



The Alternative View: Whitelee Windfarm

Eaglesham moor sits within the county of Renfrewshire, a little over 9.3 miles south of Glasgow and approximately a 20-minute drive from the center of the city. Rich in peat, it is a prehistoric landscape offering walks and sites of geological and historical interest for all who wished to visit nature in all its natural beauty, unchanged by time. Until recently. Eaglesham moor is also, now, the home of Whitelee wind farm. The biggest windfarm in the UK. It opened in 2009.

Whitelee wind farm is the inspiration for Bute's energy's future vision for Wales.

Developed and operated by Scottish Power Renewables (part of the Spanish company Iberdrola) it opened in 2009, originally covered 22 square miles and contained 140 turbines.

In order to deliver phase 1:

- A network of **90km of road** was laid
- **633 hectares** of woodland was cleared.
- **Six quarries were created** to supply the **1.5 million m³ of rock** used to create the road and turbine bases
- Turbine foundations were dug into the peat. Up to **8m deep** (depending on how thick the peat layer was) and up to **16.75m diameter**. A **3.1m deep concrete base** sits on top of granulated fill to the bottom of the pit.
- **85 dumper trucks** weighing **30 tonnes** were used to transport the rock
- **A 500-tonne crane** and **two mobile 120-tonne cranes** were used to install the turbines.
- **130 tonne low loaders** were used to transport the blades (**412 blades**, each **45 meters long**)
- The development took approximately **two years**.

Phases 2 and 3 (2012 and 2013) added a further **36 then 39 additional wind turbines**.



In 2022 more facilities were added as the Whitelee **Battery Energy Storage System (BESS)** became operational to support the windfarm. At **half the size of a football pitch** it is the largest in the UK.



Whitelee now covers over 30 square miles and houses **215 turbines**. **146** of these are **110m tall** (to blade tip), **69** are **140m tall**. They are **smaller than those proposed in Wales**. It supplies 539MW of energy enough to power **350,000 homes**, more than enough to power **nearby Glasgow and the surrounding area**.

There are further proposals to add a **10MW facility to generate hydrogen for vehicle propulsion** and a **35MW solar array** at the site of the BESS.

This is Bute's inspiration for the future of Wales .. Oh, and **149 miles of overground pylons** in the Towy and Teifi valleys alone, **to carry the power** produced to a new substation at Carmarthen and then on, **across the Severn to where it is actually needed**.



Whitelee safety record

Accidents at windfarms are, unfortunately, not rare. 1,500 were recorded by Renewable UK between 2006 and 2011.

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/8948363/1500-accidents-and-incidents-on-UK-wind-farms.html>

There have been at least three recorded major incidents/accidents at Whitelee between 2010 and 2017:

- March 2010 – a turbine blade snapped off
<https://www.dailyrecord.co.uk/news/science-technology/wind-farm-shut-over-safety-1053950>
- March 2017 – a turbine lost its nose cone
- March 2017 – a worker died falling from a turbine while it was undergoing maintenance

Tourism and Community Benefits

Whitelee is promoted as a tourist attraction and major recreational area, and provides community benefits payments. There have been over 750,000 total visits to the visitor center since opening, including 46,000 school pupils who have attended an educational program at the Whitelee visitors center. Some 200,000 people a year visit for recreational activities.

By 2019 Whitelee had delivered a total of **£9m in community benefit** payments.

Sounds impressive? It's worth looking deeper than just these published numbers perhaps:

- By 2019 Whitelee had delivered £512m in earnings in Scotland and **£670m of earnings in the UK**.
- In one-year alone (2023) Whitelee received **over £6m in constraint payments** (these are paid for 'switching off the turbines and supplying no electricity in times of high wind and low demand, or when the grid does not have enough capacity). **The total constraint payments to Scottish wind farms in 2023 was almost £275m.**
- The visitor center opened in 2009 (15 years ago) and has had 750,000 total visits. On average that works out at 50,000 visits per year not 200,000 visits per year claimed?
- Whitelee is 20 minutes' drive from Glasgow city center. There are 500,000 people living within a 30k radius. So, it is worth asking;
 - How many go for recreational activities simply because it is close and out of the city?
 - Do 500,000 people live within a 30k radius of any windfarm in Wales?

- How many people have actually visited and how many are tourists who came to see the windfarm?
- How many people visited the area before the windfarm and how many of those still do now?

Some might say the moorland was always a haven for wildlife, an outdoor education centre, and recreational area for all who visited it. Is a visit to virgin moorland really improved by the site and sound of 215 wind turbines? How many have left saying 'Such a shame, it must have been beautiful here once' and next year take a flight to some unspoilt destination?

As time passes many will begin to see the Windfarm as a 'natural' green space. How many will remember, or even know, what it was like before the turbines?

When presented with only one option, most people will take that option. We must do all we can to keep our options open, **once lost this land will not be given back, and our children will never know it as we do.**

