

Agenda Item	4
Report No	<b>BIER/28/25</b>

# The Highland Council

**Committee:** Black Isle and Easter Ross

**Date:** 10 November 2025

**Report Title:** Utility Scale Solar PV Arrays – Tain North & South

**Report By:** Assistant Chief Executive - Place

## 1 Purpose/Executive Summary

- 1.1 At the [Economy & Infrastructure Committee in August 2025](#), Members approved the 'Tranche 1' projects from the Investment & Innovation Workstream of the Delivery Plan. These Tranche 1 projects are both Utility Scale Solar PV arrays at Tain and both sites are proposed to occupy Tain Common Good Investment lands.
- 1.2 Tain North is part of a much wider Common Good landholding, all of which is currently let on a 364-day grazing let basis. The proposal on this parcel of ground is the erection of a relatively small (circa. 120kWp) ground mounted solar PV array, with the possibility of a small BESS to generate renewable electricity to feed, by direct-wire the adjacent Scottish Water Wastewater Pumping Station.
- 1.3 The land at Tain South has previously been offered as a 364-day grazing let but has found no interested parties in recent years. With the proposal on this site to be again a ground mounted solar PV array, with the possibility of a small BESS to generate renewable electricity to feed, by direct-wire the adjacent Glenmorangie Distillery.
- 1.4 As both sites are part of the Tain Common Good Register and are held as 'Investment Land', the change of use of the sites require formal Common Good consultation and this paper seek Members approval to proceed with this work.
- 1.5 Additionally, the Paper seeks approval for officers to discuss and bring forward a detailed proposal on the long-term benefits the proposals will bring to the Tain Common Good Fund.

## 2 Recommendations

- 2.1 Members are asked to:-
  - i. **Consider & note** the contents of this report and decision by the Economy & Infrastructure (E&I) Committee Members;
  - ii. **Agree** for Officers to bring forward a detailed proposal to Members for the long-term benefits to the Tain Common Good, once available; and

- iii. **Agree** to run a Common Good Consultation on the change of use of both parcels of land for generation of renewable solar energy and report back to this Committee the outcomes of the consultation.

### **3 Implications**

- 3.1 **Resource** – No impacts to agreed Budgets as progression of the work is already part of agreed commitments. Both projects are being progressed through the Council Delivery Plan as a revenue generating project and should therefore have a positive impact on the Council financial resource and the Tain Common Good Fund.
- 3.2 **Legal** – This paper seeks Committee approval to commence the formal legal process around the Tain Common Good lands, so is considered compliant in this regard.
- 3.3 **Risk** – No direct risks identified.
- 3.4 **Health and Safety (risks arising from changes to plant, equipment, process, or people)** – No direct Health & Safety issues identified.
- 3.5 **Gaelic** – No impacts anticipated.

### **4 Impacts**

- 4.1 In Highland, all policies, strategies or service changes are subject to an integrated screening for impact for Equalities, Poverty and Human Rights, Children’s Rights and Wellbeing, Climate Change, Islands and Mainland Rural Communities, and Data Protection. Where identified as required, a full impact assessment will be undertaken.
- 4.2 Considering impacts is a core part of the decision-making process and needs to inform the decision-making process. When taking any decision, Members must give due regard to the findings of any assessment.
- 4.3 This is an update report following the paper to Economy & Infrastructure Committee in August 2025. Integrated Impact Assessment screening for each individual project, and a full impact assessment will be undertaken as required and included as part of future reports.

### **5 Tain North**

- 5.1 The Tain Common Good owns a parcel of investment land extending to approximately 5.3ha to the north of the Far North Railway line, referred to as ‘Tain North’ in this paper – Location Plan is included within Appendix 1. Currently this parcel of ground is rented on a 364-day yearly grazing let between 1 April and 30 March annually. The Council Net Zero and Climate Change Team have been reviewing this land holding with the possibility of utilising it for the generation of renewable energy.
- 5.2 Early discussions were held with SSEN about developing a Utility Scale Solar PV Array on the entire grazing let. However, due to capacity issues at both the Primary Substation and the Bulk Supply Point, coupled with access issues to the primary substation, a grid connected array was deemed unfeasible at this locale.

- 5.3 It is worth noting that the issue with connecting to the grid was the primary reason for the previous proposal in 2019 to develop a solar array on this site not progressing ([Planning Approval 19/00215/FUL granted 21 March 2019](#)).
- 5.4 Corollary, discussions have been initiated with Scottish Water, who own and operate the Tain Wastewater Treatment Works (WWTW) adjacent to the eastern extent of the grazing let. Scottish Water have confirmed their early interest in a direct wire off-take from a Solar PV Array on the grazing let and to facilitate further discussions, Scottish Water have provided the Highland Council with half hourly electricity usage data for the last year.
- 5.5 Utilising industry standard modelling software with this given data, has demonstrated that a 121kWp Ground-Mounted Solar PV Array would meet the required baseload demand of the WWTW. An array of this size would require circa. 220no. 550Watt Panels and have a panel area of approximately 590sq.m. Consideration and design options are also being considered around the inclusion of a small 'behind the meter' BESS, in order to maximise revenue return.
- 5.6 Based on this array data, and assuming a ground mounted array at a 30degree inclination, with a 180degree orientation and 2no. high vertical panel configuration a site design has been developed. This design shows the array will involve a land take of a roughly rectangular shaped parcel of ground 40metres x 85metres, and approximately 0.34ha in area, which equates to approximately 6.4% of the Blarlaith North Grazing let area, and will leave 4.8ha for continuing as a grazing let.
- 5.7 It is on this basis that the Economy and Infrastructure Committee in August 2025, approved the progression of this project as part of the Council's '[Our Future Highland Delivery Plan 2024-27](#)', and it is on the same basis with which Officers present this project in this paper.
- 5.8 To progress the project, Officers have prepared an Outline Business Case for the site which includes several delivery options and currently each option is undergoing detailed assessment before determining the preferred option. Once this has been determined and the required procedural steps have been completed a report will be presented to the Economy and Infrastructure Committee for final investment decision.
- 5.9 Whilst the detailed option appraisal is ongoing, officers are seeking to commence the Common Good consultation for the change of use of the ground and discuss with Local Members the options and aspirations they have over the long-term benefit this proposal could bring to the Tain Common Good Fund.
- 5.10 In terms of the Common Good Consultation, the Council's Common Good Officer has agreed to work with the Innovation and Investment Team to prepare a timeline for this work, and subject to Members approval, it is anticipated that the Consultation would go live in late 2025. This would then allow the outcome to be reported back to this Committee in early 2026.
- 5.11 With regards the benefits this proposal could bring to the Tain Common Good Fund, at this stage it is envisaged the primarily benefit will be securing a long-term (circa. 25-year) land lease of the site. Once the detailed option appraisal has been completed, the defined benefits will be presented to Members for consideration and approval.

- 5.12 The lease value would be in addition to maintaining the ability to rent the majority of this Common Good landholding as a grazing let. As the reduction in land available as a grazing let is approximately just 6.4% of the total land area, leaving 4.8ha available for grazing, it is not envisaged a significant reduction in the rent (circa. £1,600,00, per annum) the Common Good currently receives.
- 5.13 Additional benefits to Tain, will be the biodiversity improvements to the landholding (10% improvement over the current baseline) and securing locally generated renewable energy being utilised to support and adding resilience to important public services.

## 6 Tain South

- 6.1 The Tain South Array project is less mature than the Tain North Array - as detailed in Location Plan within **Appendix 1**. The landholding is again included as 'Investment Lands' in the Tain Common Good Register and has previously been rented out as a Grazing let. However, even after being offered at a lower rental value of just £600.00 the site has found little interest and has remained unlet for the past few years.
- 6.2 Historically, the Council also achieved Planning Approval ([Council Planning Reference. 1900210/FUL](#) refers) to develop part of this landholding as a ground mounted solar array and again this project didn't move forward at that time due to the same grid constraint issues identified for Tain North (Section 5.2 above).
- 6.3 Again, the Council's Net Zero and Climate Change Team have been reviewing options for this site and have commenced discussions and site modelling with the Glenmorangie Distillery to export renewable energy via a direct wire to their site. These discussions and modelling are at an early point and require further development before the preparation of an Outline Business Case is prepared for approval.
- 6.4 Nevertheless, given the commitment to progress this work by both parties and the clear cost savings and simplification of public messaging around the use of both Tain North & South for renewable energy generation, it is recommended that a combined Common Good Consultation is undertaken, following the timeline as noted for Tain both above (Section 5.10).
- 6.5 The benefits to the Tain Common Good Fund and Tain more widely are again too early to define but will be similar to those identified for Tain North. These again will be brought back to Members for consideration and approval.

Designation: Assistant Chief Executive - Place

Date: 21 October 2025

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Background Papers: None

Appendices: Appendix 1 – Location Plan

# Climate Change & Energy

## Investment & Innovation

### Utility Scale Solar PV - Tain North & South Arrays



Plans Not to Scale

