Chapter 1: Introduction

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1 Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 This Environmental Statement (ES) is submitted by the Applicant, SSE Generation Ltd (SSE), holder of a generation licence. This ES has been prepared, on behalf of the Applicant, SSE, by SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd. The Applicant is proposing to construct an extension to the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm. Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm (the Development) is located on Gordonbush Estate, approximately 9.5km to the north-west of Brora, Sutherland, as illustrated in Figure 1.1: Site Location.

1.1.2 The total installed capacity of the Development would be up to 56 megawatts (MW). This would comprise a total of 16 turbines, 13 of which would have a maximum tip height of 130 metres (m), whilst the remaining 3 turbines would have a maximum tip height of 115m.

1.1.3 The Development is being submitted by the Applicant as one of a number of significant projects in support of the UK commitment to increase the proportion of electricity generated using renewable resources.

1.1.4 The proposal is also in support of international and national targets to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase the supply of energy through renewable sources. The Scottish Government has set a target of supplying 100% of energy from renewable sources by 2020 (Scottish Government, 2011).

1.2 Development Context

1.2.1 The Development is located on Gordonbush Estate, approximately 9.5km to the north-west of Brora, Sutherland, within the Highland region of Scotland. The Development, as shown on Figure 4.1: Site Context covers an area of approximately 7.31km² (centred on OS Grid Reference 284737, 913302 and is located to the south-west of Gordonbush Wind Farm, which became operational in June 2012. Gordonbush Wind Farm comprises a total of 35 turbines at a tip height of 110m.

1.2.2 The site boundary, illustrated on Figure 4.2: Site Layout, includes the proposed development of wind turbines, new access tracks and associated infrastructure, as well as the existing access track to Gordonbush Wind Farm, the existing substation and borrow pits utilised during its original construction.

1.2.3 Access to the Development would utilise the same delivery route used for Gordonbush Wind Farm, including routes taken for abnormal loads. The route has already been upgraded and it was successfully utilised during the construction of Gordonbush Wind Farm. From the A9 trunk road at Brora, the route would turn west along an unclassified road past the Clynelish Distillery to meet the C6 Strath Brora road. The route would continue along this road to Ascoile, as shown on Figure 4.1: Site Context.

1.2.4 Other existing infrastructure or work areas from Gordonbush Wind Farm, such as borrow pits, would be utilised where possible or practicable as part of the Development.

1.2.5 The Development would connect to the electricity transmission network using the existing substation developed for Gordonbush Wind Farm to the north of the Development. The substation would connect the wind farm to the adjacent existing 275kV transmission line.

1.3 Application Details

1.3.1 The Development would comprise 16 wind turbines and associated infrastructure, and would have an output capacity of up to 56MW. Therefore, consent for the Development is being sought by way of an application to the Scottish Ministers under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989. The application for Section 36 consent also seeks deemed planning permission under section 57 (2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended.

1.3.2 A full and detailed description of the Development is provided in Chapter 4: Description of Development.

The Applicant

1.3.3 SSE is a British energy company, headquartered in Perth with a team of around 20,000 employees. SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd operate across Great Britain, Ireland and continental Europe, including offshore and onshore wind farms, hydro, marine, biomass and solar projects.

1.3.4 SSE's renewable energy strategy is diverse and complex comprising development of a wide range of renewable technologies. In all, SSE currently has over 3,300MW (SSE Annual Report, 2015) of renewable energy capacity (onshore wind, offshore wind, hydro and dedicated biomass) and pumped storage in operation, under construction or with consent for development in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

1.3.5 SSE's renewable portfolio features a number of significant projects including the construction of two of Europe's largest wind farms; a 350MW onshore wind farm, Clyde, located in the Upper Clyde Valley in Scotland and a 504MW offshore wind farm, Greater Gabbard, located off the Suffolk coast of England.

1.4 The Project Team

1.4.1 The environmental assessment and preparation of the ES has been undertaken by environmental consultants ASH design + assessment (ASH), on behalf of SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd. The core ASH team has been supported by the following organisations and individuals, providing specialist inputs as follows:

- Planning – Jacobs;
- Landscape and Visual Impact – Optimised Environments (Open);
- Ornithology – Northern Ecological Services;
- Terrestrial Ecology (Habitats and Mammals) – Northern Ecological Services;
- Fish – Northern Ecological Services / Waterside Ecology;
- Hydrology and Geology (including Peat) – SLR Consulting;
- Cultural Heritage – Catherine Dagg;
- Socio-Economics and Tourism – BiGGAR Economics;

- Traffic and Transport – CH2M Hill;
- Noise – Hoare Lea;
- Carbon Balance – SLR Consulting; and
- Telecommunications and Aviation – SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd.

1.4.2 Advice was also sought from project team members involved in the construction of Gordonbush Wind Farm. Lessons learnt from the construction of Gordonbush Wind Farm were collated and are summarised in Appendix 4.2. Consideration has been given to these lessons throughout the EIA process for the Development.

1.4.3 Other inputs relating to the construction and future maintenance of the proposed works have been provided by SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd.

1.5 References

The Electricity Act 1989, Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO) (1989)

Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, HMSO (1997)

Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2000, Scottish Executive (2000)

2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland, Scottish Government (2011)