

Building Strong Relationships with Local Suppliers: Blargoans Limited



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Martin Nicholson, Managing Director,
Blargoans Limited



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Statkraft is committed to giving back to the local community both through community funds and through working with local suppliers. The relationships we forge with local suppliers help our projects to become successes and provide valuable investment in the local area.

Blargoans has worked with Baillie Wind Farm since its construction in 2011 and has since gone on to supply the Berry Burn Wind Farm, near Forres in Moray, Scotland. We spoke to Blargoans Managing Director Martin Nicholson about his experiences of working with Statkraft, and how the business and relationship has developed over time.

Tell us a bit about yourself

My background is in engineering. I did an apprenticeship within a nuclear site here in Dounreay from 1986 to 1990 and stayed on as a journeyman for a further two years before joining my father's engineering company. I started on the ground floor with them and worked myself up to being the site agent over a matter of years. Then I saw a gap in the market up in Caithness for the supply of industrial goods. So that was the main starting point of Blargoans.

How long have you lived in the area?

I've lived fifty years in this village. And my family on both sides go back five generations, all the while employing people in the local area and having local businesses. We are truly, truly local.

Have you seen the area change over the years?

Massively. Renewables is a huge thing now, without a doubt. I've got a map up on my wall showing all the different sites that are ongoing throughout Scotland and it's really quite amazing.

What sort of work does Blargoans do?

Blargoans supply renewables, nuclear and other construction businesses with kit and consumables such as PPE. The business continues to diversify and now provides minibuses, recruitment and IT support.

Blargoans is an unusual name where did it come from?

It's an anagram of Logans Bar. My son's name is Logan and back when I started the business off in 2009 I was looking to purchase a bar at the time which I would have named after him.

What sort of work do you do with Statkraft?

Blargoans supply the wind farm with equipment and consumables so anything from portacabins to welfare units, to hand tools, power tools, portable toilets, computers, ink, and PPE. This is in addition to the hard-faced electrical instrumentation tools that we supply. Over the years it has

been very varied. What we tend to do is if the team at Baillie Wind Farm are looking for something we'll go out and speak to them to see exactly what it is they need, and we'll go above and beyond to try and find the right deal. We provide a one-stop shop.

It has been really easy to work with Statkraft right from the start. Each manager that has been on site we have had a good relationship with. It's not easy for someone to be up a windmill but then needing something and having to come down and waste time looking for it. They know they can just lift a phone and call us.

The other benefit is that in half an hour we're there. If they need anything that we have in stock or they need us to come out and have a look at a specific article, in thirty minutes one of our team can be with them.

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How many people do you employ locally?

We have a core staff of six here at Blargoans that deal with all enquiries. When I first started off it was myself and then there was one added, two added etc. We are a good team. We now have approximately 50/60 employees overall. It changes weekly. With the higher labour last week we had 60, this week we're at 55 based on local needs.

What's the best thing about working with Statkraft?

Easy, open, communication. The payments team are excellent. We get paid on the button when invoices go in. We've not had an issue with Statkraft at all and that's not blowing smoke that's just telling the truth. We tend to work together very well and I think the team on site know that if we're going to get them something if there is a lead time of two days they will get it in two days and I think that's important open dialogue and honesty.

So you provide that reliability for each other and that means you can work well together?

Yeah. We don't win all their tenders, sometimes that's on lead times, but I'm not going to turn around and tell them that I can get something when we can't because that's no benefit to nobody. All it does is tarnish your reputation. So yeah, the open dialogue is the strongest part between us.

Would you say having the Baillie wind farm has helped you to expand?

I can't solely say it was due to just Baillie that I've had to take on more staff, but with

Statkraft's enquiries on top of other enquiries we were getting, we needed further members of staff. So yes, we have employed due to Baillie being one of our clients, 100%.

Has Covid had an impact on Blargoans and your relationship with Statkraft?

I think if anything it has strengthened our relationship with Statkraft because when Covid struck, and unfortunately other local business were closed down, myself being the sole owner meant that I could work every day. So when Mark and his team needed anything, they knew they could still phone us.

Covid has obviously had its effects on every business, but I have a lot of pride in our staff and myself for handling it the way that we did over the first shut down because it was an unknown to us all. We didn't know when we were going to get back open, how we were going to get equipment, how we were going to get it up to the north of Scotland, even the transport network to get things to the north of Scotland had slowed down.

We have also purchased and renovated the Northern Sands Hotel in our local village of Dunnet, which had fallen into disrepair, but is now doing really well as it is on the North Coast 500 route. With owning the hotel we've had people on furlough, we've had our ups and downs as well as everybody else. The enquiries did slow down tremendously because obviously everyone was at home. But we kept going between Statkraft, the NHS and Dunreay on essential equipment.

BAILLIE WIND FARM

- Installed Capacity of 52.5MW
- Operational since 2013
- 21 turbines
- With a tip height of 110m
- It generates enough renewable energy to power the equivalent of more than **37,000 homes*** each year.
- Baillie Wind Farm provides community investment of over **£130,000 per year:**
- **£104,000 pa** in community funding
- **£26,000 pa** to The Caithness Business Fund

*Department of Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (2018): UK average domestic household consumption of 3,781kWh.

For more information or to apply, go to www.bailliecommunityfund.org.uk www.caithnessbusinessfund.com

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