



PHOTOS BY KIM HJELMGAARD, USA TODAY

Donald Trump has big plans for his International Golf Links in Balmedie, Scotland, but those plans have run into some resistance from the locals.

# Trump's growing golf course has some Scottish neighbors seething

Supporters expect to reap big benefits, opponents fear damage, loss of homes

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**BALMEDIÉ, SCOTLAND** David Milne flies the Mexican flag along with Scotland's colors at his home in a former coast guard station that has views overlooking Trump International Golf Links. It's his way of sending a message to the man who occupies the White House.

Long before the world received an inkling of what type of president billionaire New York real estate mogul Donald Trump would make, he was making grandiose claims and resorting to bullying and other unsavory tactics to get his way, according to Milne and other residents of this small coastal community on a wild stretch of northeastern Scotland.

"He says he will give you the Earth and gives you a handful of dirt," said Milne, 53, a health and safety consultant for the oil and gas industry.

Milne and his wife are among property owners who are entangled in a decade-long battle with Trump over his attempt to transform more than 600 acres of rolling farmland and environmentally important sand dunes into a world-class golf course and resort.

Last week, Scotland's Environment Protection Agency and Scottish Natural Heritage, a conversation group, expressed concerns about how the development plans could contravene rules on sewage pollution, groundwater and dune preservation.

Trump's son Eric said during a visit to Scotland in late July that the Trump Organization was ready to start the next stage of the development, a move that those who live next to the course fear could force them to sell.

Trump denied he would consider compulsory purchases — a legal maneuver similar to eminent domain — to expand. Yet letters drafted by Trump's lawyers and sent to planning officials in 2009 show his company has considered the tactic, which allows property for projects in the public interest to be acquired against the owners' will.

Trump International Golf Links did not respond to a request for clarification.

Supporters of the development argue that it's become a vital lifeline for a region far too dependent on the oil industry and that the project elevated the area's prestige by associating with the Trump brand.

Opponents say the course and its amenities are nothing like what was promised, don't appear to be popular with golfers and may be abandoned by Trump if he fails to block a wind turbine farm that will sit 3 miles off the coast when it becomes operational early next year.

"Most of us, even those who aren't too keen on wind farms, are thrilled this is happening because Trump has said if it does go ahead, he won't do any more developing," said Sue Edwards, 62, an anti-Trump activist who regu-

larly walks her dog on Trump's land and a parallel strip of pristine beach — permitted under Scottish public-access laws.

The turbines — 11 in total — are expected to generate about 70% of the energy for the city of Aberdeen, 9 miles south of here, said Adam Ezzamel, the engineer who directs the project for Vattenfall, a Swedish power company. Trump has called the initiative a "blight" on the landscape.

"He assumes he can do whatever he likes and people will just do as they are told," said Milne, whose house looks over the dunes and to the North Sea beyond. Trump partially blocked that view with a row of trees and sent Milne a \$3,500 bill for a fence his company built around Milne's garden.

Just as Mexico said it wouldn't pay for a border wall Trump wants, Milne said he won't pay, either. He tore up the bill. Hence, the Mexican flag.

Milne said that in 2009, Trump offered about \$260,000 for his house and its one-fifth acre of land. Trump threw in some jewelry, a golf club membership, use of a spa (not yet built) and the right to buy, at cost, a house in a related development (not yet constructed). Milne valued the offer at about half the market rate.



Donald Trump wrote to Vic Henderson to thank him for supporting his golf resort. "He's brought the place alive," Henderson says.

## ENTICEMENT TO SPEND

Trump International Golf Links is one of three golf resorts the president and his family own in Europe. Two are in Scotland; one is in Ireland.

Two other international courses are located in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The remaining 12 are in the USA.

Since becoming president, Trump has formally ceded control of his businesses to his sons, although he has struggled to shake off perceptions that his complex portfolio of properties and investments around the world creates a massive conflict of interest.

In Scotland, where Trump plays up his Scottish roots — his mother was born on the Isle of Lewis and emigrated to the United States in 1929 — he has encountered stiff resistance to the development plan, although



A farm shed on Sheila and Michael Forbes' property near Aberdeen, Scotland, displays its owners' displeasure with Trump.

some business leaders and residents support it.

"The course has become a key part of our tourism offer," said James Bream, director of policy at Aberdeen's Chamber of Commerce. "Trump has created a new emphasis for visitors, including many Americans, to spend money in this part of the country on golf and activities associated with golf such as accommodations, bars and restaurants."

Stewart Spence, the owner of a luxury hotel in Aberdeen who describes himself as a close Trump ally and confidant to his sons Eric and Donald Jr., agreed.

"What Trump has already given us we will have for generations, and it is unbelievable," he said. "Never in our wildest dreams did we expect it. It's absolutely world-class."

Spence said Trump gave him honorary life membership to the club.

"My certificate says 001. The night Donald presented me with it, he said, 'I have only given out one other, and it's 007, to Sean Connery,'" the Scottish James Bond actor, he explained.

Vic Henderson, 88, who used to work as a farmhand and engineer on Trump's land when it was under different ownership, said Trump has done a "great thing."

"He's been tremendous. He's brought the place alive," he said.

Hanging on Henderson's wall in his small farmhouse is a letter Trump wrote in 2007 thanking him for his "ongoing public support for our project."

## ECONOMIC SLUMP

According to planning documents, public accounts and his own statements, Trump promised to invest \$1.5 billion in the project. He has spent \$100 million. He vowed 6,000 jobs. There are 150. Two golf courses were promised. There's one.

Instead of a 450-room luxury hotel and hundreds of time-share apartments that Trump pledged to build, there is a 16-room boutique hotel and a small clubhouse with a restaurant and shop that sells Trump whisky, leather hip flasks and various golf paraphernalia.

Financial accounts show the resort lost more than \$1 million last year.

In a statement, Trump International Golf Links said it plans "a multi-phased development and long-term investment project." It said the "Trump Organization enjoys a great relationship

entrepreneur and businessman because of his remarks about Muslims being terrorists in the run-up to his presidential campaign.

Ford and Anne Stirling, a government official who supports the development and played a role in overturning the initially rejected planning application, said they were unaware of any economic-impact studies related to the project.

Bream from Aberdeen's Chamber of Commerce also did not know of any such studies.

The Trump Organization said its investment in northeastern Scotland "was crucial to the economic future of the region," which is a "leading golf destination," but the company did not offer any evidence beyond attributing benefits to "the Trump Effect."

## FIGHT 'TO THE VERY END'

Trump has had an unquestionable impact on some of his Aberdeen-area neighbors.

After John and Susan Munro refused to sell their home to Trump, he built a 15-foot-high bank of earth on two sides of their house on a half-acre plot that obliterated their sweeping views across open land to a lighthouse in the distance.

The Forbes family said his presence has been nothing short of a nightmare.

"We've had a taste of Trump for 11 years. I wouldn't trust him with anything," said Sheila Forbes, 70. She has lived on land that borders Trump's with her husband, Michael, a farmer and fisherman, for more than 40 years. The Forbeses claimed that Trump's workers have harassed them since they refused to sell their property and its 24 acres for what they said was an offer at half the market value.

The couple said Trump's workers sabotaged a water pipe that left them and Michael Forbes' 92-year-old mother, who lives in her own nearby house, without clean drinking water for five years.

"We're going to fight him to the very end," Sheila Forbes said, adding that Trump was "nae mair (no more) Scottish than a flea in the air."

Trump publicly called Michael Forbes a "disgrace" who "lives

**"We've had a taste of Trump for 11 years. I wouldn't trust him with anything."**

Sheila Forbes, 70

like a pig." Trump International Golf Links said it "vigorously refutes" the allegations made by the Forbeses. It said that five years ago, its workers unintentionally disrupted an underground pipe that runs into an "antiquated, makeshift 'well'" jointly owned by the Forbeses on Trump land, but it was repaired immediately. The company said it has always treated the Forbes family and its neighbors with "courtesy and consideration."

Milne, who has a new Mexican flag on order after the previous one ripped, said, "When someone comes along and tries to kick you out, I'm afraid the heels dig in."

In 2015, Aberdeen-based Robert Gordon University revoked an honorary degree it awarded Trump for his achievements as an