rowantree Car Park; 37% from the Bennachie Centre; 10% from Donview and 17% from Back o’ Bennachie.⁸

A snapshot of the activities which take place on Bennachie show that there are a range of events which help physical and mental health, social inclusion, education, social skills, appreciation of wildlife. These are recorded events, with very many unrecorded visits.

These are just some of the events taking place regularly on and around Bennachie:

- Bennachie Hill Race, (approx. 140 runners), as well as other hill races
- Bennachie Cycle Race
- Great Inverurie Bike Ride and Suie Classic (approx. 500 riders)
- Inverurie Triathlon and Duathlons (averaging 120 athletes)
- Orienteering events
- Torchlight runs
- Rambling Clubs
- Mountain biking
- Programme of educational walks
- School outings e.g. various sponsored walks
- Duke of Edinburgh Awards Scheme (2016,116 young people involved in overnight expeditions;19 teams supervised by 19+adults
- Sir Arthur Grant Centre- (in 2016,78 young people plus 21 adults on residential weekends)⁹
- Equestrian endurance events.

⁸ Forestry Commission Scotland

⁹All above figs-Aberdeenshire Council

3.9 The Statistics-School Parties, Groups, Events on Bennachie

The Bailies of Bennachie, along with Aberdeenshire Council Ranger Service and Forestry Commission Scotland Rangers all run regular events on the hill from guided walks, wildlife identification to teddy bear picnics, all encouraging an interest in the hill. However numerous additional events are independently organised.

For example, just some of the many FCS requests for permission to use 'the hill' in 2016 included:

Educational visits from primary and secondary schools to visit the forest (without a Ranger); Forest Schools; Active Schools; OWLS (www.owls-learn.co.uk) run regular outdoor learning sessions; Companies and individuals have BBQ'S at the Back 'o Bennachie; Ministry of Defence training events; Bailies monthly volunteer working parties; University of Aberdeen geo-archaeology events; Sponsored walks including Children First, Cornfields; Google data collecting.¹⁰

Looking at the work of the Garioch Ranger Service, in the year November 2015-October 2016:

Schools

Some 988 children from 29 schools visited Bennachie, including 15 playgroup/nursery children aged 1-4, 899 primary 1-7 children aged 4-12, and 74 secondary school pupils aged 12-17. 1 John Muir Award was delivered. Sessions with schools included promoting biodiversity, environmental education, natural and cultural history and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC).

Groups

25 group sessions involving 479 people were delivered at the Bennachie Visitor Centre by the Garioch Ranger Service. 234 of them were adults, and 245 were children aged up to 18. Sessions included walks promoting biodiversity, natural and cultural history, health and wellbeing, environmental education, Scottish Outdoor Access Code(SOAC) and practical conservation work. 1 John Muir award was delivered to an adult mental health group.

Events

352 people attended 17 public events held at Bennachie, of whom 210 were adults and 142 were children up to 18 years old, with the events promoting natural and cultural history, biodiversity, health and wellbeing and SOAC. School holiday events promoted biodiversity, natural and cultural history and SOAC.¹¹

¹⁰ Forestry Commission Scotland

¹¹ Aberdeenshire Council

4 Economic Value of Bennachie

From the above it is clear that an **unspoiled** Bennachie represents an extremely valuable resource to Aberdeenshire. A key tourist destination in Aberdeenshire, Bennachie is one of very few free to enter tourist attractions close to Aberdeen. Whilst tourism is presently an important industry, it has been highlighted as having even greater significance for the North East as the oil and gas industry declines.

As previously highlighted, 88% of UK visitors to Scotland enjoy long walks and 69% short walks/strolls.

According to the Inverurie Business Association, “Bennachie is truly the ‘heart’ of the Garioch. As Inverurie’s main focal point, Bennachie attracts visitors from near and far to spend time in the local area. This brings many economic benefits, not only to our member businesses, particularly those in hospitality and retail, but to the local economy in general.”

5 Archaeological Significance of Bennachie (Limited to Eastern Section)

5.1 Enough evidence already exists to claim the North-East corner of Bennachie from Mither Tap to beyond the River Urie as constituting a culturally unified landscape with a demonstrable folk narrative stretching back at least as far as the Pictish period.

5.2 Just a few examples include the Pictish Citadel on Mither Tap, the ancient causeway, the 7th century Maiden Castle, the similarly aged Maiden Stone, the round houses, as well as the recently discovered long house, and the large Roman Fort at Logie Durno.

5.3 Aerial surveys and Lidar results along the eastern edge of Bennachie indicate a wealth of unexplored archaeology, leading to fresh discoveries being made in recent months.

5.4 Route C and B South and the infrastructure involved in construction would likely influence Bennachie’s archaeology, and hence its history.

5.5 Bennachie and Mither Tap with its citadel, be it a fort or high place nearer the gods has been a place of wonder for thousands of years, not just for the Tor itself, but from the views from it. From prehistoric cup marks to present times, signs have been left demonstrating that mankind needs and loves (an unspoiled) Bennachie.¹²

¹² Bennachie Landscapes Project

6 Conclusion

There is a rapidly growing groundswell of public opinion, locally, nationally and internationally strongly opposed to any infringement of these iconic hills.

- 6.1 Apart from the compelling arguments centring on the ecology, archaeology, history, folklore, recreational, educational, health and tourist importance of Bennachie, as well as the safety, maintenance costs and emissions associated with a high-level route, by focusing on a route to the east and north of Inverurie, there is a massive opportunity to create a lasting legacy for the infrastructure of the Garioch area.
- 6.2 Transport Scotland has a rare opportunity, through joined up thinking, of creating an integrated solution to build a dual carriageway which would service both local, and trans-city traffic, thereby readily achieving both national and local strategic outcomes, whilst providing a springboard for economic development for future generations.
- 6.3 Given our ever-expanding level of public and political support, coupled with our ethos of working positively and constructively, the Save Bennachie Campaign calls upon the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to instruct Transport Scotland and Amey Arup Joint Venture, their design consultants to engage meaningfully and involve the Save Bennachie Alliance fully in the process to arrive at a preferred route choice which will both protect Bennachie and add real value to the Inverurie area.
- 6.4 We therefore appeal to the Cabinet Secretary for Economy, Jobs and Fair Work to take cognisance of the myriad of reasons outlined above and ensure that Options C and B (South) are ruled out at the earliest opportunity in DMRB Stage 2. In particular, the overwhelming level of public and political opinion is resoundingly to protect the Bennachie area from the new, re-routed A96.

THE NEXT FEW MONTHS WILL BE CRITICAL FOR THE FUTURE OF BENNACHIE AS WE HAVE ALL COME TO KNOW IT. DO NOT UNDERESTIMATE THAT THIS IS A VERY REAL THREAT TO OUR HILL. THAT IS WHY IT IS SO IMPORTANT, FOR ALL WHO VALUE THIS SPECIAL PLACE AND WHO WANT TO PRESERVE IT FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS, TO SUPPORT THIS CAMPAIGN, LOBBY THE KEY INFLUENCERS, TAKE PART IN THE CONSULTATION EVENTS, AND SAY A HUGE NO TO THIS PROPOSAL WHICH IS ILL THOUGHT THROUGH.

