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TITLE: Local heroes or village idiots? Press portrayal of opponents of two controversial coastal developments in North-east Scotland

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Title: Local heroes or village idiots? Press portrayal of opponents of two controversial coastal developments in North-east Scotland

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Abstract

This paper examines press coverage, at the local, regional and national (i.e. Scottish) levels, of two controversial coastal developments in North-east Scotland: the building of a North Sea gas reception terminal in the 1970s, and the current development of "the greatest golf course anywhere in the world" by the American business tycoon, Donald Trump. These developments have had much in common: both have had potential or actual impacts on environmentally sensitive sites; both were responsible for significant levels of public participation in the planning processes; both saw the creation of new groups with the aim of opposing the developments; and each has been affected by plans for other major structures in their immediate vicinity. Despite these similarities, there have been some significant differences in the ways in which the local, regional and national press have portrayed the developers and environmental opponents in each case. This has been most evident with

the two daily regional newspapers in North-east Scotland, the *Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express*. While they provided a reasonably balanced account of the gas terminal controversy in the 1970s, they have adopted an obvious pro-Trump bias in their coverage of the golf course saga, where opponents of the development have largely been dismissed, ridiculed or ignored.

Keywords: development; environment; planning; press; Scotland

Note: This paper is based on a presentation made at *Media and the Margins*, the MeCCSA Annual Conference 2014, Bournemouth, UK, 8-10 January 2014.

Introduction

Many readers will be familiar with the 1983 film *Local Hero*. Written and directed by Bill Forsyth, and produced by David Puttnam, it tells the tale of an American oil company that wishes to purchase the Scottish coastal village of Furness to make way for a refinery. Although fictional, the story was reminiscent of many episodes that took place following the discovery of the UK's first North Sea gas and oil fields, in 1965 and 1969 respectively. In the late 1960s and throughout the 1970s, international exploration companies scoured Scotland for suitable coastal sites for oil and gas related developments, such as reception and processing plants, or construction facilities for platforms and rigs.

This paper will discuss one such development: the proposed construction of a North Sea gas reception terminal by the British Gas Council and the French exploration company, Total Oil Marine, on a disused airfield at Crimond, Aberdeenshire, in the early 1970s. These plans were particularly controversial, as the proposed site was adjacent to the Loch of Strathbeg, Britain's largest coastal dune lake, which had recently been designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) because of its wildlife, geology and limnology. Indeed, at the time, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) was in the process of trying to secure various pieces of land around the loch to create a new nature reserve. When the plans were first announced, in November 1972, the developers were less than forthcoming about details of the terminal, with planning permission being sought from Aberdeen County Council based on the "sketchiest of information"

(Dunnet, 1974 p.14). This lack of information resulted in several delays to the decision-making process, which was also complicated by the fact that the Ministry of Defence (MOD) had already received clearance to build an important Royal Naval radio station on the same airfield site. These delays allowed some organised opposition to begin, and this period saw the creation of two groups with broadly similar aims: to prevent the terminal being built next to Strathbeg, and to appeal for a more careful approach to industrial development across North-east Scotland. The first of these groups was the North-east Environmental Liaison Group, consisting of Aberdeen University academics and representatives of various conservation bodies, including the RSPB and the Scottish Wildlife Trust. The second was the Buchan Action Group (Buchan is the historic name for the area surrounding Peterhead – see Figure 1), which had a committee “from all ranks of life” (Fraserburgh Herald, 1973a). Eventually, in April 1973, the developers announced that they had found an alternative terminal site, a few miles away at St. Fergus. However, the Gas Council and Total refused to concede victory to the conservationists: in the weeks, months and years that followed, they continued to insist that the decision had been driven solely by the MOD’s requirement for the site (e.g., Dean, 1981).

This paper will also discuss a current coastal project: the building of “the greatest golf course anywhere in the world” (Kirk, 2006) by the American property tycoon, Donald Trump, at Menie, Aberdeenshire, around 30 miles south of Crimond (see Figure 1). Announced initially in March 2006, the £1 billion project — Trump International Golf Links, Scotland (TIGLS) —

was to include two championship courses, a 5-star hotel, and a mixed residential development. The plans immediately attracted polarised views: business and tourism groups welcomed the news and the estimated economic benefits the resort would bring to the region; while environmental bodies expressed concerns, not least because it would be built partly on an existing SSSI, including a rare, dynamic, shifting dune system. In November 2007, the application was controversially rejected by Aberdeenshire Council's infrastructure services committee, largely because of the adverse environmental impact, and because the commercial housing element of the resort was at odds with the local development plan. A few days later, the Scottish Government 'called in' the application, citing its national importance. Following a public inquiry, the Scottish Government granted outline planning permission for the development in November 2008, indicating that "there was significant economic and social benefit to be gained from this project" (Scottish Government, 2008). Since then, TIGLS has continued to court controversy, particularly when, in May 2009, Trump sought to pursue compulsory purchase orders (CPOs) to acquire additional parcels of land for the resort, including four private homes. This move resulted in the creation of a new protest group, Tripping Up Trump (TUT), with the primary aim of opposing CPOs. Eventually, in January 2011, Trump announced he would not be seeking CPOs for the residential properties; that he would effectively build his course around them. While the first championship course, together with a temporary clubhouse, opened in July 2012, the rest of the resort (the hotel, housing, etc.) was subsequently put on hold because of Trump's objections to the building of

a nearby 11-turbine offshore windfarm, with the argument that it would spoil golfers' and hotel guests' sea views. At the time of writing (November 2015), Trump's legal challenge to the windfarm continues, and he has recently submitted plans for a scaled down version of the resort (BBC News, 2015a & 2015b).

This paper focuses on the coverage of these two developments by the press, at the local, regional and national (i.e. Scottish) levels; looking in particular at the ways in which they portrayed the opponents of the schemes, and considering what influence this might have had on public perception of the projects. In the case of the Trump resort, it will also examine the impact of the emergence of online citizen journalism.

It forms part of a larger, historical, comparative study, which is looking more broadly at public access to information relating to the two projects.

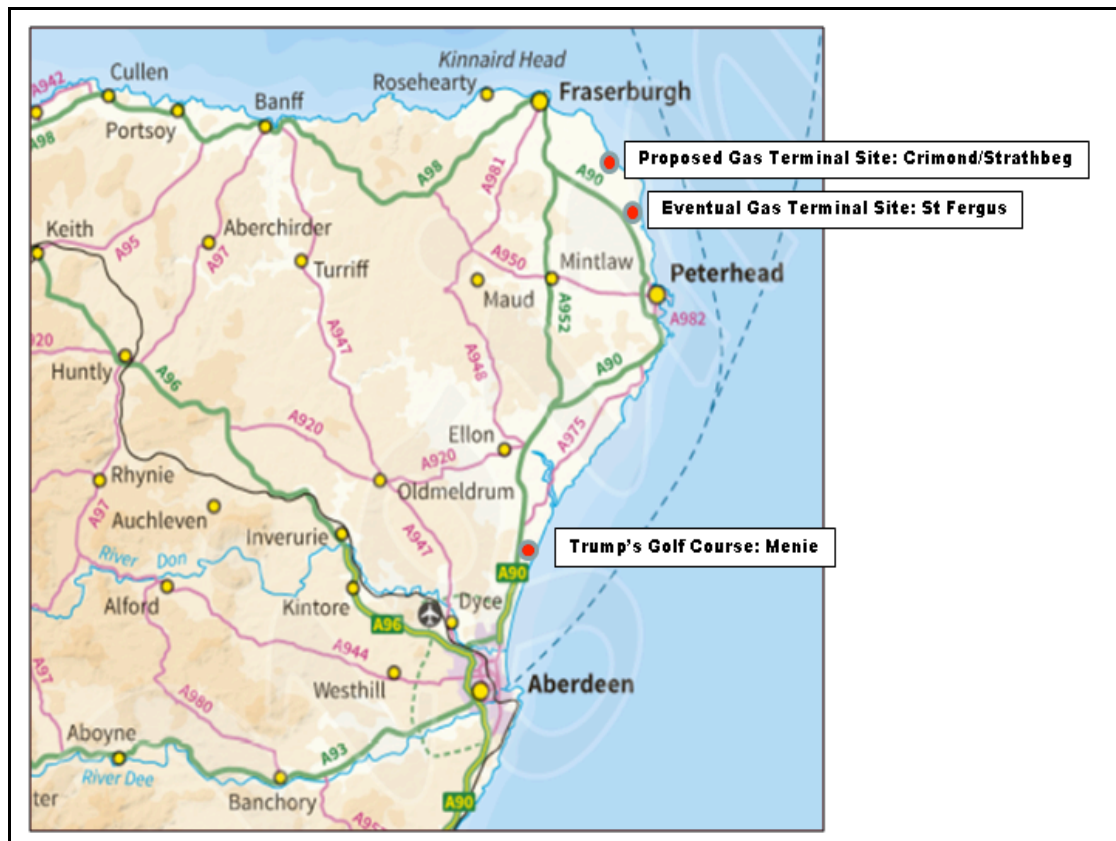


Figure 1: Location of gas terminal and golf course developments in North-east Scotland (© Crown Copyright/database right 2013. An Ordnance Survey/EDINA supplied service)

Method

Newspaper coverage of the gas terminal proposals has been collated and examined for the period from November 1972 (just before the Crimond planning application was announced formally) to September 1974 (when construction of the St. Fergus terminal foundations was well under way). With the Trump development, meanwhile, the press coverage being analysed dates from January 2006 (again, just before the plans were

announced officially); but due to the current question marks over the completion of the entire resort, this element of data collection is ongoing. Table 1 lists the local, regional and national titles being analysed, as well as their circulation figures, where these could be obtained. It should be noted that the two local titles being examined for golf course stories reflect the more southerly location of the Trump resort (see Figure 1), and that the two national Sunday titles did not exist in the 1970s. It should also be noted that the *Glasgow Herald* became simply the *Herald* in 1992.

The research has focused largely on news and feature articles appearing in the various titles. Published letters to the newspapers' editors have only been considered if they were written by representatives of those bodies and interest groups that were most heavily involved in the participatory and decision-making processes. As such, letters originating from 'ordinary' members of the public have not been taken into account. What can be said, however, is that the letters pages of the newspapers studied here provided no evidence of what has become known as 'astroturf'¹ campaigning, where organised letter-writing campaigns, using prepared, sample letters provided by interest groups, result in 'synthetic' grassroots public opinion (see, for example, Wahl-Jorgensen, 2006; Reader, 2008).

While the precise extent of the various titles' coverage of the two developments has not yet been quantified, in terms of the number of articles and/or their word length, it became immediately apparent that

¹ The coining of the term 'astroturfing' to describe 'synthetic' political lobbying is attributed to the US Senator Lloyd Bentsen, who, in 1985, used it to describe the "mountain of cards and letters" he received that promoted the interests of insurance companies. "A fellow from Texas can tell the difference between grass roots and astroturf", Bentsen declared (Sager, 2009).

coverage of Trump's golf course development has been far more frequent and extensive than that of the gas terminal over 30 years earlier. This might be attributed to the 'celebrity' status of Trump (already well known internationally, not least because of his role as host of the US reality TV programme *The Apprentice*), and to the high profile of some of the individual politicians (including two former First Ministers of Scotland, Jack McConnell and Alex Salmond) involved in the planning application process. Certainly, O'Neill and Harcup (2009) note that "celebrity", "personalities", and references to "elite people" or the "power elite" are common components of the key, existing taxonomies of journalists' "news values".² It might also be posited that Trump's current US presidential candidacy bid has added to the news value of any TIGLS-related stories.

While a more thorough analysis, using critical discourse techniques, is planned, this paper provides some initial observations on the extent, accuracy and objectivity of the information presented by the newspapers.

² News values are defined by Richardson (2007, p.91) as "the criteria employed by journalists to measure and therefore to judge the 'newsworthiness' of events".

Table 1: Newspaper titles examined for coverage of the gas terminal and golf course developments (with circulation figures, where available)

Development	National titles	Regional titles	Local titles (Weeklies)
Gas terminal (Nov 1972 to Sep 1974)	Glasgow Herald Scotsman	Press and Journal ³ (1973: 107,910) Evening Express (1973: 75,819)	Buchan Observer Fraserburgh Herald
Golf resort (Jan 2006 to date)	Herald (2014: 36,981; 365 in Aberdeen City) Sunday Herald (2014: 32,021; 823 in Aberdeen City) Scotsman (2014: 23,821; 493 in Aberdeen City) Scotland on Sunday (2014: 27,450; 997 in Aberdeen City)	Press and Journal (2014: 60,292; 15,759 in Aberdeen City) Evening Express (2014: 32,827; 25,418 in Aberdeen City)	Ellon Advertiser Ellon Times (2014: 1,012)

Sources of circulation figures: 1973 figures (Nicoll, 1973, pp.27-29); 2014 figures (Joint Industry Committee for Regional Media Research, see <http://jiab.jicreg.co.uk>)

³ The *Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express* are sister titles, and, since 2006, have been owned by the Dundee-based media group D.C. Thomson. The *Press and Journal* is a daily newspaper serving Northern and Highland Scotland and has its origins in the weekly title *The Aberdeen's Journal*, first published on 5 January 1748 (Harper, 1997, p.12); and thus lays claim to being the second oldest surviving daily newspaper in the world (Reid, 2006, p.xiii). The *Evening Express* is a daily evening paper, first published on 20 January 1879 (Fraser and Peters, 1978, p.40), and largely serves the city of Aberdeen.

“Jobs versus ducks”: press coverage of the gas terminal development

The two weekly newspapers, the *Buchan Observer* and the *Fraserburgh Herald* (which, at the time, shared the same editor), were the first to report rumours of a proposed refinery at Crimond (e.g., *Fraserburgh Herald*, 1972), and were quick to warn readers of the “covetous eyes” of developers (*Buchan Observer*, 1972). Indeed, Moore (1982, p.79) observed that, throughout the 1970s, the *Buchan Observer* continually promoted the idea that Peterhead was “a simple community of honest folk living under the threat of outside forces”. Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, both papers were fierce opponents of the oil and gas industry and its potential impact on the local landscape and on the traditional North-east industries of farming and fishing. As one editorial proclaimed:

“Buchan, we believe, is no place for industrial development, while there are thousands of unemployed in the Industrial Belt of Scotland... We give top priority to Food over Oil in this area...”

(*Buchan Observer*, 1974)

Once the gas terminal plans had been formally announced, both papers were also highly critical of the lack of detailed information emanating from the Gas Council and Total: “We are entitled to know what is going on around us... Don’t take us for mugs!” (*Fraserburgh Herald*, 1973b). The two titles, particularly the *Buchan Observer*, also regularly carried pieces

written by local churchmen, and articles on the gas terminal (and on oil and gas developments more broadly) often contained Biblical references, usually regarding the worship of Mammon (e.g., *Fraserburgh Herald*, 1973c). Both also gave extensive coverage to a Church of Scotland report on the impact of oil and gas in the North of Scotland, which was critical of the Gas Council and Total for having “not taken sufficient account of the environmental impact of their proposal” (Francis and Swan, 1973, p.36). The two papers were keen to point out that one of the report’s authors was a Peterhead man (*Fraserburgh Herald*, 1973d).

Strathbeg had long been recognised as an internationally important site for wintering wildfowl, and the *Fraserburgh Herald*, which ran a regular birdwatching column at the time, highlighted the ornithological richness of the site, concluding that, “Surely it is the duty of man to preserve this all important region for posterity” (Fordyce, 1972). Understandably, then, the eventual decision to site the gas terminal at St. Fergus was hailed by the paper as a “battle well won” by the environmentalists (*Fraserburgh Herald*, 1973e).

While the two local papers had a clear, anti-terminal agenda, the daily regional titles — the *Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express* — appeared far less partial in their coverage of the Crimond plans. Of the two, only the *Press and Journal* contained a regular opinion column at the time, and its editorial stance on the terminal proposal was never stated explicitly. What can be said, however, is that both papers were generally sympathetic to the arguments of the environmental opponents, and gave

them significant column inches in which to present their case (e.g., Ogilvie, 1973a). They also ran a number of feature articles on the Strathbeg birdlife (e.g., Willis, 1972). In contrast, they were critical of the lack of information being made publicly available by the Gas Council and Total, and of those local councillors who had expressed support for the Crimond scheme without yet having full details of the plans (e.g., Beaton, 1972). Indeed, prompted by the Church of Scotland report mentioned above, the *Evening Express* conducted its own four-part investigation into the human impact of oil and gas exploration, and in the concluding part argued:

“It is not good enough that the people of Buchan have so little information about the gas terminal planned for Crimond... It is not good enough when “little man” action groups are called upon to prove big business wrong with little expertise and less money.”
(Ogilvie, 1973b)

The two papers also expressed a degree of scepticism when the Gas Council invited pressmen to visit the existing gas terminal at Theddlethorpe in Lincolnshire, “to see what a gas terminal looks like” and to draw their own conclusions as to its impact on a locality. The *Press and Journal*, for example, described the link between the two locations as “tenuous” and “not to be taken seriously”, particularly as the wildlife at Theddlethorpe was “on a mundane scale relative to Crimond” (Milne, 1972).

When the Crimond plans were abandoned in favour of St. Fergus in April 1973, the regional press, unlike the local papers, did not automatically ascribe victory to the environmentalists. They did, however, give full coverage to the North-east Environmental Liaison Group's subsequent press release, which argued that the developers' failure to acknowledge any environmental reasons for the decision "did much less than justice to the ecologists' case" (e.g., Cummings, 1973). Interestingly, throughout the 'battle for Strathbeg', one *Press and Journal* journalist had speculated that, if the Gas Council and Total were to be viewed as having been defeated by conservation interests, then this would "spell trouble" financially for the entire North Sea oil and gas industry (e.g., Strachan, 1973).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the national scope of the *Glasgow Herald* and the *Scotsman*, they paid less attention to the gas terminal plans than the regional and local titles. Countless other oil and gas developments were proposed, or were being built, throughout Scotland at the time, so coverage of the Crimond proposal was relatively sparse (tending to coincide with Aberdeen County Council committee meetings) and it was never discussed specifically in the respective editorials. They did, however, publish a number of letters written by members of the North-east Environmental Liaison Group, which, for example, outlined the botanical and ornithological importance of Strathbeg (Lownie, 1972), and criticised the "excessive secrecy" of the developers (Bourne, 1972).

While the *Scotsman* appeared generally in favour of the oil and gas boom, believing that it gave a “unique opportunity” to strengthen the Scottish economy (Scotsman, 1972a), the *Glasgow Herald*, echoing the thoughts of the *Buchan Observer* and *Fraserburgh Herald*, feared that the East of Scotland would benefit disproportionately compared with the West, which was emerging as the UK’s worst unemployment blackspot (e.g., Glasgow Herald, 1973). Both national papers agreed, though, that Scotland’s “cumbersome and confusing” planning procedures were inadequate for dealing with the number and scale of oil and gas related projects taking place (e.g., Scotsman, 1972b).

“The New York clown” versus “the village idiot”: press coverage of the Trump golf resort development

Although the regional and national papers had, since January 2006, been reporting rumours of Trump planning a major new leisure development somewhere in Aberdeenshire, the two local titles — the *Ellon Advertiser* and the *Ellon Times* (the latter owned by the same publishing house as the *Buchan Observer* and *Fraserburgh Herald*) — did not mention the golf resort plans until April 2006, once they had been announced officially. Compared with the outspoken, ‘fire and brimstone’ approach of the *Buchan Observer* and *Fraserburgh Herald* in the 1970s, the Ellon newspapers’ coverage of the TIGLS saga has been more cautious and considered. Although the *Ellon Times* runs a regular vox pop feature — ‘Bus Stop Blether [chat]’ — which has frequently focused on aspects of

the Trump resort, the paper's own editorial stance has been unclear, as neither it nor the *Ellon Advertiser* contains an opinion column. In fact, the *Ellon Times* has often been at pains to point out that it has included the views of both supporters and opponents of the golf resort in order to "offer the readers some balance in the hotly-contested debate" (Ellon Times, 2007). Even at the conclusion of the four-week public inquiry into the planning application, the paper's on-the-spot reporter remained non-committal, stating "In all honesty I am still completely neutral" (Buchan, 2008).

Neutrality is not a word that might be associated with the *Press and Journal* and *Evening Express* coverage of Trump's golf course development. While the two papers provided a relatively impartial account of proceedings during the gas terminal controversy in the 1970s, the same could not be said about their current approach to TIGLS. When the proposals were first announced, both papers immediately expressed their unqualified support, with the *Press and Journal* (2006) describing it as "an opportunity to be grabbed with both hands", and the *Evening Express* (2006) suggesting that "it is crucial we embrace" the plans. Since then, both papers have maintained a clear pro-Trump stance, which has manifested itself in a variety of ways. For example, the seven councillors in Aberdeenshire Council's infrastructure services committee who voted against the planning application in November 2007 were immediately branded as "traitors to the North-east" in the *Evening Express* editorial, which demanded their resignation. The same column also described these individuals as "misfits", "no-hopers", "small-minded numpties [fools]" and

“buffoons in woolly jumpers” (Evening Express, 2007a). The chair of the committee, Martin Ford, whose casting vote had halted Trump’s plans, was subsequently singled out for particular criticism. Indeed, Ford (2011) has since provided his own account of his portrayal in the regional press.

Environmental opponents of the golf resort have been described variously, by editors and columnists, as “wrecking crews” (Press and Journal, 2007a), “naysayers and Nimbys” (Evening Express, 2007b), “shiny-eyed saviours of a bit of sand” (Evening Express, 2007c), and “a bunch of whinging, squabbling bairns [children] more worried about birds than people” (Evening Express, 2007d). Indeed, the RSPB has had cause to write to the *Press and Journal* to complain about “persistent factual errors in their reporting” of the organisation’s position on the original planning application (Auld, 2007), and for inferring that it had become an ally of Trump in his campaign against the offshore windfarm (Francis, 2011).

With regard to those individuals whose homes have been threatened with CPOs, the two papers have frequently prefixed their names with the expression “Trump opponent” (e.g., Press and Journal, 2007; Crighton, 2011); and they have tended to overlook some of Trump’s more ill-advised actions and comments relating to these residents. For example, they failed to mention his description of one homeowner as “the local village idiot” (to which the resident retorted by branding Trump as the “New York clown”), although this was widely reported elsewhere (e.g., BBC News, 2009; Urquhart, 2009). Meanwhile, *You’ve Been Trumped*, a multi-award-winning film documentary released in 2011, which does not

portray Trump and TIGLS in a particularly favourable light, has received negligible coverage from the two regional papers, a pattern noted by the film's director (see Kelly, 2011).

While other newspapers have been asking fundamental questions about planning policy, government transparency, and ethical business practices, the *Evening Express* has frequently focused on the more trivial aspects of Trump's lifestyle, letting readers know, for instance, how he spends his Christmas (Ewen, 2009), and how his family enjoys a "hearty Scottish breakfast" during visits to the North-east (Rennie, 2011). But perhaps the most notable example of the pro-Trump attitude of the regional press has been the *Press and Journal's* treatment of the TUT protest group. Although the paper reported on the group's formation (Bell, 2009a), on its collation of a 15,000-signature petition against CPOs at Menie (Bell, 2009b), and on its joint commissioning, with the Scottish Green Party, of an opinion poll which found that 74% of Scots opposed the use of CPOs for the golf resort (Bell, 2009c), it ceased all coverage of TUT in December 2009, effectively because key figures in the group did not originate from, live, work, or study in, the North-east. As the paper's editorial announced:

"It is now apparent that the opposition has been orchestrated by an organisation which has little interest in the area it claims to be trying to protect... This newspaper has given a voice to all those who have wished to become involved in the debate about Donald Trump's plans. That courtesy was extended to Tripping Up Trump in

the belief that it was a bona fide group of local environmentalists. Today, it has been withdrawn.” (Tucker, 2009)

This tactic meant, of course, that the *Press and Journal* failed to cover TUT’s subsequent moves to prevent CPOs. These included buying an acre of land from one of the residents threatened with eviction, dubbing it “The Bunker”, and placing multiple names on the title deeds, to create a legal headache for TIGLS and Aberdeenshire Council should they pursue CPOs (BBC News, 2010). Interestingly, one of the new co-owners of The Bunker was David Puttnam, who said:

“This saga is the real-life version of a film I made over 25 years ago, *Local Hero*. Thankfully, *Local Hero* had a happy ending when the American developer came to his senses and withdrew with dignity. It would be great if Donald Trump would watch it.”

(Urquhart, 2010)

Overall, then, readers of the two regional titles have received a decidedly one-sided view of the golf course development; the reasons for which have been debated by opponents of the scheme. It has been suggested, for example, that the papers may have been seduced by Trump’s wealth and fame, or that they have been more interested in securing advertising revenue from TIGLS than in providing any objective accounts of the resort’s development (Kelly, 2012). In this last regard, the two titles, in common with most other newspapers in Scotland, have certainly experienced decreasing circulation figures in recent years. As Table 1

illustrates, their respective readerships have fallen dramatically (-44.1% for the *Press and Journal*; -56.7% for the *Evening Express*) since 1973, when the gas terminal controversy was at its peak and when the two papers provided more balanced reportage. It should perhaps also be noted that the Trump Organisation has twice recently fallen foul of the Advertising Standards Authority (2012 & 2013) for placing “misleading” anti-windfarm adverts in the *Press and Journal*. In 2013, it also emerged that the editor of the *Press and Journal* (and previously editor of the *Evening Express* between April 2006 and March 2011) had married the Executive Vice President of TIGLS. While the newspapers themselves have not mentioned this event, other sources, including the satirical magazine *Private Eye* (2013), and the online citizen newspaper *Aberdeen Voice* (Kelly, 2013) certainly have, and have drawn their own conclusions as to the impact on the papers’ objectivity.

Launched in June 2010, *Aberdeen Voice* (at www.aberdeenvoice.com) aims to “give a voice to the general public in the North East and to promote inclusion in affairs affecting the region”. Since then, it has contained several (mostly critical) articles on the Trump development, and, in so doing, has frequently commented on the less than objective coverage by the *Press and Journal* and *Evening Express* (e.g., Smith, 2010; Edwards, 2013). These articles have included extensive coverage of the *You’ve Been Trumped* documentary, satirical poems about Trump and TIGLS written in Doric (the North-east of Scotland dialect), and accounts and photographs of less well-maintained parts of the golf course. While many of these articles could not themselves be regarded as being entirely

impartial, and while its readership figures are unclear, it might be argued that the emergence of *Aberdeen Voice* has gone some way to addressing the imbalance caused by the coverage of the two regional newspapers.

As was noted earlier, coverage of the Crimond gas terminal proposals was relatively sparse in the two national Scottish newspapers, largely due to the multitude of other oil and gas developments taking place across the country at the time. However, the perceived national importance of Trump's golf resort, coupled with the high profile of the applicant, has meant that the two titles, and their Sunday equivalents, have contained numerous accounts of the development over the last nine years. While neither the *Herald* nor *Sunday Herald* have declared their support for, or opposition to, the resort, the editorials of the *Scotsman* and *Scotland on Sunday* both expressed cautious welcomes to the plans: the *Scotsman* (2006) warning Trump not to "kill the goose that lays the golden egg with too many houses", and *Scotland on Sunday* (2007) urging compromise from the developer and the planning authorities. Interestingly, in an editorial reminiscent of those appearing in its pages 35 years earlier, the *Scotsman* Leader column, when discussing the Trump application, was also critical of Scotland's current planning system, "legendary for its in-built delays, politicisation and costs" (Scotsman, 2007a).

Indeed, the *Scotsman* Leader has continued to discuss the Trump development on a regular basis, at times berating each of the interested parties: for example, Aberdeenshire Council for "sidelining" the initial planning decision to a minor committee (Scotsman, 2008); Scotland's

then First Minister, Alex Salmond, and Scotland's Chief Planner for unwisely meeting Trump's representatives immediately prior to the Scottish Government calling in the application (Scotsman, 2007b); TUT for making erroneous claims about the TIGLS clubhouse discriminating against women (Scotsman, 2011); and Trump for being a "cavalier and unpleasant bully" (Scotsman, 2012).

On this last point, and in complete contrast to the regional press, the national newspapers have had little hesitation in questioning or criticising some of Trump's comments or actions. At times, these have been at a more humorous, satirical level; poking fun, for example, at his unusual hairstyle (e.g., Smith, 2012); his continual habit of mentioning his Scottish mother (e.g., Peterkin, 2012); and his renaming the Menie Estate "The Great Dunes of Scotland" (e.g., Taylor, 2010). On other occasions, however, they have focused more seriously on the Trump Organisation's business practices. For example, *Scotland on Sunday* (Watson, 2006) revealed that, prior to the golf resort plans being announced publicly, a Trump employee had attempted to buy some of the residences at Menie on the pretext of them being used as "personal holiday homes", using only his middle names in an effort to conceal his identity (and that of his employer) and thus avoid paying a premium for the properties. The other three titles, meanwhile, have all run stories that have discussed various accusations, legal challenges and financial difficulties facing the Trump Organisation, in the United States and elsewhere (e.g., McCracken, 2008; Ross, 2008; Williams and Smith, 2009).

While the gas terminal controversy took place at a time when government secrecy was still the norm, the golf course saga has occurred during a period when the Freedom of Information (Scotland) Act 2002 (FOISA) has given people the basic right to see information held by Scottish public authorities. Although the local and regional papers appear to have used the FOISA to some degree in compiling stories relating to the Trump project, the national papers (and in particular the two Sunday titles) have made extensive use of the legislation, acquiring information that might otherwise have remained hidden from the public eye. For example, *Scotland on Sunday* obtained the release of documents from Scotland's national economic development agency, Scottish Enterprise, and its international arm, Scottish Development International, which showed the extent to which agency officials were "courting" Trump and his representatives when interest in investing in Aberdeenshire was first expressed (Barnes and Watson, 2006). While a *Sunday Herald* journalist secured the release of over 200 pages of internal documents and emails from the then local police force, Grampian Police (now part of Police Scotland), which suggested that TIGLS had "unrealistic expectations" that local police would behave like the New York Police Department in providing security at the resort (Edwards, 2011).

Conclusions

Although separated by over thirty years, the two coastal developments discussed here have much in common: both have had potential or actual

impacts on SSSIs; both were responsible for significant levels of public interest and participation in the planning processes; both resulted in the creation of new groups with the primary aim of opposing the proposed developments; and each has been affected by plans for other structures (a military radio station and offshore windfarm, respectively) in their immediate vicinity. As this paper has highlighted, however, there have been some significant differences in the ways in which the local, regional and national press have portrayed the developers and environmental opponents in each case.

With regard to the local papers, both the *Buchan Observer* and the *Fraserburgh Herald* were forthright in their opposition to the Crimond gas terminal proposals, and to oil and gas developments more widely, in the 1970s. These protests were frequently accompanied by an element of religious zeal. While the local titles analysed in relation to the Trump golf course (*the Ellon Advertiser* and *Ellon Times*) have been different, and therefore not directly comparable, they have lacked any outspoken, or potentially controversial, editorial comment. Indeed, it could be said that they have gone out of their way to appear even-handed and impartial to their readers. Perhaps reflecting an increasingly secular Scottish society, the two local papers (as well as the regional and national titles discussed here) have remained largely devoid of any comment on the Trump development from churchmen or other religious figures.

In the Scottish national press, coverage of the golf resort has been more extensive than that of the gas terminal forty years ago. Throughout both

developments, though, the national papers have adopted a vocal yet generally objective approach, often reserving particular criticism for unnecessarily bureaucratic planning processes and for perceived political machinations and petty point scoring. With Trump's golf course, where events have frequently descended into near farce, the viewpoint of the national titles might be summed up in the words of one frustrated *Scotsman* journalist:

"How have we allowed an issue of profound importance for Scotland to degenerate into pebbledash politics at its worst: the niggardly fishwife prattle of some blighted Brigadoon?" (Jamieson, 2008)

But it is with the regional press that the most noticeable (and perhaps the most significant) change has taken place. Forty years ago, the *Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express* provided a reasonably balanced account of the battle over the Crimond airfield land. However, despite a recent claim by the *Press and Journal* that it provides "one of the few platforms for the little man to take on the big institutions" (Forsyth, 2012), the same two titles have displayed a distinct lack of impartiality during the golf resort saga. These papers will hear little ill of Trump, while opponents of the resort have largely been dismissed, ridiculed or ignored: they have effectively provided their readers with only one side of the story. While, as Table 1 illustrated, they have each suffered dramatic falls in circulation over the last 40 years, they remain the most widely-read newspapers in North-east Scotland. The current author would argue, therefore, that those North-east citizens who presently rely on the regional press as their

main information source are less well-informed than their 1970s predecessors; and that the rather one-sided editorial direction of the *Press and Journal* and the *Evening Express* may well have had a skewed impact on public awareness and opinion during the planning and construction stages of “the greatest golf course anywhere in the world”.

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