CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Figures (Volume 3)

1. Introduction

1.1 Overview

1.1.1 SSE Generation Ltd, 'the Applicant', is proposing to construct an extension to the operational onshore Achany Wind Farm to maximise the renewable electricity generation potential at the site. The proposed wind farm, called 'Achany Extension Wind Farm', is located on the adjoining land to the north-west of the operational Achany Wind Farm. The location of the proposed wind farm is approximately 4.5 kilometres (km) north of the village of Rosehall and 11km west-north-west of Lairg, as shown by the 'Site Boundary' on Figure 1.1: Location Plan.

1.1.2 The proposals for which consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 is sought by the Applicant, are referred to in this report as 'the Proposed Development'[1] and are described in paragraph 1.1.3 and Chapter 3 of this EIA Report. The application for Section 36 consent has been prepared by SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Limited (SSE Renewables), 'the Developer', on behalf of the Applicant. Deemed planning permission under Section 57(2) of the Town and Country Planning Act 1997, as amended, is also sought. The Applicant holds the necessary generation licence required to operate the Proposed Development.

1.1.3 The Proposed Development comprises a generating station, consisting of a wind farm with up to 20 Wind Turbine Generators (WTGs), supported by ancillary development, and would be an extension to the 19 WTGs of the operational Achany Wind Farm. The installed generation capacity of the existing operational Achany Wind Farm is 38 megawatts (MW) and the total installed capacity of the Proposed Development alone, is anticipated to be in excess of 80MW. Therefore, the combined capacity of Achany Wind Farm and the Proposed Development is anticipated to be in excess of 118MW[2]. The maximum tip height of the proposed WTGs is 149.9 metres (m) and the site layout is shown on Figure 3.1: The Proposed Development.

1.1.4 The Proposed Development has been subject to an iterative design process, giving due consideration to the operational asset and environmental constraints specific to the site and surrounding areas. Further detail on the iterative design process is provided in Chapter 2: Site Selection and Design Evolution.

1.1.5 The Proposed Development could contribute to legislated climate change targets[3] and government policy objectives in helping Scotland to reduce its greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2045 at the latest.

1.2 Background

1.2.1 There was a previous proposal to construct a wind farm in the area. An application to construct and operate a 26 turbine wind farm and associated works on Glencassley Estate, 'Glencassley Wind Farm', was submitted to the Scottish Governments Energy Consents Unit in 2012. The Highland Council North Planning Applications Committee recommended to raise no objection to this application in 2013, however, it was refused

[1] The land within the site boundary is also referred to as 'the Site' within this EIA Report.
[2] The Proposed Development would have a separate point of connection to the National Grid to Achany Wind Farm.
[3] The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

by Scottish Ministers in 2015, on the grounds of perceived impacts on the Assynt Coigach National Scenic Area (NSA) and on the Reay-Cassley Wild Land Area (WLA).

1.2.2 As the Site offers excellent potential for a wind farm development due to its wind resource, proximity to existing wind development and in context with the climate emergency[4], legislated climate change targets and government objectives (see Section 1.5), the Applicant revisited the potential opportunity to locate WTGs in the area of the previous application boundary.

1.2.3 In doing so, the Applicant has sought to review and address the grounds for refusal of the Glencassley Wind Farm application, taking previous concerns raised about the prominence and proximity of turbines in views from the nearby Assynt Coigach NSA and to core areas of wild land, into consideration. In order to respond to, and overcome previous concerns raised as far as possible, initial site optimisation design focused on moving the WTGs of the Proposed Development further from the NSA at the north western end, closer to the operational Achany and Rosehall Wind Farms, located at the south eastern end of the Site, to deliver sustainable renewable energy.

1.2.4 The proposed WTGs are therefore located approximately 2km closer to the operational Achany Wind Farm in comparison to the previous Glencassley Wind Farm proposal. As a result, it is considered that the theoretical visibility of the Proposed Development would be largely limited to areas where there are already existing external influences on the WLA, including existing wind turbines in close proximity and other features and associated infrastructure. Moving the proposed WTGs closer to the existing Achany Wind Farm also brings operational benefits in managing and maintaining both sites. Furthermore, the Proposed Development through its use of existing Achany Wind Farm access tracks, passing places, borrow pit reuse and operational building and storage infrastructure, minimises additional site requirements. Therefore, the Proposed Development has evolved through the iterative design process to form an extension to the existing operational Achany Wind Farm[5].

1.3 Development Context

1.3.1 The Proposed Development is located on adjoining land to the north-west of the operational Achany Wind Farm, as shown on Figure 1.2: Site Context. The Proposed Development covers an area of approximately 979.76 hectares (Ha) centred on OS Grid Reference 246180, 909181.

1.3.2 Access to the Proposed Development would be achieved by utilising the existing track infrastructure in place for the operational Achany Wind Farm, accessed from the A839. Existing tracks would require improvements and widening in certain sections.

1.3.3 The formation of new track infrastructure would be required to access each turbine base of the Proposed Development. Each turbine would comprise foundations, a hard standing area for cranes, and underground cable connections to a new on-site substation.

[4] On 28th April 2019, Scotland's First Minister declared a climate emergency.

[5] The 2019 Scoping Report for the Proposed Development referred to the project as Glencassley Wind Farm. However, during the iterative design process it was determined to rename the project as Achany Extension Wind Farm due to its close relationship with Achany Wind Farm. This was clarified in the Scoping Refresh exercise in November 2020.

1.4 The Applicant

1.4.1 SSE Generation Ltd (the Applicant) is a leading generator of renewable electricity in the UK and Ireland and one of the largest electricity network companies in the UK. Developing the project on behalf of the Applicant, SSE Renewables, is a leading developer and operator of renewable energy across the UK and Ireland, with a portfolio of around 4GW of onshore wind, offshore wind and hydro. Part of the FTSE-listed SSE plc, its strategy is to drive the transition to a zero-carbon future through the world class development, construction and operation of renewable energy assets.

1.4.2 SSE Renewables owns nearly 2GW of operational onshore wind capacity with over 1GW under development. Its 1,459MW hydro portfolio includes 300MW of pumped storage and 750MW of flexible hydro. Its operational wind portfolio consists of 580MW across three offshore joint venture sites, two of which, Beatrice and Greater Gabbard, it operates on behalf of its joint venture partners.

1.4.3 SSE Renewables has the largest offshore wind development pipeline across the UK and Ireland at up to 7GW, of which around 2.6GW is in construction or consented. It is currently constructing the world's largest offshore wind farm, the 3.6GW Dogger Bank Wind Farm in the North Sea, a joint venture with Equinor. It is also building Scotland's largest offshore wind farm, the 1.1GW Seagreen Offshore Wind Farm in the Firth of Forth, which is a joint venture with Total.

1.4.4 SSE Renewables is a Principal Partner to the UK Government in the run up to, and during the COP26 UN climate summit in November 2021.

1.5 Need for Onshore Wind in Scotland

1.5.1 On 28th April 2019, Scotland's First Minister declared a climate emergency. Following this declaration, the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 ("the 2019 Act") was passed by the Scottish Parliament to amend the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The 2019 Act commits Scotland to reducing its greenhouse gas emissions to net-zero by 2045 at the latest. This compares with the UK Government target of net-zero by 2050.

1.5.2 The Scottish Climate Change Plan (Scottish Government, 2018) outlines a target of reducing greenhouse gas emissions by 66% by 2032. An update to the Climate Change Plan was published in December 2020 (Scottish Government, 2020) setting out the government's pathway to achieving the targets set out in the 2019 Act, with a focus on 'green recovery' from the COVID-19 pandemic and recognition of climate change as a human rights issue.

1.5.3 The Scottish Government's Energy Strategy (Scottish Government 2017), sets out the target of achieving the "*equivalent of 50% of the energy for Scotland's heat, transport and electricity consumption… from renewable sources*" by 2030.

1.5.4 In order to meet this and wider UK renewable energy targets by 2030, approximately 17GW of installed capacity will be required. The energy strategy recognises that onshore wind offers the lowest cost renewable technology and is a vital component of the renewables industry in Scotland. As such, it will be a key part of achieving these targets.

1.5.5 The Scottish Government's Onshore Wind Policy Statement (Scottish Government 2017a) recognises the need to deliver new onshore wind farms subsidy free and acknowledges the technology shift towards larger turbines.

1.5.6 The Proposed Development, as a generator of renewable electricity from wind, could contribute to legislated climate change targets and government policy objectives by adding a minimum of 80MW of installed renewable onshore wind capacity.

1.6 Environmental Impact Assessment

1.6.1 This EIA Report is required to accompany the Section 36 Application under the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ("the EIA Regulations") as the Proposed Development comprises a wind farm with a generation capacity greater than 50MW and for which Section 36 consent is required. It is therefore considered to fall within the definition of Schedule 2 development contained in Regulation 2(1) of the EIA Regulations[6].

1.6.2 This EIA Report is therefore submitted in support of the application for consent and assesses the likely significant environmental effects of the Proposed Development. In terms of the application for Section 36 consent, deemed planning permission under Section 57 (2) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, is also sought.

1.6.3 A request for a Scoping Opinion was made to the Scottish Ministers under Regulation 12 of the EIA Regulations in August 2019. A Scoping Report was submitted to support the request, which sought input from the Energy Consents Unit of the Scottish Government, and statutory and non-statutory consultees regarding the information to be provided within this EIA Report.

1.6.4 The Scoping Opinion provided by the Energy Consents Unit on behalf of Scottish Ministers was issued in October 2019 confirming the scope of the EIA Report.

1.6.5 The Scoping Opinion states that advice regarding the requirement for an additional Scoping Opinion be sought from Scottish Ministers if an application for consent has not been made within 12 months of the relevant Scoping Opinion. This is the case for the Proposed Development, and therefore a consultation exercise, referred to in this EIA Report as 'Scoping Refresh', was undertaken In November 2020 to provide an update on the Proposed Development and seek confirmation from Scottish Ministers and consultees where changes in the scope of the EIA Report may be deemed appropriate, either as a result of a change in guidance, policy or to the Proposed Development itself, in comparison to that presented in the Scoping Report.

1.6.6 Further details of Scoping and other consultations undertaken are contained in Chapter 5: Scoping and Consultation, and accompanying appendices.

1.7 EIA Report

1.7.1 The EIA Report consists of the following volumes:

- Volume 1 – Non-Technical Summary;
- Volume 2 – Main Report;
- Volume 3 – Figures;
- Volume 3A – Landscape and Visual Photomontages (NatureScot Methodology);

[6] The application is also submitted in accordance with The Electricity Works (Miscellaneous Temporary Modifications) (Coronavirus) (Scotland) Regulations 2020.

- Volume 3B – Landscape and Visual Photomontages (The Highland Council Methodology);
- Volume 4 – Technical Appendices; and
- Volume 5 – Confidential Annex[7]

1.7.2 Further details on the content of the EIA Report, the general approach to assessment and confirmation of the specialist consultants responsible for each of the technical assessments is included in Chapter 4: EIA Process and Methodology.

1.7.3 A Planning Statement is included with the application as supporting information. The Planning Statement considers the acceptability of the Proposed Development in the context of existing and emerging planning policies. A Pre-Application Consultation Report is also included as supporting information, setting out the public consultation that has been carried out prior to submission of the application.

[7] Comprising sensitive environmental information and supplied to relevant statutory and non-statutory bodies only.

1.8 References

Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. Available at: http://www.legislation.gov.uk/asp/2019/15/enacted (Accessed 05 March 2021).

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