

## **TECHNICAL APPENDIX 7.11: APPRAISAL OF THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL'S CRITERIA FOR THE CONSIDERATION OF ONSHORE WIND PROPOSALS**

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## 1. Technical Appendix 7.11: Appraisal of The Highland Council's Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Proposals

### 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) details The Highland Council (THC) policy and guidance on measures to be considered for the design and assessment of onshore wind farms. In relation to landscape and visual amenity it identifies ten criteria to be used by THC as a framework and focus for assessing proposals. This Technical Appendix provides analysis of the Proposed Development in relation to these criteria.

1.1.2 The ten criteria are outlined in Table 1.1.1:

**Table 1.1.1: OWESG Criteria for the Consideration of Onshore Wind Farm Proposals**

Criterion	Threshold
<p><b>Criterion 1.</b> <b>Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development)</p>	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements / key locations or from the majority of its access routes.
<p><b>Criterion 2.</b> <b>Key Gateway locations and routes are respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes)</p>	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.
<p><b>Criterion 3.</b> <b>Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected</b> (the extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks)</p>	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.
<p><b>Criterion 4.</b> <b>The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc.))</p>	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.
<p><b>Criterion 5.</b> <b>The amenity of transport routes is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access))</p>	Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes.

Criterion	Threshold
<p><b>Criterion 6.</b> <b>The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.</b> (the degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development. Considerations include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Turbine height and proportions,</li> <li>• density and spacing of turbines within developments;</li> <li>• density and spacing of developments;</li> <li>• typical relationship of development to the landscape;</li> <li>• previously instituted mitigation measures;</li> <li>• Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.</li> </ul>	<p>The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 7.</b> <b>The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters).</p>	<p>The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters</p>
<p><b>Criterion 8.</b> <b>The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.</b> (the extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance).</p>	<p>The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception</p>
<p><b>Criterion 9.</b> <b>Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected.</b> (the extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal).</p>	<p>Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.</p>
<p><b>Criterion 10.</b> <b>Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected.</b> (the extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape).</p>	<p>Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.</p>

1.1.3 An analysis of the Proposed Development in relation to these criteria is presented in section 1.2 of this Technical Appendix.

## 1.2 Analysis of Criteria

### **Criterion 1. Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape are respected.**

- 1.2.1 The Proposed Development would not be visible from the majority of the main settlements within the study area (see Figure 7.1.1 and 7.1.2). There would be some visibility from Bonar Bridge and the outskirts of Lairg. From Bonar Bridge, the Proposed Development would be barely perceptible, being sited to the rear of existing wind turbines at Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms within the view. From the outskirts of Lairg, the Proposed Development would be usually peripheral in the view and would be seen in a context where wind turbines already form a feature. The effects on these areas are anticipated to be not significant (see Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables).
- 1.2.2 Significant effects are anticipated at some smaller settlement areas including Rosehall, Achnairn and West Shinness and locally for users of the A838, leading to Lairg from Laxford Bridge. This comprises a minority of views from residential areas and therefore it is concluded that the threshold for this criteria would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

### **Criterion 2. Key Gateway locations and routes are respected**

- 1.2.3 The sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for East and Central Sutherland and therefore Key Gateway locations and routes have not yet been defined. Drawing from the baseline studies, key gateways are anticipated to involve high points on roads or locations within straths where there is a sense of arrival to areas such as the Kyle of Sutherland, Dornoch Firth, Lairg and Loch Shin, the Assynt – Coigach NSA to the west, the east coast, or the flow country to the north.
- 1.2.4 Suggested locations which may be considered key gateways in the study area include:
- The B9176 northbound over Struie, including the parking area and viewpoint on this route represented by VP15 (see Figures 7.25.1 – 7.24.4).
  - The Kyle of Sutherland on the A836 at Bonar Bridge and Invershin both north-west and south-eastwards, and at Carbisdale Castle looking to the north-west.
  - The A837 which generally provides a gateway between east and west Sutherland, and notably around Rosehall where views down the Kyle of Sutherland open up (represented by VP6 – see Figures 7.14.1 – 7.14.4).
  - The A836 and A839 on approach to Lairg and where views across Little Loch Shin are opened up.
  - The A836 north of Lairg which provides a transition between central and north Sutherland, particularly at Crask (represented by VP1 – see Figures 7.9.1 – 7.9.4) looking north and south.
  - The A838, particularly where views open up over Loch Shin, westwards at the junction with the A836 (represented by VP2 – see Figures 7.10.1 – 7.10.4) and eastwards near Overscaig and at Fiag Bridge.
- 1.2.5 The assessment has concluded that there would be a limited effect on the majority of locations which may be considered important gateways. To the south-east, down the Kyle of Sutherland and Dornoch Firth, the Proposed Development would always be seen through existing turbines with minimal perceived increase in effect. From the north and west, the Proposed Development would usually be seen in a context where existing

turbines would be visible. A significant effect has been identified for the A838 (route R4 in Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables) due to views of the Proposed Development, but this is not anticipated to affect the sense of a gateway perceived when looking across Loch Shin. A significant effect has also been identified for VP6 (see Technical Appendix 7.6 and Figure 7.14.1 – 7.14.4). However, this relates to the views towards Glen Cassley, and away from the Kyle of Sutherland where the sense of a gateway is felt. No significant effects were identified for any of the other key routes or gateways identified above.

- 1.2.6 It is therefore concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development, because it is not anticipated to detract from key elements of these routes and gateway points.

**Criterion 3. Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected**

- 1.2.7 Valued natural landmarks referred to under this criteria are considered to comprise geological features such as distinct mountains and lochs and other features which contribute to the Special Qualities of designated and protected landscapes. Valued cultural landmarks are considered to comprise important cultural sites and designated cultural heritage sites.
- 1.2.8 The LVIA has identified that there would not be any significant effect to key landmark features which contribute to NSAs or SLAs as a result of the Proposed Development. No mountain Landscape Character Types (LCTs) are anticipated to be significantly affected.
- 1.2.9 The effect on views featuring key natural landmarks such as mountains is generally not anticipated to be significant. There would be significant effects to some views on the north side of Loch Shin, overlooking Loch Shin (see Technical Appendix 7.9: Visual Assessment Tables, VP9 and VP14, also Figures 7.17.1 – 7.17.4 and 7.22.1 – 7.22.4). However, this is not anticipated to lead to a deterioration of the appreciation of Loch Shin as a feature of the landscape.
- 1.2.10 The effect from one mountain VP, VP21 (Meall an Aonaich) (see Technical Appendix 7.9 and Figures 7.29.1 – 7.29.4) is anticipated to be significant but this is not considered likely to affect the wider appreciation of this summit within the context. There would be no significant effect to views from the most popular summits, Ben More Assynt, Ben Klibreck and the Assynt and Coigaich mountains.
- 1.2.11 A significant effect is anticipated to the setting of one Scheduled Monument site: Dail Langwell broch (see Chapter 12: Cultural Heritage). However, whilst there would be a potentially significant effect upon the setting of the broch, the asset's key relationship with the River Cassley and the glen would still be appreciable and the ability to understand its defensive position would not be diminished. On this basis there would not be an adverse effect upon the integrity of the asset's setting.
- 1.2.12 Overall it is therefore considered that the Proposed Development would not diminish the prominence or disrupt the setting to any natural or cultural heritage landmarks.
- 1.2.13 It is therefore concluded that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

**Criterion 4. The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected**

- 1.2.14 As the sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for East and Central Sutherland key recreational routes and ways have not been defined. A significant effect

to visual receptors using one Core Path has been identified: SU21.03: Allt an Tuir Burn Walk (see Technical Appendix 7.9, route R12). A localised significant effect has also been identified for one longer distance footpath Scottish Hill Track 332 between Kylesku and the A837 near Benmore Lodge, at a point where it passes closer to the Proposed Development. A significant effect has also been identified for users of the public road through Glen Cassley (see Technical Appendix 7.9, route R9), which may be used recreationally. These effects would be relatively localised with respect to the available recreational routes within the study area and it is not considered that the effects would be sufficient to overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of these routes.

1.2.15 The visual effect on all Munros and Corbetts assessed within the study area has been concluded as not significant and the effect on views from routes ascending these peaks is anticipated to be similarly limited.

1.2.16 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

**Criterion 5. The amenity of transport routes is respected**

1.2.17 As the sensitivity appraisal by THC has not yet been undertaken for East and Central Sutherland key routes have not yet been defined. The majority of road routes within the study area would not be significantly affected by the Proposed Development. A significant effect has been identified for one main road route within the study area: the A838 between Dalchork and Corrykinloch (see Technical Appendix 7.9, route R4). Whilst this is anticipated to affect the visual amenity of this route, the rating for this effect would be Moderate and it is considered that this would not overwhelm or significantly detract from the visual appeal of the route as open and attractive views would still be retained in areas not affected by the Proposed Development.

1.2.18 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

**Criterion 6. The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected**

1.2.19 This criterion cites the following considerations to be taken into account:

- Turbine height and proportions,
- density and spacing of turbines within developments;
- density and spacing of developments;
- typical relationship of development to the landscape;
- previously instituted mitigation measures; and
- Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.

1.2.20 There would be some increased effect on landscape character and views as a result of the Proposed Development, comprising, in some areas, a greater number of turbines seen within views and potentially greater surrounding effect of wind turbines, and in other areas a reduced proximity to turbines within the view. The Proposed Development turbines would be taller with longer blade length than existing neighbouring turbines at Achany Wind Farm and Rosehall Wind Farm but would be similarly set on the higher plateau between glens in the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT in an area where existing wind turbines already create a precedent for wind development. The difference in turbine dimensions would not normally be perceived in views as a degree of separation between these existing turbines and the Proposed Development would lead to them being seen alongside, but as a separate cluster to existing turbines. When seen

from the north-west, the Proposed Development would be seen in combination with existing turbines, but the increased scale would lead to its appearing as a separate, closer development (see VP10 – Ben More Assynt (Figure 7.18.1 – 7.18.4). From the south-east, due to the turbines of these existing sites being set at a mostly slightly greater elevation, the Proposed Development would be seldom seen to the rear of existing turbines, other than as blades and tips, which would be usually more difficult to perceive. This means that the difference in turbine height would not normally be discernible (see VP15 – B9176, Struie Viewpoint (Figures 7.23.1 – 7.23.4)).

- 1.2.21 From some areas to the south-west and north-east (e.g. VP13 – Ben Klibreck (see Figures 7.21.1 – 7.21.4) and VP19 – Seana Bhràigh (see Figures 7.27.1 – 7.27.4), the increased spread of wind turbines would be seen further to the north-west. However, due to the separation of the Proposed Development from existing wind farms, the greater size of turbines would result in the Proposed Development appearing slightly closer, rather than larger. The Proposed Development would reflect an existing pattern of development along the elevated ridge within a similar landscape context to the existing wind farms. Although there would be a perceptible movement of wind farm development towards the north-west in these views it would still be seen in a context where existing wind turbines affect a similar area. If the consented Creag Riabhach Wind Farm were constructed, this movement would not be so noticeable as Creag Riabhach would appear further to the north-west than the Proposed Development.
- 1.2.22 Overall, it is considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded, as it is considered that the Proposed Development forms a well-located wind farm site which enables the generation of renewable energy with relatively localised significant landscape and visual effects. The Proposed Development respects the pattern of existing development within the Rounded Hills – Caithness and Sutherland LCT.

**Criterion 7. The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected**

- 1.2.23 As detailed for Criterion 6 above, the Proposed Development would be located close to the existing Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms but would usually be seen to form a separate wind turbine cluster. It is not anticipated to lead to any change in the way existing development clusters are perceived and it is unlikely to be seen to form one large cluster with the existing wind farms from any particular location, due to the difference in turbine size which would usually lead to it appearing as a separate, closer development. The wind turbine cluster would normally be seen as similar in scale to the existing cluster of Achany and Rosehall.
- 1.2.24 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

**Criterion 8. The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected**

- 1.2.25 The Proposed Development would be formed of larger turbines than those used on existing operational sites within the nearby area. This is anticipated to lead to it appearing somewhat closer to the viewer from some locations. From most mountain summit areas where the widest views are obtained across the landscape, this would not lead to a notable effect on the perceived scale of the landscape as the view is already so expansive. For most of these locations, the perception of scale is influenced by a greater sense of distance beyond where the Proposed Development would be seen. For example, from

locations such as VP13 – Ben Klibreck (see Figures 2.21.1 – 7.21.4) and VP5 – Ben Hee (see Figures 7.13.1 – 7.13.4) distant mountains beyond the Proposed Development are more influential in leading to the perceived sense of scale. From closer areas and summits, such as VP10 – Ben More Assynt (see Figures 7.18.1 – 7.18.4) the location and scale of the Proposed Development would lead to some degree of perceived reduction in the more local, surrounding undeveloped peatlands to the south-east because the Proposed Development would be closer than existing turbines. However, expansive views would still be perceived in other directions and the sense of scale in the more distant landscape would be maintained.

1.2.26 From lower areas, the Proposed Development would normally be seen as proportionate to the adjacent landscape as turbines have been purposely set away from the highest parts of the site. For example, from VP9 – Achnairn Caravan and Camping Site Entrance (see Figures 7.17.1 – 7.17.4) and VP14 – A838 near West Shinness (see Figures 7.22.1 – 7.22.4), although the visual effect of the Proposed Development is anticipated to be significant, the turbines would be seen on the skyline between two adjacent hills with hubs always below the height of the adjacent topography, thereby reducing the prominence of the turbines. As such, it is not considered that the Proposed Development would overwhelm the scale of the ridge.

1.2.27 It is considered that overall, the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development because the apparent landscape scale and distance perceived by receptors would be generally maintained, other than in very localised locations where the Proposed Development would inevitably be closer than existing wind turbines.

#### **Criterion 9. Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected**

1.2.28 As detailed for Criterion 6, the Proposed Development would be set close to the existing Achany and Rosehall turbines but would almost always appear as a separate cluster. Due to the position of the existing wind turbines at slightly higher elevation, the setting of these wind turbines is unlikely to be noticeably affected by the Proposed Development, other than where the Proposed Development would form a closer feature within the landscape setting to the front of these turbines. However, in these situations it would still form a clearly separate cluster due to the larger turbine size which would exaggerate the perceived distance between it and the existing wind farms. It is not considered that there would be any locations where the Proposed Development would increase the prominence of existing wind turbines within the landscape setting.

1.2.29 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded.

#### **Criterion 10. Distinctiveness of landscape character is respected**

1.2.30 The Proposed Development would lead to some localised effects on landscape character, largely limited to the north of the Proposed Development where existing wind turbines are less influential. These would affect the LCTs LCT135: Rounded Hills - Caithness & Sutherland and LCT142: Strath - Caithness & Sutherland, anticipated to reach up to 8km from the Proposed Development and locally to 10km.

1.2.31 A localised significant effect has also been identified to Wild Land Area (WLA) 34– Reay Cassley and one of its Key Qualities: *“Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains”*, covering a similar area to the east and west of Glen Cassley. However, this is not anticipated to affect the integrity of WLA 34.



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- 1.2.32 No significant effects have been identified to any NSA or SLA designated landscapes.
- 1.2.33 The range of significant effects would be localised and other than within the directly affected confines of the immediate development site, the landscape character would not be fundamentally changed. The integrity of the LCTs is therefore not anticipated to be affected within the study area. Surrounding LCTs would not be significantly affected and as the Proposed Development would be located within the same LCT as existing wind farm development within the surrounding area, no loss to the experience of landscape variety within the study area is anticipated.
- 1.2.34 It is therefore considered that the threshold for this criterion would not be exceeded by the Proposed Development.

### **1.3 Summary and Conclusions**

- 1.3.1 The analysis of the THC criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals has taken account of the anticipated landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development detailed in Chapter 7 of the EIA. This has concluded that although some significant effects would occur to localised parts of the landscape and visual resource, the location, design and layout of the Proposed Development is not anticipated to result in the threshold for any of the ten THC criteria being exceeded.
- 1.3.2 The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in broad conformity with THC's criteria for the consideration of onshore wind farm proposals.