# Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm

## Environmental Statement

June 2015

Planning Statement

# Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm: Planning Statement



**Appendices**



**Figures**



** Please note that the visualisation included on the front cover is extracted from ES Figure 7.34: Viewpoint 1 (Beinn Smeorail) and is for illustrative purposes only.*

THIS PAGE IS INTENTIONALLY BLANK

# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 This Planning Statement accompanies an application for consent made on behalf of SSE Generation Ltd (SSEG) (the 'Applicant') by SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd to the Scottish Government Energy Consents Unit (ECDU) for the extension of the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm in the Scottish Highlands. The application is for consent under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for the construction and generation of electricity from the proposed Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm ("the Development"), and includes an application for deemed planning permission for the same development under Section 57(2), of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 as amended.

1.1.2 In accordance with the requirements of the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2000, the environmental effects of the Development have been studied systematically through an iterative process, the results of which are presented in the Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm Environmental Statement (ES). The findings of the ES have been used in order to assess the compliance of the Development against the relevant Development Plan policies. This Planning Statement accompanies the ES as part of the application for Section 36 consent.

1.1.3 The application site is approximately 9.5km to the north-west of the village of Brora in Sutherland and covers an area of approximately 730 hectares (ha), as shown on Figure 1: Site Location, although only a small proportion of this would be occupied by the wind farm infrastructure. The Development is located within The Highland Council local authority area.

## 1.2 Proposed Development

1.2.1 The Development is the product of an iterative design process (see Appendix 3.1: Design Statement in the ES for further information) and involves the construction of 16 horizontal axis wind turbine generators (hereafter referred to as turbines) and associated operational infrastructure, including a permanent meteorological mast, an operations building and associated site access tracks. The installed capacity of the Development would be up to 56MW taking the combined turbine total of Gordonbush to 51 turbines with a maximum generation capacity of 126MW.

1.2.2 The Development will generate electricity for up to 25 years, after which time it will be decommissioned, or a fresh application made to extend the life of the wind farm.

## 1.3 The Applicant

1.3.1 This Planning Statement is submitted by the Applicant, SSE Generation Ltd (SSE) and has been prepared on behalf of the Applicant by SSE Renewables Developments (UK) Ltd.

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

1.3.3 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, pumped storage and dedicated biomass) in operation, under construction or with consent for development in the UK and the Republic of Ireland.

1.3.4 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 Planning History

1.4.1 A Section 36 application for Gordonbush Wind Farm was submitted to the Scottish Government in June 2003 with the application reference SU2003236. The Section 36 consent was granted in April 2008, with construction commencing in July 2010. Gordonbush Wind Farm became operational in June 2012 following an 18 month construction period. The operational wind farm comprises 35 turbines and has an output capacity of 70MW, thus generating enough renewable electricity to power around 60,000[1] homes each year.

1.4.2 The Development will form an extension to the existing Gordonbush Wind farm, producing an accumulated maximum power output of 126MW. The Development will benefit from the existing infrastructure that is in place for the existing wind farm, including access tracks, borrow pits and grid substation.

1.4.3 The Applicant sought a scoping opinion from the Scottish Ministers on the environmental information to be provided in the ES. A scoping report was submitted in September 2013, and the Applicant confirmed the intention to submit a Section 36 application (under the Electricity Act 1989) following completion of the EIA process. A scoping opinion was subsequently issued by Scottish Ministers in December 2013.

## 1.5 Purpose and Structure of the Planning Statement

1.5.1 The purpose of this Planning Statement is to outline how the Development responds to, and complies with, relevant planning policy and guidance. Unless otherwise stated, effects reported in the ES and referred to in this Planning Statement are assumed to be adverse.

1.5.2 The structure of the remaining sections of this Planning Statement is set out as follows:

[1] Based on average household consumption of 3,200 kWh a year

- Section 2 sets out the need for wind energy development;
- Section 3 describes the Applicant's site selection process which led to the identification of this site for wind farm development;
- Section 4 describes the site and Development;
- Section 5 considers the extent to which the Development complies with the policies of the extant Development Plan;
- Section 6 identifies other material considerations relevant to the application and assesses the extent to which they are applicable to, and are met by, the Development; and
- Section 7 provides a conclusion on the overall compliance of the Development in planning policy terms.

# 2 The Need for the Proposed Development

## 2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 The need for the Development is based on renewable energy targets set at European, UK and Scottish Government levels. Successive governments in the UK have made progressively more determined efforts to curb emissions of greenhouse gas emissions through a reduction in dependence on fossil fuels. There is now a great deal of support for sustainable energy solutions. The sustainable use of energy implies a commitment to improve energy savings and efficiency, and also to generate electricity from renewable sources of energy including onshore wind power.

2.1.2 The European Union and the UK and Scottish Governments have encouraged the generation of energy from renewable resources (including onshore wind) for a number of years now. This support is underpinned by UK and Scottish Government policy on energy and climate change which influences local authority planning polices and decision making. It has also led to the setting of renewable energy targets on both an international and national level. The ability to meet these targets is reliant on the implementation of consented renewable energy schemes, including wind farms.

2.1.3 This section provides some detail on the climate change and renewable energy policy background for the Development by summarising the renewable energy policy context on an International, UK and Scottish Government level.

## 2.2 International Context

2.2.1 The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) is the principal international forum for action aiming to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and bring about a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. At its Kyoto conference in December 1997, developed countries agreed to reduce emissions of the six principal man-made greenhouse gases overall to 5.2% below 1990 levels over the period 2008-2012. The European Community agreed jointly to undertake an 8% reduction at Kyoto, with the UK agreeing to take on a reduction target of 12.5%.

2.2.2 In December 2009 the UNCCC Copenhagen Climate Change Summit was held to agree a framework for international climate change mitigation as a successor to the Kyoto Protocol after 2012. However, the summit did not result in a legally binding agreement on climate change action. The Copenhagen Accord was drafted by the United States, China, India, Brazil and South Africa on the 18th December 2009. It underlines that climate change is 'one of the greatest challenges of our time' and states that long term co-operative actions should be taken to keep global temperature increases to below 2%. The Accord has been noted by the participating countries, including the UK but has not been adopted.

2.2.3 A breakthrough on the international community's response to climate change was delivered at the 2011 UNCCC meeting in Durban. The primary focus of the conference was to secure a global climate agreement as the Kyoto Protocol's first commitment period (2008–2012) was about to end. The secured agreement referred to as the "Durban Platform", is notable in that for the first time it included developing countries such as China and India, as well as the US which refused to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. However, the total of official emission reduction pledges from all countries falls short of the amounts needed

to limit the temperature increase to 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. As part of the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action, a work programme has been launched that will consider ways to urgently increase mitigation ambition.

2.2.4 Although the Durban Platform is a firm commitment by both developed and developing nations to enter into an international climate agreement with legal force, the details of the action to be taken have not yet been agreed and considerable uncertainty remains regarding the content and extent of a new deal. In light of these uncertainties, it is widely expected that the Durban Platform will have little short-term impact on the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme ("EU ETS"), which has previously suffered a drastic drop in prices. However, the Durban Platform provides some increased certainty that the EU ETS will extend beyond the expiry of its third phase in 2020.

2.2.5 The key points of the Durban Platform are as follows:

- Agreement to negotiate a new international climate treaty as an "*outcome with legal force*" by 2015;
- Effectively secures the future of the Clean Development Mechanism;
- Little short-term impact on the EU's Emissions Trading Scheme; and
- Provides for a second commitment period for the Kyoto Protocol.

2.2.6 The Bonn Climate Change Conference took place in June 2014 and focused on: implementation of the second commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol; and political aspects of the Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (ADP), including the nature of nationally determined contributions for the 2015 agreement and the necessary level of ambition before 2020. Ministers also considered the recently published reports by the IPCC. During the ADP, negotiators will continue designing the 2015 agreement and discussing ways to raise global ambition to address climate change prior to 2020, when a new agreement is expected to enter into force. It is expected that the agreement will be adopted at the Paris climate conference in December 2015.

## 2.3 European Context

2.3.1 In March 2007, European Union (EU) leaders reached an agreement on European climate and energy targets for 2020. The binding legislation set three ambitious key objectives known as the '20-20-20' targets, and are as follows:

- a 20% reduction in EU greenhouse gas emissions from 1990 levels;
- raising the share of EU energy consumption produced from renewable resources to 20%; and
- a 20% improvement in the EU's energy efficiency.

2.3.2 The Renewable Energy Directive (2009) seeks to establish national renewable energy targets, defined by Member States, which result in an overall binding target of a 20% share of renewable sources in energy consumption in 2020. This target embraces all energy sources (electricity, heating and cooling and transport). The EU aims to see 20% of all energy consumed to be from renewable sources: this is now legally binding. The UK must achieve a 16% reduction in UK greenhouse gas emissions by 2020 and 15% of the energy consumed in the UK must be generated by renewable sources.

2.3.3 On the 8th March 2011 the EC published a Roadmap for transforming the EU into a competitive low carbon economy by 2050. The document sets out the cost-efficient trajectory for reducing emissions by 2050, consistent with the EU's long terms goal of reducing emissions by 80-95%. The EC's Roadmap demonstrates both that the 20% target is not ambitious enough to achieve the 2050 goal and that the EU already has the tools and policies to cut emissions.

2.3.4 The EC's Green Paper: 'A 2030 framework for climate and energy policies', highlights the importance of diversity of energy supply and of energy generation within the EU, along with an emphasis on increasing energy from renewable sources to achieve Europe's carbon reduction objectives (European Commission, 2013). A centrepiece of the framework is the target to reduce EU domestic greenhouse gas emissions by 40% below the 1990 level by 2030. To achieve the 40% target, the sectors covered by the EU emissions trading system (EU ETS) would have to reduce their emissions by 43% compared to 2005.

2.3.5 Renewable energy will play a key role in the transition towards a competitive, secure and sustainable energy system. The Commission proposes an objective of increasing the share of renewable energy to at least 27% of the EU's energy consumption by 2030.

2.3.6 The resulting 2030 policy framework for climate and energy was presented by the European Commission in January 2014 to drive continued progress towards a low-carbon economy. The targets presented were agreed by EU leaders on 23rd October 2014 with the aims to build a competitive and secure energy system that ensures affordable energy for all consumers, increases the security of the EU's energy supplies, reduces dependence on energy imports and creates new opportunities for growth and jobs through market stability.

## 2.4 National Context

2.4.1 The UK Government retains control of the overall direction of energy policy in the UK. Some energy policy issues have been devolved to the Scottish Government such as energy efficiency and renewable energy (including consents for generating plants covered by the Electricity Act 1989). Increasing the amount of energy generated from renewable sources is an important task of both the UK and Scottish Climate Change Programmes.

2.4.2 This has included a range of Energy White Papers and programmes which have all recognised the important contribution that the development of renewable energy can make towards addressing climate change and achieving the targets that have been set at an international level.

2.4.3 In an effort to deliver these targets, the UK Government launched the UK's Climate Change Programme in November 2000. The principal features of the Climate Change Programme include:

- The Climate Change Levy: This is payable on the business use of energy, which was first introduced by the UK Government in April 2001. It includes agreements with energy intensive sectors to meet challenging targets and additional support for business sector energy efficiency measures; and
- The Renewables Obligation (RO): This obliges electricity suppliers to increase the proportion of electricity provided by renewable sources to 10% by 2010, subject to the cost to consumers being acceptable. The RO is the key support mechanism for the

expansion of renewable energy. At present, it is due to rise to about 15% in 2015-16. In April 2010 the Renewables Obligation (Amendment) Order 2010 introduced changes to the RO extending its current end date of 2027 to 2037 for new projects. At present the UK is behind in meeting its RO target. The House of Lords EU Committee noted that the shortfall is due to various 'barriers to renewable generation' these include the need for grid upgrades and investment and constraints in the planning system. Licensed suppliers have a legal obligation that must be fulfilled otherwise penalties will be applied.

2.4.4 The Energy White Paper, 'Meeting the Energy Challenge' (2007) sets out the UK Government's energy strategy. It outlines that 'renewable energy has a key role to play in reducing carbon emissions and achieving security of supply' (page 4). It recognises the contribution that renewable energy has already made to reducing emissions but recognises that there are barriers to development which are currently 'slowing the rate of renewables development in the UK in both the short and long term' (page 4) and that these need to be overcome if the UK is going to achieve its renewable energy targets.

2.4.5 Under the section on planning, the White Paper outlines that the UK Government expects to see the planning system respond. In relation to commercial wind energy developments it provides a clear steer that planning professionals and local authority decision makers should look favourably on renewable energy developments when considering applications.

2.4.6 Furthermore, the White Paper places into policy a 'Statement of Need' for renewable energy. It sets out the *'important role that renewables has to play in helping meet the UK's energy policy goals' and that renewable energy 'as a source of low carbon, indigenous electricity generation is central to reducing emissions and maintaining the reliability of our energy supplies'. It states that new renewable energy projects 'provide crucial national benefits' and that this is a 'material consideration to which all participants in the planning system should give significant weight when considering renewables projects*' (box 153, page 157).

2.4.7 In line with the EU Directive the UK government published the UK Renewable Energy Strategy (UKRES) in 2009 which states that the UK needs to radically increase the use of renewable electricity. The document set out how the legally binding target of 15% of all energy consumption to be generated from renewable sources can be achieved. This will mean a seven fold increase in the share of renewables within a decade. The UKRES sets out a scenario which suggests that more than 30% of electricity should be generated from renewables in the UK by 2020. It is expected that the majority of this is to come from wind power, both on and offshore.

2.4.8 In addition to the UKRES, the UK Government published the UK Low Carbon Transition Plan, a White Paper published in July 2009. It sets out how the greenhouse gas emission cuts will be delivered. It also seeks to ensure that the UK will get 40% of electricity from low carbon sources by 2020 with policies that require electricity suppliers to substantially increase the amount of energy produced from renewable sources. The White Paper sets out how five year 'carbon budgets' will reduce emissions by 80% by 2050 and how these budgets will be met.

2.4.9 Specific proposals and policies for meeting the UK's carbon budgets are explained in the White Paper. It refers to 'transforming our power sector' and states that the Transition Plan, along with wider policies, will result in 40% of electricity being produced by

renewable resources by 2020 (Summary, page 4).

2.4.10 Along with the Energy Act 2008, the Climate Change Act 2008 aims to ensure that UK legislation underpins the long-term energy and climate change strategy. The Act introduced legally binding targets for the UK as a whole to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 80% by 2050. Furthermore, it provided a framework for shared action by devolved administrations to ensure that the targets are met.

2.4.11 The change of UK Government in May 2010 has led to the issue of new energy policy. In the Coalition Programme, the Government committed to producing an Annual Energy Statement (AES) to provide market direction, set strategic energy policy and help guide investment. In setting the strategic direction of energy policy and guiding investment, the annual statements set out the full secure and low carbon energy context, covering climate change and energy efficiency as well as supply-side issues, international security and the liabilities.

2.4.12 In order to advise the UK Government on the implementation of the provisions of the Climate Change Act and assess how targets can best be achieved, an independent body, the Committee on Climate Change (CCC), was established. In their second report to government in June 2010 one of their main findings was that wind power (both on and off-shore) remained the most likely proven renewable energy technology to make a significant contribution towards the step changes that are needed if targets are to be met.

2.4.13 In July 2014 the committee published the findings of its review into renewable energy which was commissioned by the UK Government in the May 2010 Coalition Agreement. This most recent study concluded that '*Onshore wind has established itself as one of the most cost-effective low-carbon technologies with potential for increased deployment to 2020 and beyond.*' It found that onshore wind, along with nuclear power, are the most cost-effective methods of supplying green energy over the next 20 years.

2.4.14 Under Article 4 of the European Renewable Energy Directive (2009/28/EC) the Government submitted the UK's 'National Renewable Energy Action Plan' (NREAP) to the European Commission in July 2010. The European Commission required the NREAP to be based on a set template, which asks for a description of the route and methods that will be put in place that will facilitate the UK to achieve the EC's legally binding target which requires that renewable sources supply 15% of energy consumption in 2020 to be from renewable sources. The 'lead scenario' set out in the UK NREAP demonstrates that it is possible to achieve the 15% target and provides one view of the technology mix in 2020 – in which some 30% of electricity demand is derived from renewables. However, the NREAP makes clear that this scenario does not represent a target for any particular sector or technology and it should not be seen as an upper limit to the UK's ambition for renewables deployment.

2.4.15 The Government published the UK Renewable Energy Roadmap on 27 July 2011 setting out a comprehensive action plan to accelerate the UK's deployment and use of renewable energy. The aim of the Roadmap is to achieve the 2020 target set out in the EC Roadmap and the NREAP, while driving down the cost of renewable energy over time. The actions set out in the Roadmap seeks to exploit the UK's renewable resources, contribute towards energy needs, provide opportunities for jobs and wealth creation and contribute to efforts to reduce emissions of harmful greenhouse gases.

2.4.16 In terms of onshore wind development the Roadmap aims to:

- *"Provide long term certainty for investors through electricity market reform and transition from the RO;*
- *Reform the planning system to ensure it supports economic growth and gives communities a greater stake in development;*
- *Co-fund the development of technical solutions to overcome wind farm interference with aviation radar and broker roll-out plans; and*
- *Upgrade onshore transmission capacity and ensure that developers secure timely and cost-effective access to the network and put in place a process to monitor delivery" (page 6).*

2.4.17 The Roadmap has been updated twice since July 2011, in December 2012 and November 2013. The purpose of the updates is to provide analysis on further achievements and changes that have taken place since it was first published in 2011. Changes include updates to energy demand projections, renewable energy deployment to 2020, and technology cost projections.

2.4.18 The publication of the UK Renewable Energy Roadmap coincided with the publication of a White Paper entitled 'Planning our Electric Future; a White Paper for secure, affordable and low carbon-electricity' in July 2011. The document sets out a package of reforms to ensure a flexible, responsive, secure and low carbon electricity network that will meet the predicted increasing demand for electricity as a result from the electrification of transport and heating systems. Key elements in the reform package include:

- a Carbon Price Floor;
- introduction of new long term contracts;
- an Emissions Performance Standard (EPS); and
- a Capacity Mechanism.

2.4.19 In December 2011 the Government published The Carbon Plan setting out plans for achieving the emissions reductions committed to in the Carbon Budgets. This publication brings together the Government's strategy to curb greenhouse gas emissions and deliver set climate change targets. In terms of low carbon electricity the plan states that electricity demand may rise by between 30% and 60%.

2.4.20 The document states that onshore and offshore wind farms in particular are likely to become one of three low carbon energy sources with nuclear power stations and gas and coal fired power stations with Carbon Capture Storage technology also producing low carbon electricity (paragraph 44). A number of coal and nuclear power stations are set to close in the early 2020s and this will allow for the introduction of renewable sources for electricity generation. Modelling suggests that around 40-70 GW of new low carbon electricity capacity will need to be built by 2030 (paragraph 2.150), rising to 100GW by 2050 (paragraph 2.153). To achieve this target 2.5 GW of new low carbon capacity will require to be built each year. Cost is likely to determine the deployment levels split between nuclear, fossil fuel with CCS and onshore and offshore wind.

2.4.21 Paragraph 2.242 in The Carbon Plan states that the Scottish Government believes that decarbonisation of the electricity supply should be achieved without the development of

new nuclear power stations. In Scotland the two cornerstones of energy supply transition are renewables and carbon capture and storage.

2.4.22 The Energy Act received Royal Assent on 18th December 2013. This Act establishes a legislative framework for delivering secure, affordable and low carbon energy throughout the UK. The Act includes provisions on:

- Electricity Market reform (EMR); Puts in place measures to attract the £110 billion investment which is needed to replace current generating capacity and upgrade the grid by 2020, and to cope with a rising demand for electricity;
- Strategy and Policy Statement (SPS); Introduction of SPS to improve regulatory certainty by ensuring that Government and Ofgem are aligned at a strategic level;
- Nuclear regulation; Creation of Office for Nuclear Regulation (ONR);
- Government Pipeline and Storage System (GPSS); Provisions to enable the sale of the GPSS; and
- Offshore transmission; change to the Electricity Act 1989 to aid the construction of the UK offshore grid for exporting power.

2.4.23 The Development can thus be justified to meet legal obligations which seek to increase the proportion of electricity which is to be derived from renewable sources. This is a relevant material consideration.

## 2.5 Electricity Market Reform (EMR)

2.5.1 Following the assent of The Energy Act (2013), the Electricity Market Reform (EMR) (2014) was introduced to achieve the Government's energy and climate change targets and to provide sustainable, affordable and low-carbon energy. Significant investment is required for new generation and grid infrastructure.

2.5.2 To attract such investment the EMR utilises the proposed instrument 'The Contract for Difference (CfD).' The CfD provides long-term price stabilisation to low carbon plant, allowing investment to come forward at a lower cost of capital and therefore at a lower cost to consumers.

2.5.3 The EMR encourages low-carbon energy generation. The proposals will contribute to helping the UK and Scotland achieve their energy and climate change targets.

## 2.6 Scottish Energy Policy and Targets

2.6.1 Tackling Climate Change is a devolved matter and therefore the Scottish Government has a responsibility to set policy to ensure compliance with the targets set out above. It has set a target that 100% of gross electric consumption should be produced by renewable sources by 2020.

2.6.2 The world-leading Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 created a statutory framework for reductions in greenhouse gas emissions. It set an 80% reduction target for 2050, with an interim target of a 42% reduction in emissions by 2020. The Act requires all public bodies, including local authorities to act in a way that contributes and helps deliver these emission targets.

2.6.3 The Act is a key commitment of the Scottish Government. It believes that reducing greenhouse gas emissions and shifting to a low carbon economy will help to create a successful country with opportunities for all of Scotland to flourish through increased sustainable economic growth. Importantly, the Scottish Government hopes that the 2009 Act can provide huge economic opportunities by providing business with the certainty that it needs to make investment decisions and help to deliver the aspiration of Scotland becoming the green energy capital of Europe.

2.6.4 In their 2011 pre-election paper on Scotland's electricity capacity in 2020 'Our Ambitions for Clean, Green Energy' the Scottish National Party (SNP) estimated if renewable energy targets are met that there will be 130,000 jobs in the low carbon sector by 2020 that will support further jobs and underpin Scotland's economic growth. The Scottish Government website sets out that the renewables industry *"also provides new opportunities to enhance our manufacturing capacity and to provide new employment..."*

2.6.5 In Scotland, energy supply emissions accounted for 40.5% of net emissions in 2006. This represents the biggest share of annual emissions. Therefore a key part of reducing greenhouse gas emissions to achieve the targets set out in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 is increasing the amount of energy produced by renewable sources. Scotland has a significant renewable energy resource, which includes 25% of Europe's potential wind resources. This should be utilised to produce energy.

2.6.6 In 2008 the Scottish Government set clear targets for the amount of electricity that should be generated through renewables sources as a percentage of Scottish gross annual electricity consumption. In September 2010 these targets were increased and following the SNP's election victory in May 2011 these targets were increased further and now stand at 100% of Scotland's electricity demand being generated from renewable sources by 2020.

2.6.7 Currently Scottish Government Policy still seeks to generate the equivalent of 100% of Scotland's gross annual electricity consumption, the equivalent of 11% of Scotland's heat demand met from renewable sources and 500 MW of community and locally-owned renewable energy, all by 2020 (Scottish Government, 2014).

2.6.8 In order to meet and exceed these challenging targets more generating facilities will be required such as that proposed at Gordonbush Extension. Even taking account of the consented schemes and those under construction in addition to current operational schemes (almost 58% of consumption) additional facilities will be required. In order to meet the 100% renewable energy target approximately 17GW of renewable capacity will be required.

## 2.7 Renewables Action Plan

2.7.1 The Scottish Government published the Renewables Action Plan (RAP) to drive the development of renewable energy. The aim of the plan was to establish Scotland as a UK and EU leader in the renewable field. It sets out what needs to happen and by when to meet the Scottish Government's renewable energy targets. The Action Plan was first published in July 2009 and has been updated in February 2010, August 2010, February 2011 and March 2011.

2.7.2 Within its main principles the RAP recognises that:

- Scotland's low carbon energy has the potential to provide enormous opportunities for sustainable economic growth, coupled with the creation and retention of more wealth in Scotland; and
- Investment in renewables and clean coal and gas can achieve a security of energy supply.

2.7.3 As part of the plan one of the Scottish Government's objectives was to provide unambiguous backing for the renewables energy sector. This commitment has been reiterated through the recent increase in renewable energy targets. The RAP supports development of onshore wind farms in environmentally acceptable locations where cumulative effects can be addressed. Developers should be prepared to demonstrate good practice, in terms of mitigation and measurement of carbon impact, however, this measurement must not become an unreasonable burden inhibiting development.

2.7.4 In November 2010, the Scottish Government issued a suite of documents under the banner of 'A Low Carbon Economic Strategy for Scotland, Scotland – a Low Carbon Society'. In the foreword to the Economic Strategy, John Swinney MSP, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth, stated:

*"… the transition of Scotland's industries and firms to low carbon processes, products and services is both an economic and environmental imperative, and offers the potential to stimulate and exploit rapidly expanding global markets. At the same time, over and above our world leading legislation in the field, Scotland must also adapt economically and socially to the uncertain, but yet inevitable, consequences of climate change. Moving to a low carbon economy is essential to both capture the opportunities and to mitigate the threats."*

2.7.5 In Section 1.1 of the Strategy, the Scottish Government refers to the target that, within less than 10 years, 80% of electricity will be generated from renewables. In addition, the Scottish Government has developed an ambitious set of targets which will include the decarbonisation of electricity generation by 2030.

2.7.6 The Low Carbon Economic Strategy is an integral part of the Scottish Government's overall Economic Strategy and seeks to establish strong policy direction around Scotland's key low carbon economic opportunities (page 7). On page 10 of the document, it is stated that:

*"Scotland has the natural resources to become the green energy power house of Europe".*

2.7.7 The energy sector is referred to in Section 2.2 of the Strategy and onshore wind is specifically addressed on page 49:

*"it is important to recognise that onshore wind is still the technology that can make the most immediate positive impact on our low carbon economy, and therefore the Scottish Government will continue to encourage large, medium and small scale developments that are sited appropriately".*

2.7.8 The Scottish Government published 'Low Carbon Scotland – Meeting the Emissions Reduction Targets (2011-2022)' in March 2011. This report on Proposals and Policies sets out specific measures for reducing greenhouse gas emissions to meet Scotland's ambitious statutory targets. A Technical Appendix accompanies the report and provides more detail about the analysis that underpins the figures used in the main report.

2.7.9 In June 2011 the Scottish Government published the 2020 Route Map for Renewable Energy in Scotland. This is an update and extension to the Scottish Renewable Action Plan 2009 and reflects the new target to meet an equivalent of 100% demand for electricity (with an interim target of 31% by 2011) and at least 30% of overall energy (heat, transport and electricity) demand from renewable energy by 2020 (page 4). The benefits that renewable energy could provide to Scotland (paragraph 1.1.1) include:

- Up to 40,000 jobs and £30b investment to the Scottish economy;
- Significant displacement and reduction in carbon emission;
- A strengthening of future energy security through the harnessing of sustainable indigenous resources; and
- A transformational opportunity for local ownership and benefits.

2.7.10 With regard to onshore wind, the Route Map identifies the objectives in respect of energy consents and planning and records the actions to be taken to meet them. Paragraph 1.2.5 states that wind farms are relatively efficient in comparison with other generators and although wind farm output can vary according to wind speed it can be forecast with confidence. The headline ambition is to "*support the development of onshore wind farms in locations where it is environmentally acceptable, and hence contributes most effectively to sustainable economic growth*" (page 68).

2.7.11 Given the proven status of the technology, and the known and anticipated quantity of applications in the system, the Routemap notes that onshore wind is expected to provide the majority of capacity in the timeframe of the interim and 2020 renewable electricity targets. Key actions relate to offer a supportive planning system which provides clear spatial and policy direction, continues to engage local communities, and balances the need to protect the environment alongside the need to continue to make progress to renewable energy targets (page 72).

2.7.12 The Scottish Government recognises that due to its natural resources Scotland has the potential to be a world leader in renewable energy. This potential was first embedded in the Government Economic Strategy (GES) that was published in 2007 when the energy sector and renewable energy in particular, were identified as being a key sector with high growth potential. However in order to reach its potential the GES recognises that particular attention should be given to building a critical mass of activity if this key sector is to expand Scotland's international competitive advantage. Following the Scottish Government elections in May 2011 and in responses to the global economic downturn this Strategy was updated in September 2011.

2.7.13 The updated Strategy sets a new strategic priority: Transition to a Low Carbon Economy. The document recognises that a low carbon economy has delivered significant investment to Scotland and it has the potential to attract substantial additional investment to the economy and support 130,000 jobs by 2020. The overall objective of the Strategy is to develop a more resilient and adaptable economy. On page 16 the Strategy asserts that Scotland has 25% of Europe's wind and tidal resources. A low carbon economy that promotes the sustainable use of resources (water, land, energy, minerals, etc.) will make the Scottish economy more resilient. The transition to a low carbon economy creates opportunities particularly for rural Scotland. In terms of electricity generation it can be noted that the Scottish Government has committed to fully decarbonise electricity generation by 2030.

2.7.14 The Strategy has again been superseded by Scotland's Economic Strategy (March 2015) providing an overarching framework for how the Scottish Government aims to achieve a more productive, cohesive and fairer Scotland. The strategy includes providing £10 million in 2015-16 through the Local Energy Investment Fund to invest on behalf of communities in commercial renewables schemes. It forms the strategic plan for existing and all future Scottish Government policy. The Strategy notes on page 14 that the equivalent of 44% of Scotland's demand for electricity is now generated from renewable energy.

2.7.15 The Climate Change Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP) is required under the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 to set out proposals and policies for meeting annual emission reduction targets from 2010 to 2022. The RPP was superseded in June 2013 with the publication of the report 'Low Carbon Scotland: Meeting our Emissions Reductions Targets 2013 -2027 – The Second Report on Proposals and Policies (RPP2).' RPP2 sets out how Scotland can meet its carbon reduction targets and make Scotland a low carbon society, providing significant social and economic benefits.

2.7.16 The Scottish Government published an initial draft Electricity Generation Policy Statement (EGPS) in November 2010, to support the RPP. A final version of the EGPS was published in June 2013 setting out the path to meeting the Scottish Government target of delivering the equivalent of at least 100% of gross electricity consumption from renewables by 2020. It demonstrates how Scotland currently generates electricity, and the changes needed to meet Scottish Government targets and deliver a low carbon generating mix. The EGPS states that:

*"Achieving the 100% target will require Scottish installed generation capacity to almost double over the 10 year period to 2020 – with wind (offshore and onshore) playing a critical role. This growth rate represents a major challenge, but is consistent with the trajectories identified in our Renewables Routemap and the Blue Seas – Green Energy report."*

2.7.17 The Development would provide additional installed capacity of up to approximately 56MW contributing to meeting legal obligations seeking to increase the proportion of electricity which is to be derived from renewable sources.

## 2.8 The Wind Resource in Scotland

2.8.1 In 2001 the (then) Scottish Executive published a study into the potential for renewable energy in Scotland by 2020. The study showed that Scotland has a potential renewable energy resource in excess of 60,000MW. The majority of this is made up of wind energy, both onshore and offshore. The conclusions stated that offshore wind could account for 25,000MW of new renewable energy generating capacity and onshore wind 11,500MW. Onshore wind was the cheapest of the technologies considered and, on this basis, can be expected to make the largest contribution to near-term Scottish Government targets for renewable energy.

2.8.2 The Environment and Rural Development Minister at the time stated in the foreword that the study outlined:

*'The breath taking scale of Scotland's renewable energy potential and vindicates our strongly held belief that we are ideally placed to benefit from the sustainable energy revolution. The scale of this potential is illustrated by one stunning statistic: there is enough potential energy from onshore wind power alone to meet Scotland's peak winter demand*

*for electricity twice over. In all, the total resource amounts to 75% of the total UK existing generating capacity'*

2.8.3 The potential of Scotland's wind resource was further emphasised in a series of UK Government commissioned regional renewable energy assessments (DTI and DTLR, 2002).

2.8.4 Turbine technology has improved significantly in terms of capacity, efficiency and impacts such as noise since these studies were carried out and it is anticipated that there will be further improvements in turbine technology. In addition, subject to supply constraints and global demand, economies of scale in manufacture and technical improvements should lead to lower capital equipment costs.

2.8.5 The latest Scottish Government figures show that onshore wind power has recently overtaken hydro power as the most common form of renewable energy in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2014). Figures published in June 2013 demonstrate that wind generation in the first quarter of 2013 reached a record high, up by 11.5% year on year. Scotland currently boasts 25% of Europe's onshore wind resources. The Scottish Government recognises that boosting renewable energy will also make a significant contribution to a sustainable economy (Scottish Government, 2014).

## 2.9 Contribution of the Proposed Development

2.9.1 The Development will:

- Reduce emissions of carbon dioxide through the displacement of electricity that would otherwise have included equivalent fossil fuel generated power. This will contribute to Scottish, UK, EU and international policies and targets for reducing carbon dioxide emissions in the face of climate change predictions and assessments of the impacts of climate change;
- Deliver installed capacity of up to 56 MW. This will directly contribute to national, Scottish and strategic policy objectives, including specific targets for renewable energy electricity generation capacity;
- Result in the following estimated reduction in emissions of CO2 due to the Development replacing other electricity sources over the 25 year lifetime of the wind farm:
    - 126,564 tonnes of CO2 per year over coal-fired electricity;
    - 63,282 tonnes of CO2 per year over grid-mix of electricity; or
    - 89,331 tonnes of CO2 per year over a fossil fuel mix of electricity.
- Contribute to the need, for diversity and security of supply in the UK electricity system.

# 3 Site Selection Process and Design Evolution

## 3.1 Introduction

3.1.1 This section of the statement outlines the Applicant's site selection process, and provides an overview of the site design considerations and evolution of the application layout.

## 3.2 Approach to Site Selection

3.2.1 As identified in ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives the site has been selected following environmental and technical considerations identified during the site selection and feasibility process. The Development is one proposal within a wider programme of development by the Applicant aimed at significantly increasing the proportion of energy generated from renewable sources and is committed to decarbonising its generation by 50% by 2020.

3.2.2 Factors taken into account during identification of the site by the Applicant include a range of criteria, primarily wind resource but also landscape and environmental designations, ecological sensitivity, bird issues and noise.

3.2.3 A key benefit in the selection of the site is the presence of the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm, which would enable the Development to utilise the existing infrastructure, including utilising existing access tracks and connecting into the existing substation. The Development would also benefit from appropriate access to site following upgrades to the local road network completed during the construction of the original Gordonbush Wind Farm.

3.2.4 The site is located in a sparsely populated area with the closest residential property approximately 2km away, reducing the likelihood for unacceptable impacts from noise, visual or shadow flicker. The site is also located within a Stage 3: Area of Search, as identified by The Highland Council through their Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (ISGOWE) (see paragraph 6.5.5 of this statement).

## 3.3 Design Strategy and Design Evolution

3.3.1 The purpose of a wind farm is to harness the energy of the wind and convert this to electricity. The process of turbine siting is a balance between maximising energy yield and minimising potential for negative environmental effects. The main environmental parameter affecting design is often landscape and visual effect, but other factors such as noise, ornithology and ecological effects can also carry considerable weight.

3.3.2 Changes made as a consequence of the design process are considered 'embedded' mitigation. The design of the wind farm layout is a vital part of the EIA process, as it is the stage where the biggest contribution can be made to prevent or mitigate potential effects.

3.3.3 The design of the Development has developed through a series of iterations, informed by the baseline environmental surveys, technical considerations and consultations to ensure that it is appropriate for the site. It is considered that the Development therefore represents an optimum fit within the technical and environmental parameters of the site.

3.3.4 The design process for the Development has been fundamental in the mitigation of

potential significant effects, with the scoping layout of 20 wind turbines being reduced to the concentrated group of 16 wind turbines that is seen in the final layout. The key effect of this reduction was to pull turbines northwards away from Strath Brora, thus reducing the potential for significant effects to arise within and to the south of the strath. The layout design has also achieved a high level of integration with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm, and this has been fundamental in the avoidance and reduction of effects on the landscape and visual resource.

3.3.5 The design development process is set out in Section 3.4 of ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives, and Appendix 3.1: Design Statement.

# 4 Description of the Site and the Proposed Development

## 4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 This section provides a brief overview of the site and its surroundings, and the various components of the Development.

## 4.2 The Site and its Environs

4.2.1 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 1: Site Location covers an area of approximately 7.31km² (centred on OS Grid Reference 284737, 913302), but only a small proportion of this will be occupied by wind farm infrastructure.

4.2.2 The Development 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.

4.2.3 Development proposed within the application boundary, illustrated on Figure 2: Proposed Development includes 16 new wind turbines, new tracks and associated infrastructure. The existing access track to Gordonbush Wind Farm, the existing substation and 2 borrow pits from the original construction would also be utilised.

4.2.4 Access to the Development would utilise the same delivery route used for the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm, including routes taken for abnormal loads, such as delivery of turbine components. The route has already been upgraded and it was successfully utilised during the construction of Gordonbush Wind Farm. From the Port of Entry, the construction route would head northbound on the A9 trunk road. Upon reaching Brora, the route would turn west from the A9 and along an unclassified road past the Clynelish Distillery to meet the C6 Strath Brora road. The route would continue along this road to Ascoile.

4.2.5 Other existing infrastructure or work areas from Gordonbush Wind Farm would be utilised where possible or practicable as part of the Development. Full access details and an assessment of effects on the local road network are provided in ES Chapter 12 (Access, Traffic and Transport).

4.2.6 During operation the wind farm infrastructure will occupy approximately 9.9 ha (less than 1.3% of the application area). During the construction period the development footprint would be approximately 13.6 ha which will include the construction compound area, borrow pits and storage areas which will be restored following completion of the works.

4.2.7 Land-take requirements are set out fully in ES Chapter 4 (Description of Development). Figure 2: Proposed Development illustrates the footprint of the Development.

4.2.8 The Development site consists of a single slope of moorland that falls from approximately 330m AOD in the north-east to a low point of around 150m AOD in the south-west. All sides of the site other than the west are surrounded by higher landform. To the west and south-west, the slope of the site continues to fall into the valley of the Allt a' Mhuilinn before rising gently again into a series of cnocans.

4.2.9 To the north-east of the site, the moorland continues to rise up to Cnoc a' Chrubaich Mhoir, and on this slope, above the site, is the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm. Access to the operational wind farm is gained by a track that runs from the public road in Strath Brora, across the southern edge and up the eastern side of the Development site.

4.2.10 To the south of the site is Strath Brora, which is particularly enclosed at this point. Loch Brora lies within the Strath due south of the site. The minor road that links Brora to Rogart also runs through Strath Brora at this point, passing to the south of the site in a narrow corridor between Loch Brora and Cnoc a' Ghrianain. There is scattered settlement in this part of Strath Brora, largely to the north of the road, loch and river. Around 5km to the south of the site, on the north-west-facing slopes of Meall Horn and Meall Odhar, is the operational Kilbraur Wind Farm and its extension.

4.2.11 Immediately to the west of the site, east of the Allt a' Mhuilinn, is a 275kV transmission line which runs north-south through the northern part of the study area.

4.2.12 There are several small forestry blocks on the lower ground around the southern part of the site. To the south-west is forestry, of which part has recently been felled in association with the Gordonbush Estate Habitat Management Plan (HMP). Deciduous woodland is found along the banks of Loch Brora and is a notable characteristic of the enclosed Strath landscape.

4.2.13 There are no statutory landscape designations within the site boundary. Outwith the site boundary lies Ben Klibreck –Armine Forest Wild Land Area (WLA) which lies 200m to the west and; Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loch Special Landscape Area (SLA) which is a minimum of 1.6km to the east. The Dornoch Firth National Scenic Area (NSA) is approximately 23km south of the site.

4.2.14 Two statutorily designated sites lie within 5km of the Development site, Coir' an Eoin Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) to the west, which is part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Carrol Rock SSSI on the south-westerly shore of Loch Brora. Coir' an Eoin SSSI is designated for its upland wetland and peatland habitats and species, including blanket bog and otter.

4.2.15 The Development lies immediately to the south-east of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA). The SPA qualifies under Article 4.1 of the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive: black-throated diver; golden eagle; golden plover; hen harrier; merlin; red-throated diver; short-eared owl; and wood sandpiper.

4.2.16 Ornithological surveys have indicated no raptors were found to be breeding within 2km of the site boundary. No qualifying species of the nearby Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA were found to be using the Development site. In particular, no golden plovers (a qualifying species of the SPA), were recorded foraging on the Development site and only one short flight by this species was seen on the site during vantage point observations. The bird species found breeding in the survey area were considered to be of Local or Low conservation value, with the exception of the skylark, which was considered to have a site population of Regional conservation value.

4.2.17 The Development and surrounding area are split into 2 catchments; Allt a'Mhuilinn catchment (drains to the west) and Allt Smeorail catchment (drains to the east), both

tributaries of the River Brora. The River Brora is identified as a salmonid water.

4.2.18 Solid geology underlying the Development site is Psammite and micaceous Psammite overlain by isolated peat deposits and Glacial Till. Peat is generally <1m with pockets of deeper peat (>2m) confined to local topographic hollows.

4.2.19 There are a number of potential high and moderate ground water dependent terrestrial ecosystems (GWDTE) identified within the Development site boundary. However further investigation has identified that the majority of these habitats are sustained by surface rainfall-runoff rather than groundwater, with the exception of areas along the watercourse corridors and an area to the west of the site.

4.2.20 The Development site extends into a landscape of sparse features of settlement and cultivation dating from the Iron Age to early 19th century. There are no Scheduled Monuments (SM) or Listed Buildings (LB) within the site boundary. Located within 15km of the outermost turbines of the Development there are 12 SMs and five LBs (all category B).

4.2.21 Tourism and agriculture are key sectors important to the local economy of the area. Popular tourist and recreation activities in the area include walking, cycling, fishing and golf.

**Gordonbush Estate Habitat Management Plan**

4.2.22 As part of the Gordonbush Wind Farm development, a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) was designed and implemented to deliver a range of long-term mitigation and enhancement measures on Gordonbush Estate. The HMP was secured by means of an agreement under Section 75 of the Town and Country Planning Act.

4.2.23 The overall aim of the HMP is to provide mitigation for any potential adverse effects on the wind farm on golden eagle, merlin and golden plover both by deterring species from the wind farm site ('push' factors) and attracting them elsewhere on the estate ('pull' factors) by enhancement of peatland, woodland and grassland habitats, which are being met via the implementation of a number of methods and specific plans (which are described in ES Chapter 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation):

- 

4.2.24 The Development site boundary overlaps a small part of the HMP area. The Ecological Impact Assessment (EcIA) within Chapter 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation of this ES has included the HMP area as a baseline receptor by considering each of the HMP Objectives. The EcIA concluded that none of the HMP Objectives in terms of habitat management and enhancement would be compromised by the Development.

## 4.3 The Proposed Development

4.3.1 The layout of the Development is shown on Figure 2: Proposed Development. The proposed wind farm would include the following key components:

- 16 wind turbines in total comprising:
    - 13 wind turbines at up to 130m tip height; and
    - 3 wind turbines at up to 115m tip height.

- crane hardstanding area at each wind turbine location with a maximum area of 1900m²;
- one permanent meteorological mast and associated hardstand with a maximum area of 840m²;
- an operations building with parking for operational and maintenance staff;
- on site access tracks (of which approximately 7.96km are new access tracks and approximately 11km are existing tracks where upgrades may be undertaken to facilitate delivery of the wind turbine components);
- a network of underground cabling to connect each wind turbine to the existing onsite substation;
- Modifications to the existing on site control building and grid substation to accommodate additional cables and equipment; and
- Any associated ancillary works required.

4.3.2 In addition to the above components of the proposed wind farm, the construction phase would comprise the following:

- a temporary concrete batching plant;
- temporary telecommunications infrastructure;
- temporary meteorological mast;
- a temporary construction compound and storage area; and
- reopening and extension of 2 of the original borrow pits used for the Gordonbush Wind Farm.

4.3.3 Full details of the Development are included in Chapter 4 (Description of Development) of the accompanying ES. All aspects of the proposal including location, siting, design and layout have been developed to minimise its effect on the environment.

4.3.4 The turbines will consist of tapering tubular steel towers supporting a nacelle and a three bladed rotor turning on a horizontal axis. The blades would be made from fibre-reinforced epoxy. The finish of the turbines is proposed to be semi-matt pale grey colour. The turbines are automatically controlled to ensure that at all times each turbine faces directly into the wind. As a result of this the appearance of the wind farm will alter with changes in wind direction. The final choice of turbine would be dependent on economics and available technology at the time of construction, but would have a maximum blade tip height of 130m. Of the 16 turbines, the Applicant is committed to reducing the tip height of 3 turbines to minimise potential landscape and visual impacts. These turbines would be reduced to 115m.

4.3.5 A transformer will be required for each turbine located adjacent to each turbine as is consistent with the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm. These are typically 4m x 3m area and 2m in height and would be sited within the hardstanding area of each wind turbine.

4.3.6 The principal construction and operations access to the site would utilise the same delivery route used for Gordonbush Wind Farm, including routes taken for abnormal loads. There is currently approximately 21km of track constructed as part of the operational wind farm site that has been built to a high standard with a width of around 4.5-5m. Approximately

11km of the existing tracks would be utilised to access the Development and the existing control and substation buildings. Localised widening of the existing track may be required to facilitate the delivery of the wind turbine components dependent on the wind turbine chosen to be used on the Development. In addition, approximately 7.96km of new tracks with a minimum 4.5m wide running surface and localised widening of corners would be required to access the turbines from the existing access tracks, for use both during construction and operation. The access track would be designed to incorporate passing places that would be suitable for construction plant and 4x4 traffic. Depending on local ground conditions, access tracks would be constructed using a combination of 'floating track' or 'cut track' construction.

4.3.7 It is anticipated that concrete batching would be undertaken on site. The location of the batching plant is shown in Figure 2: Proposed Development. The batching facility would comprise batching towers and a number of feeder hoppers used to store the constituent parts (water, fine and course aggregates and cement), which are mixed to form concrete.

4.3.8 It is estimated that approximately 144,000m³ of stone would be required for construction of the Development (including access tracks, structural fill beneath turbine foundations, and hardstandings at turbine bases and compounds). Stone required during construction is expected to be obtained from borrow pits which were utilised for the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm site. Where the borrow pits do not yield suitable material for certain construction operations such as concrete batching or access track capping, it may be necessary to import material to the site. This will be determined following detailed ground investigation works.

# 5 Policy Context and Assessment

## 5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The modernisation of the Scottish planning system under the Planning Etc. (Scotland) Act 2006 has introduced changes to the Development Plan system. Strategic Development Plans (SDPs) are required to be prepared in place of Structure Plans in the four largest city regions and provide strategic policy direction on the management of land use and new development. Local Development Plans (LDPs) are required to be prepared in place of Local Plans within all local authority areas. LDPs provide detailed and site specific planning policy for an area, in accordance with the SDP where applicable. The preparation of SDPs and LDPs is currently ongoing and until they come into force existing Structure Plans and Local Plans remain applicable.

5.1.2 The Highland Council is located outwith the four designated City Regions and as a result the LDP documents are required to address strategic as well as local policy issues. However, The Highland Council has pursued a means of maintaining an overview document covering the entire council area since the introduction of the new Development Plan system in 2006. It adopted the Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HWLDP) on the 5th April 2012. The HWLDP updates and replaces parts of the Highland Structure Plan as well as parts of the existing Local Plans which cover strategic and policy issues. As a result the HWLDP provides a strategic vision and the framework policies and three additional local area LDPs will address local policy and spatial issues. When adopted, the Development will be located within the Caithness and Sutherland LDP area.

5.1.3 The Scottish Government passed a Special Order, the Town and Country Planning (Continuation in force of Local Plans) (Highland) (Scotland) Order 2012 because the HWLDP does not replace the current Development Plan in its entirety. The Order came into effect on the 1st April 2012 and will allow the continuation of certain provisions within the adopted local plans alongside the adopted HWLDP. The provisions that are continued in the Sutherland Local Plan, which covers the area of the Development, are listed in Appendix 7 of the HWLDP.

5.1.4 The Main Issues Report (MIR) for Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan (CaSPlan) was published and issued for consultation in October 2014. The consultation period ended in February 2015. Furthermore, a recent Additional Sites and Issues Consultation period ran from 13th March 2015 until 24th April 2015. The MIR sets out a number of initial development options within the CaSPlan area and includes a number of sites that were submitted for consideration during the 'call for sites' phase in autumn 2013. The Council is now in the process of analysing the comments that have been made on the MIR and will use the information gathered to produce a Proposed Plan for publication towards the end of 2015 and adopt the plan in summer of 2017. Although the MIR may provide an indication of the Council's aspirations for the Caithness and Sutherland area, The Highland Council does not treat this document as a material consideration in planning decisions as it is a consultation document. It has therefore been excluded from the assessment.

5.1.5 The table below sets out the key documents that comprise the current and emerging Development Plan.

**Table 5.1: Highland Development Plan Documents**

| Plan | Status | Date |
|---|---|---|
| **Statutory Development Plan** | | |
| Highland Wide Local Development Plan | Adopted | April 2012 |
| Sutherland Local Plan (saved provisions only) | Adopted | June 2010 |
| **Emerging Development Plan** | | |
| The Caithness and Sutherland Local Development Plan | Main Issues Report | Published for consultation March 2015 |

5.1.6 In addition to the Development Plan a range of other documents must be considered when assessing the policy context for this application. These documents are presented in the table below and are discussed in detail in Section 6 – Material Considerations of this statement.

**Table 5.2: Material Considerations**

| Plan | Status | Date |
|---|---|---|
| Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (under partial review) | Adopted | May 2006 |
| Supplementary Guidance: Sustainable Design Guide | Adopted | January 2013 |
| Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy | Approved | March 2012 |
| Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments | Approved | March 2015 |
| Construction Environmental Management Process for Large Scale Projects | Published Guidance | August 2010 |
| Highland's Statutorily Protected Species: Supplementary Guidance | Adopted | March 2013 |
| Trees, Woodland and Development: Interim Supplementary Guidance | Adopted | January 2013 |
| Special Landscape Area Citations (formerly known as AGLVs) – Background paper to Proposed Highland Wide Local Plan | Finalised | June 2011 |
| Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment SPG | Adopted | January 2013 |
| Physical Constraints: Supplementary Guidance | Adopted | March 2013 |
| The Highland Council Community Benefit Policy and Guidance Note "Community Benefit in relation to Renewable Energy Proposals" | Approved | February 2013 |

## 5.2 Assessment of Compliance

5.2.1 This section provides an assessment for the Development in terms of the relevant policies within the Development Plan. Relevant provisions and individual policies of the Development Plan have been identified in the ES Chapter 5: Planning Policy Context.

5.2.2 The Development Plan policies are considered on an individual basis in terms of the HWLDP and are assessed under the policy topics which are broadly aligned with the ES. Appendix 1 of this statement provides a summary table of the policies assessed.

## 5.3 The Development Plan

5.3.1 The Development Plan for the Development site consists of the HWLDP and the saved provisions of the Sutherland Local Plan (SLP). Chapter 5 of the ES sets out the policies that are relevant to the Development. An assessment of compliance with these policies has been undertaken and has been reported in Section 5.4 of this statement.

5.3.2 The SLP has no specific policies relating to wind farms, the site or the locality of the Development. The general policies contained within the plan were superseded by the adoption of the HWLDP.

**Site Designations**

5.3.3 The Development is mainly situated within land designated as local and regional importance in the HWLDP (Policy 57) with a smaller area located within the 'Wider Countryside' (Policy 36). The approved Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (ISGOWE) provides guidance on the relevance of these designations to wind energy proposals stating in paragraph 2.8 that, *'these are the areas within which appropriate proposals are likely to be supported subject to detailed consideration against the Highland-wide Local Development Plan, in particular policies 57 and 67 and the Development Guidelines section of this interim guidance.'*

5.3.4 The Development is not covered by any specific environmental designations as shown on the Proposals Map of the HWLDP.

**Renewable Energy and Sustainability Policy**

5.3.5 The Highland Council policy relevant to renewable energy development is set out in Policy 67 of the HWLDP and the ISGOWE which provides additional policy guidance in terms of onshore wind energy developments. Policy 67 provides 11 criteria against which all developments have to be assessed and these criteria have been replicated and amplified in the ISGOWE.

5.3.6 Policy 67 requires that '*renewable energy developments are related to the source and resources required*'. The required source is a reliable flow of wind of sufficient speed. Data from the existing permanent meteorological masts located within the operational wind farm has established that there is a sufficient source available for the Development of a productive wind farm.

5.3.7 The policy states that the Council will also consider:

- *The contribution of the Development towards meeting renewable energy generation targets*; the Development has a capacity to generate up to 56MW with a total maximum output of up to 126MW in conjunction with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm;
- *Any positive or negative effects it is likely to have on the local and national economy*; Chapter 14 (Socio-economics and Tourism) of the ES concludes that the Development is not expected to have any significant tourism or socio-economic effects. Currently the Applicant contributes to the Scottish Hydro Gordonbush Community Fund to support developments in the areas covered by the Community Councils of Brora, Golspie, Helmsdale and Rogart. The contribution provides at least £144,000 per annum, with additional funding available depending on the output of the Gordonbush Wind Farm. In

addition it is explained in Chapter 14 that there will be socio-economic benefits during construction both directly through award of contracts and indirectly through staff expenditure in the local economy, and ongoing benefits during the operational stage for example through maintenance contracts.

- *An assessment of proposals against other policies of the Development Plan, the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines and have regard to any other material considerations, including proposals able to demonstrate significant benefits including by making effective use of existing and proposed infrastructure or facilities*. An assessment of other relevant Development Plan policies is provided later in this section. The Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines are discussed in more detail in Section 6 of this statement. The Development would utilise existing infrastructure from the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm including access roads, borrow pits and the existing substation.

5.3.8 The policy provides 11 criteria which are relevant to proposals for onshore wind energy developments, and states: *Subject to balancing with these considerations and taking into account any mitigation measures to be included, the Council will support proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments, having regard in particular to any significant effects on the following:*

- *Natural, Built and Cultural heritage features*: The scope and extent of the Development has been dictated by a series of design iterations. The modified final layout has significantly reduced landscape and visual effects. Known natural heritage features have been avoided by utilising and expanding existing borrow pits. Turbines and new access tracks were also designed to reduce potential effects on sensitive habitats. The use of existing access tracks has been optimised and this has reduced the amount of new tracks and resulted in no new water-crossings being required.

  Most of the site is designated as being of 'local/regional importance' on the proposals map of the HWLDP. Paragraph 2.19 of the ISGOWE states that any significant adverse effects on designated sites must be clearly outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. The Development will contribute towards national targets to reduce emissions and increase the amount of energy generated by renewable resources providing up to 56MW towards the national target. It is considered that there are clear benefits of national importance which provide support for the Development when balanced against the effects on environmental designations, and it is noted there are no nationally significant designations affecting the site.

  Paragraphs 2.24 to 2.26 of the ISGOWE require that the effect of the Development on wild land is considered in the assessment. ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment provides an assessment in terms of the identified wild land. As noted in Table 7.1 of the Chapter, 'wild land areas' (WLA) were mapped and as agreed with SNH formed the basis of the wild land assessment. The assessment concluded that there would be no significant impacts on WLAs.

  Additional guidance will be prepared by the Council and SNH but at the time of the assessment, only the interim guidance on onshore wind is currently available, see Section 6.

  In terms of cultural heritage features, there are no designated features which would be directly affected by the Development (ES Chapter 11: Cultural Heritage). However it is

concluded that there would be some significant indirect visual impacts at two SMs (Balnacoil Hill Cairn and Duchary Rock Fort). None of the SMs are associated with significant visual relationships with other sites or natural features which would be interrupted by the Development.

- *Species and Habitats:* Ornithological and ecological surveys have been carried out to inform the design of the Development from an early stage, and minimise impacts where possible. This has included consideration of results from existing data for the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm, including pre-construction, construction and post-construction surveys.

  Policies 57, 58, 59 and 60 and the potential for significant adverse effect on protected species are discussed in detail below (paragraph 5.3.28 to 5.3.32).

- Visual Impact and impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area (the design and location of the proposal should reflect the scale and character of the landscape and seek to minimise landscape and visual impact, subject to any other considerations): The site is not covered by any international, national, regional or local landscape designations. The guidance states that by careful choice of location there is often scope to accommodate development of an appropriate scale, siting and design into these areas in an acceptable way. The Development is also located broadly within the Area of Search for onshore wind energy development in Highland Council's approved Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (ISGOWE). ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment explains that, in consultation with The Highland Council and SNH during the design process the scale and layout of the Development has been reduced, in terms of number of turbines and height, to minimise potential landscape and visual impacts. Considerations during the design process included achieving a turbine layout that relates to the landform of the site and adjacent areas, and achieves a balanced composition with the surrounding landform and skyline, in addition to the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm, as viewed from key receptors. This process and how it has sought to minimise landscape and visual effects has been described in the Design Statement (Appendix 3.1 of the ES).

  The closest Special Landscape Area (SLA) to the Development is Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth, which is a minimum of 1.6km to the east of the nearest turbine. Visibility of the Development from this SLA is not widespread, but there is visibility from the areas that lie closer to the Development and ES Chapter 7 notes there is potential for a significant effect to arise on small parts of the SLA.

  There would be no significant effects on WLAs, NSAs, Garden and Designed Landscapes (GDLs), or any other SLA within the study area (other than some parts of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA).

  ES Chapter 7 concludes that the revision of the Development from an initial 20 to a concentrated group of 16 turbines seen in the final layout will mitigate the impact northwards on Strath Brora, thus reducing the potential for significant effects to arise within and to the south of the strath. The layout design has also achieved a high level of integration with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm, and this has been fundamental in the avoidance and reduction of effects on the landscape and visual resource.

  Five landscape character types that cover the site and its surroundings are likely to be subject to significant effects up to a maximum distance of around 6.5km away, although this would only be the case where there is notable visibility of the Development, with

extensive areas gaining no or limited visibility. The landscape character receptors that would be significantly affected include the Inland loch: Loch Brora; Small Farms and Crofts: Balnacoil area; Strath (Strath Brora): eastern section; Moorland Slopes and Hills; and Sweeping Moorland.

The effects on views have been assessed within a 35km Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) and the results have been summarised in Table 7.11 of ES Chapter 7. The assessment of effects on views was informed by a series of 17 viewpoints selected, in agreement with SNH and The Highland Council, to represent visibility from sensitive locations throughout the study area. The assessment found significant effects on two hilltop viewpoints (Beinn Smeorail and Ben Horn); parts of Strath Brora where people may visit for informal recreation; intermittent significant effects on up to 3km of the minor road from Brora to Rogart travelling eastwards and 1.4km travelling westwards; intermittent significant effects on approximately 5.6km of core path SU06.02 on the west side of Loch Brora; intermittent significant effects on approximately 300m of core path SU06.14 on the east side of Loch Brora; and a significant effect on a part of the access track to Ben Armine Lodge. There would be no significant effects on other routes, including the A9, A836, A839, A897, A949, national cycle routes, long distance walking routes and railway lines.

An assessment of cumulative effects that may arise from the addition of the Development to other developments in the baseline (i.e. operational, consented and application stage wind farms) has been undertaken (see Table 7.5 of ES Chapter 7 which indicates the list of development included in the assessment).

The cumulative assessment indicates that the addition of the Development to operational and consented wind farms would result in significant cumulative effects on the landscape character of small parts of Strath Brora, including one very small part of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA; the minor road from Brora to Rogart, travelling in either direction; and on the view from Creag nam Fiadh. The consideration of application stage wind farms does not lead to any additional significant cumulative effects.

While these effects are significant in EIA terms, the assessment against this policy requires a wider consideration of the Development such that its effects are, on balance, not detrimental. Although some significant effects remain, the iterative design process enabled the potential landscape and visual effects to be reduced; this involved the removal of a number of turbines in response to sensitivities identified in consultation with The Highland Council and SNH. The landscape and visual assessment identifies a limited number of significant landscape and visual effects, at a site which is located within the Area of Search for onshore wind energy development in The Highland Council's approved Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (ISGOWE), indicating areas which are less constrained or have no significant constraints on development. The Guidance also states that development that has significant adverse landscape and visual effects on designated sites may be acceptable provided these effects are outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. The Development will have a life span of 25 years. Socio-economic benefits as a result of the Development have been identified by in ES Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Tourism and conclude that the Development could help generate a moderate, positive, long-term, cumulative economic effect as a result of its contribution to the wind farm supply chain in the local area.

- *Amenity at sensitive locations, including residential properties, work places and recognised visitor sites (in or outwith a settlement boundary):* The minimum distance to the closest residential property is approximately 2km, thus according with the minimum separation distance of 2km advocated in the ISGOWE. ES Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration reports the noise assessment undertaken for the Development, and concludes that noise generated through construction activities will not have a significant effect as long as mitigation measures are implemented. The predicted turbine operational noise levels are in line with ETSU-R-97 derived noise limits at all residential receptor locations and for all wind conditions and are therefore not significant.
- *Safety and amenity of regularly occupied buildings and the grounds that they occupy- having regard to the visual intrusion or the likely effect of noise generation and, in the case of wind energy proposals, ice throw in winter conditions, shadow flicker or shadow throw*: A noise assessment was undertaken the conclusions of which are described in ES Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration. It was concluded that predicted construction noise levels at each noise monitoring locations will result in noise levels no more than 50dB $_{Aeq\ T.}$ with some minor effects associated with construction traffic. This will not result in a significant effect, as long as mitigation measures are implemented, including the restriction of working hours. The predicted wind turbine operational noise levels vary between 14 to 30dB $L_{A90}$ at the closest monitoring location (Ascoile) and <29dB for dwellings further away. ETSU-R-97 noise limits are predicted to be achieved at all wind speeds and at all receptor locations. Cumulative operational impacts of the Development were considered with the operational Gordonbush, Kilbraur and its extension wind farms (it was considered other wind farms would not contribute in an acoustically significant way and therefore were not considered in the cumulative assessment). Predicted cumulative noise emission levels at the receptor locations vary between 26dB $L_{A90}$ at low wind speeds and 35dB $L_{A90}$ at high wind speeds at some of the closest locations, with levels < 31 dB $L_{A90}$ at more distant locations.
- ES Chapter 15: Other Issues considers other issues that may affect wind farm developments such as shadow flicker and ice throw. Shadow flicker can arise from the moving shadow of the turbine rotor blade passing over a narrow opening such as the window of a nearby residence. However, shadow flicker effects will not occur as a result of the Development, as the closest residential property is around 2km from the turbines and outwith the zone where shadow flicker effects can occur. The risks of ice throw (ice building up on turbine blades and falling to the ground) resulting in damage or injury are considered to be very low. The maximum theoretical distance calculated for ice throw at the site is 277.5m, and the nearest public road and residential property are approximately 2km from the nearest turbine, and well outside the maximum fall/throw distance. It is predicted that the potential for ice throw affecting members of the public is considered to be extremely low. Appropriate measures are proposed in order to safeguard the safety of operations staff and the public, for example the use of notices at access points alerting members of the public of the possible risk of ice throw under certain weather conditions.

  Paragraph 2.44 of the ISGOWE requires that the effect of the Development is assessed not only on existing land uses but also those permitted or which are specific proposals in the development plan. The site is designated to be 'wider countryside' under policy 36 of the HWLDP. There are no other designations or proposals on or near the site. As a result no development opportunity identified in the HWLDP will be adversely affected by the Development.

- *Ground water and Surface water (including water supply) aquatic ecosystems and fisheries:* An assessment of the potential effects of the Development on surface and ground water is described and assessed in ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology. Policy 63 relates to the water environment and is discussed below (paragraph 5.3.43 to 5.3.44). The study in ES Chapter 9 concludes that one licensed surface water abstraction and six private water supplies have been identified within 5km of the Development site boundary. None of these water supplies are at risk from the proposed Development. A number of potential GWDTE were identified within the site boundary. The Development has been designed to avoid highly dependent GWDTE habitats, and moderately dependent where possible. Further detailed assessment has been undertaken and mitigation measures proposed where appropriate to avoid potential effects on areas of possible GWDTE. Best practice measures to mitigate against all potential effects during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases have been outlined. Mitigation measures based on best practice would prevent, reduce or offset the effects on the receiving water environment, and are described in detail within ES Chapter 9. These shall be detailed within the Construction Environmental Management Plan (CEMP) (see ES Appendix 4.1: Draft CEMP), which shall include a site Pollution Prevention Plan. With the adoption of the proposed mitigation measures, the Development has been assessed as having the potential to give rise to no significant effects in terms of the EIA Regulations on hydrology, hydrogeology or geology. In relation to fisheries, the ES includes survey reports into Fish and Fish Habitat (Appendix 8.3) and Freshwater Pearl Mussel (FWPM) (Appendix 8.4). These conclude that no evidence of FWPM was recorded on site or its environs while migratory salmonids are restricted by a waterfall approximately 2km downstream of the Development site and therefore will not be impacted.
- *Safety of Airport, Defence and Emergency Service Operations*: As set out in ES Chapter 15: Other Issues, following receipt of the scoping opinion, further consultation with the Ministry of Defence (MoD) was sought to clarify turbine positions and discuss potential mitigation in respect of MoD's interests. The Applicant will agree a suitable aviation lighting scheme with the MoD given that the Development is located within an area designated as a low flying area.
- *Other communications installations, or the quality of radio or TV reception:* A desk-based assessment and consultation was carried out to collect baseline data. The Applicant also undertook a TV signal strength survey of the most populated areas served by the Rosemarkie Transmitter. No effects are predicted on telecommunication, television or radio signals resulting from the Development therefore no mitigation is proposed.
- *Amenity of users of any core path or other established public access for walking, cycling or horse riding*: There are no core paths within the site boundary that will be affected by the Development. Core paths are located to the south of the site in the Brora valley. Intermittent significant landscape and visual effects are predicted on approximately 5.6km of core path SU06.02 on the west side of Loch Brora; intermittent significant effects are predicted on approximately 300m of core path SU06.14 on the east side of Loch Brora. There are no formal cycleways or equestrian routes within the site boundary. If paths within, or in the vicinity of, the site have to be closed temporarily during construction, operation or decommissioning then diversions with appropriate signage will be put in place. Information will also be provided, via a community liaison officer, for local users regarding construction or decommissioning activity to reduce any effects experienced. If diversions of rights of way are required these will be applied for

under the appropriate legislation. The only National Cycle Route (NCR) to cross the northern Highlands is NCR 1, which runs the length of the UK from Lands End to John O' Groats. The northern section of this route goes from Bonar Bridge, through Lairg and onto Tongue. This section of the route represents less than 3% of the total 2,740km covered by the route therefore it is reasonable to expect that the route would be reasonably insensitive to the Development.

- *Tourism and Recreation Interests:* The study area for the tourism and recreational assessment in ES Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Tourism is a 20km radius from the outermost turbines of the Development. In terms of residual effects, neither the assessment of potential socio-economic effects nor the assessment of potential tourism/recreational effects identified any significant effects arising from the Development.

  In terms of the cumulative effect of the Development on tourism receptors, this would be dependent on the visual impact of the Development, as assessed in ES Chapter 7. The cumulative visual impact assessment found no significant effects of relevance to tourism resources and so there is no reason to expect that the cumulative impact on tourism or recreation would be significant.

  Potential impacts on the local tourism sector were considered as part of the Environmental Statement that was prepared to support the Section 36 application for the now operational Gordonbush Wind Farm when submitted in 2003. This assessment concluded that any effect the wind farm might have on the local tourism industry would be insignificant. The top five visitor attractions in the Highlands are all more than 100km from the Development and were therefore discounted from the scope of this assessment. In terms of the local and regional tourist attractions, as is shown in ES Chapter 14, there are 12 identified tourist attractions within 20 km of the Development, none of which are less than 5km from the Development and are all, with the exception of Dunrobin Castle (regional), of Local importance. The Development will not have a significant effect on these tourist attractions.

- *Land and water based traffic and transportation interests:* The main traffic and transport effects relating to the Development will be associated with the movements of HGV-traffic during the construction period. During construction, vehicles will access the site transporting construction staff, construction materials (aggregates, steel bar etc.), plant items and turbine components. ES Chapter 12: Access, Traffic and Transport concludes that a significant amount of material will be sourced from borrow pits on site and concrete will be batched on site, which will significantly reduce transport requirements. Once the wind farm is operational, it is envisaged that the amount of traffic associated with the Development will be minimal. A number of mitigation measures are proposed to reduce the adverse effects of the construction traffic including traffic management measures and communications protocol. The assessment concludes that no significant detrimental effects are predicted as a result of construction traffic associated with the Development. Additionally, a cumulative assessment was also undertaken which concluded there would be no significant effects predicted on the local roads network.

5.3.9 The design iteration process has addressed any potential significant effects either through design changes or the introduction of mitigation measures in order to reduce or eliminate any significant adverse effects of the Development. The effect the Development may have has been assessed in detail as described in the ES. Each criterion that may determine the

impact of a development has been discussed in detail above and it can be concluded that although the Development will have some significant visual and landscape character effects and cultural heritage setting impacts, these should not be prohibitive.

**Sustainable Development Policy**

5.3.10 *Policy 28 – Sustainable Design* states that the Council will support development which promotes and enhances the social, economic and environmental wellbeing of the people of Highland. A number of criteria are listed and those that are relevant to the Development are set out below. The policy states that developments will be assessed on the extent to which they:

- *are compatible with public service provision (water and sewerage, drainage, roads, schools, electricity);* The Development is compatible with public service provision in that the development will generate up to 56 MW of renewable electricity. 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 Development to the adjacent existing 275 kV transmission line. In terms of roads, generally a wind farm development does not generate high volumes of traffic during the operational phase, traffic movements will however increase during the construction period. A transport assessment has been carried out and is reported in ES Chapter 12: Access, Traffic and Transport which concludes that 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.
- *are accessible by public transport, cycling and walking as well as car;* a wind farm is the type of development requiring a remote location and so the site is not readily accessible by public transport. During the operational phase of the Development the number of people requiring access on a daily basis will be low and limited to operational and maintenance staff. It is not anticipated that the wind farm will become a visitor attraction and as such movements to and from the site would be too low to justify a viable public transport option.
- *maximise energy efficiency in terms of location, layout and design, including the utilisation of renewable sources of energy and heat;* the Development seeks to generate renewable electricity and maximises its capacity through the site selection, layout and design of the site as described in ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives.
- *are affected by physical constraints described in Physical Constraints on Development: Supplementary Guidance;* the Development does not affect the physical constraints identified in the guidance, refer to Section 6 of this statement for more details.
- *make use of brownfield sites, existing buildings and recycled materials;* the site does not consist of brownfield land and this is not usually feasible for commercial scale wind farms. However, the site benefits from utilising existing operational facilities and infrastructure associated with the existing wind farm whilst minimising additional effects when compared to a new site for a project of a similar size.
- *demonstrate that they have sought to minimise the generation of waste during the construction and operational phases;* the amount of waste generated by the Development will be minimised through implementation of a CEMP. A CEMP for the

operational Gordonbush Wind Farm was put in place during the construction of that scheme following agreement with The Highland Council, SNH and SEPA. The same principles of this CEMP would be adopted for Gordonbush Extension; however, new best practice techniques and lessons learned from the operational scheme would be incorporated. Waste management is addressed in detail in the CEMP. Wherever possible, excavated stone or soils would be reused on site, primarily for reinstatement of disturbed ground.

- *impact on individual and community residential amenity;* there are no residential properties located within the site. No significant effects are predicted in terms of noise on the nearest residential properties (approximately 2km from the site). None of the residential properties will be affected by shadow flicker. No significant detrimental effects are predicted on local communities as a result of traffic associated with the Development.
- *impact on non-renewable resources such as mineral deposits of potential commercial value, prime quality agricultural land, or approved routes for road and rail links;* the site has no mineral deposits of potential commercial value nor does it affect any prime agricultural land. There are not any approved roads or rail links within or near the site that may be affected by the Development.
- *impact on the following resources, including pollution and discharges, particularly within designated areas:*
    - *habitats;*
    - *freshwater systems;*
    - *species;*
    - *marine systems;*
    - *landscape;*
    - *cultural heritage;*
    - *scenery; and*
    - *air quality.*

The effects of the Development in terms of pollution, discharges and designated areas have been assessed in detail and are reported in the ES. Design iterations have minimised the effect of the Development on the landscape, visual, cultural heritage and habitats and species whilst mitigation measures have been developed to limit the effects on habitats, species and freshwater systems during the construction phase. However, some significant effects in terms of visual impact, effects on landscape character areas and impact on the setting of two SMs will remain.

- *demonstrate sensitive siting and high quality design in keeping with local character and historic and natural environment and in making use of appropriate materials;* the site layout has been designed to minimise the effect on the local character and the wider historic and natural environment. This is described in detail in ES Chapters 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment and 11: Cultural Heritage.
- *contribute to the economic and social development of the community;* the Development will create a number of jobs either as a direct result of the construction of the wind farm

or through the operational phase. These benefits are described in ES Chapter 14: Socio-Economic and Tourism.

5.3.11 Policy 28 also states *'All development proposals must demonstrate compatibility with the Sustainable Design Guide.'* This design guide accompanies the HWLDP and contains a checklist setting out minimum standards in terms of building design. The guide sets out how a sustainable approach to new development can be implemented in terms of conserving the character of the Highland area, using resources efficiently, minimising the environmental effects of development and enhancing the viability of the Highland communities. All these elements have been given full consideration through the design iteration process as described in ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives, and Appendix 3.1: Design Statement.

**Landscape and Visual Policy**

5.3.12 This section of the statement addresses landscape and visual related policies. The landscape and visual effects associated with the Development are identified in ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment.

5.3.13 As outlined in ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives (see also Appendix 3.1: Design Statement) an iterative design process was undertaken in formulating a design for the Development, whereby potentially adverse effects can be identified during the design process allowing design modifications to reduce or mitigate these effects as far as reasonably practical. Some landscape and visual effects are inevitable as a result of commercial scale wind farm developments. The site selection criteria and the design iteration process examined landscape and visual sensitivity and sought to protect important views and reduce the potential for significant effect to the south of the Strath, particularly the impact along Strath Brora, and on Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA and Ben Klibreck – Ben Armine WLA. The final proposed turbine layout has been subject to various design and layout iterations to reduce any potential effects.

5.3.14 The methodology followed in the ES is not repeated in detail in this statement, however, it is important to note that while there are no statutory or local designations with regard to landscape character or visual amenity within the application site, the study assessed effects upon those designated areas and visual receptors across an area of 35km from the nearest turbine in the Development that were predicted to receive a significant effect.

5.3.15 The following landscape and visual policies are contained within the HWLDP and are relevant to the Development:

<u>Policy 36 – Development in the Wider Countryside</u>

5.3.16 This policy states that outwith Settlement Development Areas, development proposals will be assessed for the extent to which they:

- *are acceptable in terms of siting and design;* the design iteration process and consultation that was undertaken with The Highland Council, SNH, SEPA, Community Councils and the public has sought to deliver a development that relates to the site and will accommodate its current and planned use. This process of design iterations and consultations has led to the removal of four turbines from the initial design of 20 to a

more concentrated group of 16 turbines, which in turn resulted in a significant reduction in terms of the potential landscape and visual effects of the Development on the local and wider environment. The Development is located within the Stage 3: Areas of Search identified in The Highland Council ISGOWE which has determined the location to be suitable for wind farm development. The design iteration process has been described in the Design Statement (see ES Appendix 3.1) and details of the consultation process have been reported in the Community Consultation Report (see Appendix 6.3 of the ES).

- *are sympathetic to existing patterns of development in the area;* As reported in ES Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Tourism, the surrounding area is one of the most sparsely populated areas of Scotland and has a comparatively elderly population. The local area also has a more limited range of employment opportunities compared with the Highlands as a whole and is highly dependent on employment associated with the decommissioning of the Dounreay Nuclear Plant, which will decrease substantially over the next decade. Therefore, for the local economy, the scale of the project would be relatively large. This suggests that the creation or loss of even a small number of jobs could have a significant effect on the local economy.
- *are compatible with landscape character and capacity;* the site is located within the area of search for onshore wind farms that was approved by The Highland Council indicating that the area has the capacity to absorb the development. ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual concludes that the reduction from 20 to 16 turbines has reduced the potential for significant effects to arise to the south within Strath Brora. Additionally, the layout design has achieved a high level of integration with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm, and this has been fundamental in the avoidance and reduction of effects on the landscape and visual resource.
- *avoid incremental expansion of one particular development type within a landscape whose distinct character relies on an intrinsic mix/distribution of a range of characteristics;* the appearance of the development in combination with other wind farm developments in the study area has been considered in the cumulative assessment reported in ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment. The cumulative assessment concludes that the addition of the Development to operational and consented wind farms would result in significant cumulative effects on the landscape character of small parts of Strath Brora, including one very small part of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA; the minor road from Brora to Rogart, travelling in either direction; and on the view from Creag nam Fiadh. The consideration of application stage wind farms does not lead to any additional significant cumulative effects.
- *avoid, where possible, the loss of locally important croft land;* the site is part of the Gordonbush Estate which is not crofting land.
- *would address drainage constraints and can otherwise be adequately serviced, particularly in terms of foul drainage, road access and water supply, without involving undue public expenditure or infrastructure that would be out of keeping with the rural character of the area.* The Development has been designed addressing any drainage constraints and these measures have been described in ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology, with one licensed surface water abstraction and six private water supplies identified within 5km of the Development site boundary. None of these would be affected by the Development.

5.3.17 In terms of renewable energy, Policy 36 states that proposals will be assessed against the

Renewable Energy Policies, the non-statutory Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and where appropriate the Onshore Wind energy Interim Supplementary Guidance document. Renewable energy policies and the potential effects of the development on landscape policies have been discussed in section 5.3.5 – 5.3.8 of this statement. The Interim Supplementary Guidance Onshore Wind Energy is discussed in Section 6 below.

- *Policy 51 – Trees and Development: The Council will support development that promotes significant protection to existing hedges, trees and woodland on and around development sites.*
- *Policy 52 – Principle of Development in Woodland; The Council will maintain a presumption in favour of protecting woodland resources and development proposals will only be supported where they offer clear and significant public benefit. The Council will consider major developments against their socio economic impact on the forestry industry within the locality, the economic maturity of the woodland, and the opportunity for the proposals to coexist with forestry operations.*

5.3.18 As detailed in ES Chapter 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation and as can be seen in Figure 2: Proposed Development, the Development has been designed to incorporate existing and planned access tracks to reduce environmental effects by limiting the amount of new infrastructure required and therefore does not require any forestry clearance. Further to this, an overarching Habitat Management Plan is being implemented by the Applicant on Gordonbush Estate. The Development can coexist with current neighbouring forestry operations and is therefore in accordance with policies 51 and 52.

Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage

5.3.19 This policy sets out the test against which all development which affects natural, cultural and built heritage features must be assessed. All development proposals will be assessed taking into account the level of importance and nature of heritage features, the nature and scale of development, and any effect of the feature and its setting.

- *For features of local/regional importance, developments will be allowed if it can be demonstrated that the development will not have an unacceptable impact on natural environment, amenity and heritage resources.*

5.3.20 ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment describes the assessment of all designated local and regional sites. The design process for the Development has been fundamental in the mitigation of potential significant effects, with the scoping layout of 20 wind turbines being reduced to 16 wind turbines reducing the potential for significant effects to arise within and to the south of the strath. The final layout design has also achieved a high level of integration with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm, and this has been fundamental in the avoidance and reduction of effects on the landscape and visual resource. The cumulative assessment indicates that the addition of the Development to operational and consented wind farms would result in significant cumulative effects on the landscape character of small parts of Strath Brora, including one very small part of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA; the minor road from Brora to Rogart, travelling in either direction; and on the view from Creag nam Fiadh. The consideration of application stage wind farms does not lead to any additional significant cumulative effects.

- *For features of national importance we will allow developments that can be shown not to compromise the natural environment, amenity and heritage resource. Any significant*

*adverse effects must be outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. It must also be shown that the development will support communities in fragile areas who are having difficulties in keeping their population and services.*

5.3.21 There is one National Scenic Area (NSA) (the Dornoch Firth NSA, which lies to the south of the Development) and six inventoried Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs) within the study area that was considered in the LVIA. The ZTV indicates some limited visibility of the Development from the eastern end of the Dornoch Firth NSA, a minimum of around 23km away. The Development may have some influence on the NSA but this will not be significant due to the limited level of visibility and the distance at which the Development would be seen.

5.3.22 There is no visibility of the Development from Dunbeath Castle, Kildonan Lodge, Langwell Lodge or Skibo Castle, and these GDLs are discounted from the assessment. There is some limited visibility from the eastern extremity of Dunrobin Castle, a minimum of approximately 10km away, but the affected areas are covered by woodland and are unlikely to undergo any notable effect as a result of the Development. The landform of these areas is also orientated away from the Development. There is also some visibility from House of the Geanies, but at over 33km away this will not have a significant effect on the landscape character of the GDL.

- *For features of international importance developments likely to have a significant effect on a site either alone or in combination with other plans or projects will be subject to an appropriate assessment. Where a priority habitat or species would be affected development will only be allowed for reasons of overriding public interest.*

5.3.23 There are no international designations relevant to landscape and visual features within or near the study area.

<u>Policy 61 – Landscape;</u>

5.3.24 This policy states that *'proposals should relate to the landscape characteristics and special qualities of the area in which it is proposed also taking into account cumulative effects where these occur. Landscape Character Assessments and the Council's Supplementary Guidance on Sustainable Design should be taken into account, in addition to relevant capacity studies, design guides and Supplementary Guidance'.*

5.3.25 There are no designated landscapes covering the Development site. There are several designated landscapes across the wider 35km radius study area. The layout for the wind farm has been developed through a number of design iterations and following consultation with the Council and SNH the extent of the Development has been reduced to mitigate against potential landscape and visual effects. The LVIA described in ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment concludes that some limited parts of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA (a minimum of 1.6km from the Development) would have significant effects, but there would be no significant effects on wild land areas (WLA), National Scenic Areas (NSA) or any other SLA'S in the study area. These effects have been summarised in section 5.3.8 of this statement.

**Ornithology, Ecology and Nature Conservation Policy**

5.3.26 ES Chapter 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation and ES Chapter 10: Ornithology are of relevance to policies under this heading. There are no designated sites within the Development boundary but two designated sites within 5 km of the site, Coir' an Eoin SSSI to the west, which is part of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Area of Conservation (SAC), and Carrol Rock SSSI on the south-westerly shore of Loch Brora. The latter being designated for its botanical importance while Coir' an Eoin designation is primarily associated with the presence of Annex 1 habitats, namely Blanket bogs.

5.3.27 The Development lies immediately to the south-east of the Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands Special Protection Area (SPA). The SPA qualifies under Article 4.1 of the EU Birds Directive (79/409/EEC) by supporting populations of European importance of the following species listed on Annex I of the Directive: black-throated diver; golden eagle; golden plover; hen harrier; merlin; red-throated diver; short-eared owl; and wood sandpiper.

5.3.28 There are designated conservation sites located within 10km of the application boundary. Surveys were undertaken for mammals, reptiles, fish habitat, terrestrial invertebrates during 2010 and 2011 to assess the likelihood of presence of protected species. This included an extended Phase 1 habitat survey and National Vegetation Classification (NVC) survey. Five UK BAP animal species (otter, water vole, bat, Atlantic salmon and brown trout) were identified from the Development site or its environs. Otter signs, including shelters, were restricted to the two watercourses just beyond the Development site boundaries, the Allt a'Mhuilinn and the Allt Smeorail, and the lower part of the Allt nan Nathraichean in the north-west of the site. No otter natal (breeding) holts were identified. Apart from the Baden Burn in the east of the site, water vole evidences were restricted to tributaries on the western and south eastern site boundaries. No bat roosts were recorded on site, the nearest being a ruined cottage just beyond the south- east corner of the site, with several potential roosts identified in buildings in the Strath below. Bat activity on site was very low, with most bat flights occurring in the tributary valleys and edges of plantation blocks beyond the site boundaries. The other mammal species recorded on site was pine marten, with activity recorded from the plantation blocks in the south-east corner of the site and the Allt Smeorail valley, but with no dens recorded. In terms of the water environment, the only fish species identified in the streams draining directly from the Development site was brown trout. Waterfalls and a dam restrict the migratory flow, some 2km downstream of the nearest proposed wind turbine. No Freshwater Pearl Mussel's (FWPM) were found within either the Allt a'Mhuilinn or Allt Smeorail watercourses.

5.3.29 Ornithological surveys have indicated no raptors were found to be breeding within 2km of the site boundary. No qualifying species of the nearby Caithness and Sutherland Peatlands SPA were found to be using the Development site. In particular, no golden plovers (a qualifying species of the SPA), were recorded foraging on the Development site and only one short flight by this species was seen on the site during vantage point observations. The bird species found breeding in the survey area were considered to be of Local or Low conservation value, with the exception of the skylark, which was considered to have a site population of Regional conservation value.

5.3.30 Four policies are relevant in terms of protected species and habitats, as follows:

- *Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage (the provisions of which are summarised under landscape and visual policy).*

- *Policy 58 – Protected Species; This policy sets out that 'where the development may affect a protected species surveys will need to be carried out and mitigation plan may need to be prepared to avoid any impacts on the species from the development. Generally, development that is likely to have an adverse effect individually or cumulatively will normally only be allowed where there is no satisfactory alternative, the development is required for the preservation of public health or other reasons of overriding public interest and the development will not be detrimental to the maintenance of the population of the species concerned.'*
- *Policy 59 – Other Important Species; This policy concerns other important species and states that 'development proposals should avoid adverse effects, individually and/or cumulatively on the following categories of species if not protected by other legislation or by nature conservation site designations:*
    - *Species listed in Annexes II and V of the EC Habitats Directive;*
    - *Priority species listed in the UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans; and*
    - *Species included on the Scottish Biodiversity List.*
- *Conditions and agreements will be used to ensure detrimental effect on these species is avoided.*
- *Policy 60 – Other Important Habitats and Article 10 Features; This policy seeks to safeguard other important habitats such as landscape features that provide 'stepping stones' for the movement of flora and fauna. The Council will have regard to these features where they are not protected by designations. Habitats that may be affected individually and/or cumulatively:*
    - *Habitats listed in Annex I of the EC Habitats Directive;*
    - *Habitats of priority and protected bird species (see Glossary);*
    - *Priority habitats listed in the UK and Local Biodiversity Action Plans; and*
    - *Habitats of principal importance included on the Scottish Biodiversity List.*
- *Conditions and agreements will be used to ensure detrimental effect on these habitats is avoided. Suitable mitigation measures must be put in place where reasons for a development clearly outweigh the desirability of retaining these important habitats.*

5.3.31 No significant effects on designated sites, birds, mammals, reptiles, fish and invertebrates are predicted subject to important mitigation measures being fully implemented. For example, pre-construction surveys will be carried out to mitigate against the potential destruction or disturbance of otter, water vole, pine marten, wildcat, badger and reptile and potential bird nesting sites. In addition a 50m exclusion zone will be maintained between working areas, machinery and watercourses (except watercourse crossing points) and this will ensure that there are no insurmountable physical barriers to otter, water vole and fish movements in important watercourses within the site boundary. Detailed pollution prevention measures are included as part of the draft CEMP (ES Appendix 4.1). Infrastructure will be micro-sited which will enable the appointed Ecological Clerk of Works (ECoW) to identify and avoid sensitive habitats when laying down routes. Floating tracks will be constructed where required.

5.3.32 Habitat loss would occur during the construction and operational phase. Direct habitat loss for each habitat impacted, covering tracks, crane pads, turbine bases and the construction

compound, plus the percentage loss of each respective habitat, and overall habitat, within the study area is reported in ES Chapter 8. Habitat on site is dominated by wet heath and blanket bog habitats. Whilst minor habitat losses would occur, the final design does take cognisance of habitat sensitivity and potential construction effects on blanket bog habitats were reduced by the final design layout avoiding sensitive habitat areas where possible. By applying effective mitigation measures the ES identifies that there will be no significant adverse effects on any habitats and protected species.

5.3.33 Assessment of effects on statutory designated sites (see paragraph 5.3.26 and 5.3.27) showed that, after mitigation is taken into account, residual effects are not significant.

5.3.34 The Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policies 57 to 60.

**Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology**

5.3.35 Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology is considered in ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology.

5.3.36 The policies from the HWLDP that are relevant are:

Policy 53 – Minerals

5.3.37 This policy states that the Council will support borrow pits which are near to or on the site of the associated development if it can be demonstrated that they are the most suitable source of material, are time limited and appropriate environmental safeguards are in place for the workings and the reclamation.

5.3.38 The Development will extend and reuse the two existing borrow pits that were developed for the current Gordonbush Wind Farm and are retained within the site boundary therefore minimising geological and ecological impacts. The borrow pits will be used to extract stone for the construction of access tracks and surface course, structural fill beneath turbine foundations, and hard-standings at turbine bases and temporary construction compound. Using on site borrow pits will reduce the haulage distances required. The use of on-site borrow pits is considered to be accordance with Policy 53.

Policy 55 – Peat and Soils

5.3.39 Development proposals should demonstrate how they have avoided unnecessary disturbance, degradation or erosion of peat and soils. Where development on peat is unavoidable the council may ask for a peat-land management plan which should clearly state how impacts have been minimised and mitigated.

5.3.40 The turbine layout has been designed, wherever possible, to avoid areas of major and moderate significance in terms of peat stability. A peat depth survey was undertaken to identify peat depths and to inform a layout which minimises peat slide risk where practicable. Results indicate that the majority of the site comprises of peat <1m in depth; however, pockets of deeper peat (>2m) do exist, and these areas were taken into consideration and avoided during the design process. In addition, the ground conditions determined the design of the new access track and whether they would be cut design or float design.

5.3.41 In addition to mitigation proposed in ES Chapter 9, a draft Peat Management Plan (PMP) is provided in ES Appendix 9.3. The draft PMP includes the following information:

- an overview of peat conditions on-site;
- the activities that will require peat excavation along with associated volumes;
- the classification of this peat and its suitability for re-use;
- identification of restoration and reinstatement options including the volumes of peat required and the likely source; and
- details on the handling and storage of excavated peat.

5.3.42 Best practice measures to mitigate against all potential effects during the construction, operation and decommissioning phases have been outlined. In order to ensure that these measures are carried out, a CEMP will be drawn up and adhered to by all site contractors. A draft CEMP is included in ES Appendix 4.1. With the adoption of the proposed mitigation measures, the Development has been assessed as having the potential to give rise to no significant effects on peat and soil in terms of the EIA Regulations. The Development therefore is compliant with Policy 55.

**Surface Water Policy**

5.3.43 Surface water issues are assessed in ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology. The site and surrounding area can be split into two catchment areas based on the surface topography and drainage patterns. These are the Allt a' Mhuilinn catchment, draining the west of the site and the Allt Smeorail catchment, draining the east of the site. Both catchments are tributaries of the River Brora to the south, which flows in an easterly direction and discharges to the sea at Brora. The River Brora is an important salmonid fishery and has good overall water quality.

5.3.44 One licensed surface water abstraction and six private water supplies have been identified within 5km of the Development site boundary. None of these water supplies will be impacted by the Development.

<u>Policy 63 – Water Environment</u>

5.3.45 This policy relates to the water environment and states that proposals that will not compromise the objectives of the Water Framework Directive will be supported. The Council will also take into account the River Basin Management Plan for the Scotland River Basin District and associated Area Management Plans.

5.3.46 The potential for effects on the surface water environment is highest during the construction phase when there would be most activity on-site and include changes to natural drainage patterns, effects on runoff, erosion and sedimentation, and risk of pollution incidents. Mitigation measures outlined in ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology would prevent, reduce or offset the effects on the receiving water environment. These mitigation measures will be included in the CEMP to be developed by contractors, which shall also include a site Pollution Prevention Plan which to control activities during the construction phase (see ES Appendix 4.1: Draft CEMP). An Environmental Incident Plan or similar would be implemented during the operational phase of the Development. The protection of groundwater and surface water quality as required

by the EC Water Framework Directive (2000/60/EC) and the classification of the underlying Northern Highlands Drinking Water Protection Area as being of 'Good' overall status. With the adoption of the proposed mitigation measures, no significant effects are predicted as a result of the Development.

Policy 64 – Flood Risk

5.3.47 The flood risk policy states that development proposals should avoid areas that are susceptible to flooding and promote sustainable flood management. A Flood Risk Assessment or other suitable information demonstrating compliance with SPP may be required for development that is at risk of flooding.

5.3.48 There is no known or recorded history of flooding in the study area nor is it anticipated that the Development would increase the risk of flooding within or near the proposed site. As such it is considered that the Development is compliant with Policy 64.

Policy 66 – Surface Water Drainage

5.3.49 This policy states that all Development must be drained by Sustainable Drainage Systems (SuDS). Guidance contained within the SuDS Manual (CIRIA C697), the Sewers for Scotland Manual 2nd Edition and PAN 69: Planning and Building Standards Advice on Flooding paragraphs 23 and 24 should be taken into account.

5.3.50 An appropriate use of SUDs such as cut-off ditches and attenuation features will be incorporated into the overall development design in order to attenuate runoff rates and reduce runoff volumes to ensure minimal effect upon flood risk. All SUDS measures would be designed and implemented in consultation with SEPA and in accordance with CIRIA C697 (2007) 'The SUDS Manual'. Best practice and experience obtained from the design and construction of previous wind farm developments would also be applied. These measures would be determined prior to construction commencing in each area. These proposed measures are in accordance with Policy 66.

**Cultural Heritage and Archaeology Policy**

5.3.51 Cultural heritage is considered in detail in ES Chapter 11: Cultural heritage.

Policy 57 – Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage

5.3.52 This policy is relevant to cultural heritage and archaeology (refer to paragraph 5.3.19 of this Planning Statement for details, where the landscape aspects of this policy are discussed).

5.3.53 There are no SMs, LBs or statutory designated sites within the Development site boundary. A total of 12 SMs, five LBs and one Garden and Designed Landscape (GDL) are present within a 15km radius of the site boundary, although the closest asset is over 3km from the nearest turbine location. The assessment in ES Chapter 11 identifies that the majority of these would be unaffected, with direct impacts on only a few minor features of low sensitivity / local importance. The overall magnitude of direct impact on cultural heritage features is Low, and not significant. Of the 72 individual archaeological features identified in ES Chapter 11: Cultural Heritage, four features were deemed to be directly affected by the Development. These four features are all of Local Importance whilst the magnitude of impact is expected to be low with a negligible level of significance. The evaluation

concludes that there would be no significant direct impacts on the archaeological record or other cultural heritage resources as a result of the Development.

5.3.54 In addition, the Development lies within a wider area, Strath Brora and the surrounding high ground, which contains a number of cultural sites of national importance and with statutory protection. Significant indirect visual impacts are predicted at two SMs (Balnacoil Hill Cairn and Duchary Rock Fort). It is also predicted that the Development would add to the cumulative visual impact at Duchary Rock Fort and Kilbraur Hut Circle SMs.

5.3.55 Although a significant indirect impact is predicted on the setting of two SMs, the impact is considered to be acceptable in both cases as, although there will be a visual impact, this only takes the form of increasing the density and marginally increasing the visible extent of the existing group of turbines. None of the SMs are associated with significant visual relationships with other sites or natural features which would be interrupted by the Development. This should also be balanced against the benefits of the Development in terms of contributing towards national renewable energy targets. The Development is therefore considered to broadly accord with Policy 57.

**Noise Policy**

5.3.56 Noise is considered in Chapter 13 (Noise and Vibration) of the ES. Policy 72 of the HWLDP is relevant for noise pollution.

Policy 72 – Pollution

5.3.57 This policy relates to pollution including noise and states that proposals will only be approved where a detailed assessment is provided and mitigation measures are identified to reduce the impact. Independent monitoring may be required. Major developments are expected to follow a project environmental management process.

5.3.58 ES Chapter 13: Noise and Vibration states that the Development is ETSU-R-97 compliant, which is the commended standard in planning policy and guidance. It would result in a slight but not significant level of noise occurring during the construction phase and operational noise levels from the Development would be within levels accepted for wind energy schemes. Furthermore, noise matters can be controlled by means of conditions and appropriate mitigation as proposed within the ES. The Development is considered to be in accordance with the policies of the Development Plan with respect to noise.

**Access, Traffic and Transport Policy**

5.3.59 The traffic and transport policies of the Development are considered in detail in ES Chapter 12: Access, Traffic and Transport.

Policy 56 – Travel

5.3.60 This policy requires that development proposals are accompanied by a statement which will enable the Council to consider the likely on and off site transport implications of the development.

5.3.61 ES Chapter 12 examined the potential effects of the Development on transport in and out of the site. The main traffic and transport effects relating to the Development will be

associated with the movements of Heavy Goods Vehicles (HGVs) during the construction period. During construction, vehicles will require to access the site for the delivery of construction materials, plant items, turbine components and site staff, however, as significant amount of material will be sourced from borrow pits on site and concrete will be batched on site, which will significantly reduce transport requirements. A number of mitigation measures are also proposed to reduce the adverse effects of the construction traffic, including traffic management measures and communications protocols. Once the wind farm is operational, it is envisaged that the amount of traffic associated with the Development will be minimal, although regular visits will be made for maintenance checks. The likely routes to site by abnormal loads and construction traffic given consideration within the assessment are:

- the A9 Trunk Road;
- Clynelish Distillery Road; and
- C6 Strath Brora Road.

5.3.62 These are the same delivery routes used for the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm. The route was upgraded during the construction phase, and substantial works were undertaken on the public road network to accommodate the associated abnormal loads, including strengthening, reinforcement and widening of roads and bridges. Potential effects assessed include noise and vibration, air quality, visual effects, severance, pedestrian delay and amenity, accidents and safety, dust and dirt. No significant effects were assessed.

5.3.63 In addition, in order to ensure all mitigation measures outlined within this ES are carried out on site, contractors would be required to develop a Traffic Management Plan (as well as the CEMP) throughout the construction process.

5.3.64 The community will be consulted on proposed delivery movements to avoid HGV movements during school arrival and departure times and other key community dates. During construction of Gordonbush Wind Farm, the Applicant established a community liaison group which provided the local community with information about key construction activities and a mechanism by which concerns from the local community could be shared and discussed. This has been considered a success by the Applicant, the community and The Highland Council and such a group would be re-established during the construction of Gordonbush Extension, if consent is granted.

5.3.65 Based on existing traffic data and the estimated construction vehicle movements, the assessment concludes that no significant detrimental effects are predicted as a result of construction traffic associated with the Development. The Development is considered to be compliant with Policy 56.

**Socio-economic and Recreation Policy**

5.3.66 Realising sustainable economic development at the strategic and local level whilst maintaining and improving tourism and recreation assets is a key objective of the HWLDP.

Policy 77 – Public Access

5.3.67 Where a development proposal affects a core path or affects wider access rights the

Council may require the developer to submit an Access Plan, to ensure that access is maintained and is no less attractive and safe to use.

5.3.68 There are no core paths within the site boundary. Core paths are located to the south of the site in the Brora valley. These routes will not be directly or indirectly impacted from the Development during both operational and construction stages. There are no formal cycleways or equestrian routes within the site boundary. If paths in the vicinity of the site have to be closed temporarily during construction, operation or decommissioning then diversions with appropriate signage will be put in place. Information will also be provided for local users regarding construction or decommissioning activity to reduce any effects experienced. If diversions of rights of way are required these will be applied for under the appropriate legislation. The site itself will not be publicly accessible and will not impact on public rights of way.

Policy 78 – Long Distance Routes

5.3.69 This policy states that the Council will safeguard and seek to enhance long distance routes and their settings.

5.3.70 Scotland's Great Trails (formerly known as "Long Distance Routes") is a network of 26 nationally promoted trails in Scotland suitable for "people powered" journeys. Each trail is waymarked, largely off-road and is at least 25 miles long. None of these trails are located in the northern Highlands and therefore the policy is not specifically applicable. Additionally, in terms of cycling routes, the only National Cycle Route to cross the northern Highlands is NCR 1, which runs the length of the UK from Lands End to John O' Groats. The northern section of this route goes from Bonar Bridge, through Lairg and onto Tongue. This section of the route represents less than 3% of the total 2,740km covered by the route therefore the sensitivity of the route was assessed as low.

**Other Relevant Policies**

Policy 30 – Physical Constraints

5.3.71 This policy states that developers must consider whether their proposals would be located within areas of constraints as set out in the Supplementary Guidance: Physical Constraints. Where a proposal is affected by any of the constraints detailed within the guidance, developers must demonstrate compatibility with the constraint or outline appropriate mitigation.

5.3.72 This policy refers to the Physical Constraints SPG which is a material consideration and is discussed in Section 6 of this Statement. It is concluded that through careful design the Development is not affected by any of the constraints listed in the SPG.

## 5.4 Development Plan Conclusions

5.4.1 For this assessment, the relevant Development Plan policies have been identified and interpreted carefully with particular attention given to the detailed wording of policies. Policy 67 of the HWLDP requires that the contribution of the Development towards meeting renewable energy generation targets, and any effects the Development is likely to have on the local and national economy are balanced against policies of the Development Plan, the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines and other material

considerations. The policy also notes that the Council will support proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments. The assessment above has shown that the Development is in accordance with the aims and objectives and also the policies of the HWLDP. The design iteration process and the consultation process were undertaken concurrently, whereby consultation responses and technical assessments informed the scheme design. The visual impact of the scheme has been a major consideration throughout the development of the final layout. Regular consultation took place with The Highland Council, SNH, SEPA, Community Councils and the public. This process of design iterations and consultations and the results from the technical assessments has led to the removal, or reduction in height of a number of turbines from the initial design which in turn has resulted in a significant reduction in terms of the potential landscape and visual effects of the Development on the local and wider environment. The Applicant recognises that tourism is important to the regional and national economy; however, the Development is not expected to have any significant tourism effects.

5.4.2 Although some significant effects remain they are considered to be acceptable for the reason that the Development is located within the Broad Areas of Search which are described in The Highland Council's ISGOWE that has identified the location to be suitable for wind farm development. The ISGOWE states that significant effects on designated sites may be acceptable provided that these effects are outweighed by social or economic benefits of national importance. Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Tourism has noted that the Development will result in socio-economic benefits in terms of enhanced employment, supply chain and investment opportunities of local, regional and national significance.

5.4.3 The Development will contribute towards national targets to reduce emissions and increase the amount of energy generated by renewable resources providing up to 126MW in combination with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm. It is considered that there are clear benefits of national importance which provide support for the Development when balanced against the limited significant landscape and visual effects (including visual effects from two SMs) and as such it is considered that the Development accords with the detail of all development plan policies.

# 6 Material Considerations

## 6.1 Introduction

6.1.1 This Section of the statement provides an assessment of the Development against relevant material considerations. Material considerations include national planning policy and guidance produced by the Scottish Government and Supplementary Planning Guidance produced by The Highland Council. ES Chapter 5: Planning Policy Context sets out the relevant national planning policies, energy context, advice and guidance as relevant to the Development. The following section of this statement adds to this and discusses other relevant material considerations. This section summarises and refers to:

- National planning policy including the National Planning Framework 3 (NPF 3) and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP);
- Planning Advice Notes (PANs) and other relevant guidance; and
- Highland Council Supplementary Planning Guidance.

6.1.2 International, European and national agreements, legislation and policy statements in relation to climate change and the role of renewable energy reducing carbon dependency inform national and ultimately local planning policy and are therefore regarded as material considerations. These have been discussed in Section 2 of this Statement.

## 6.2 National Planning Policy and Guidance

**National Planning Framework 3**

6.2.1 NPF3 was laid in the Scottish Parliament on 23rd June 2014. This framework sets out a long term vision for the development of Scotland, with a focus on supporting sustainable economic growth and the transition to a low carbon economy. NPF3, which has replaced NPF2 (2009) is the statutory framework that informs development and investment decisions of the Scottish Government and guides Scotland's spatial development over the next 20 to 30 years. The central vision is set out over four key aspects; a successful, sustainable place; a low carbon place; a natural, resilient place; and a connected place. Paragraph 1.3 explains that the spatial strategy of the framework supports this vision by identifying *"where there will be opportunities for growth and regeneration, investment in the low carbon economy, environmental enhancement and improved connections across the country."*

6.2.2 In setting out strategic development priorities to support the Scottish Government's central purpose of promoting sustainable economic growth, the NPF3 seeks to encourage a greener Scotland. A key aim of the framework is that *"Natural and cultural assets are respected, they are improving in condition and represent a sustainable economic, environmental and social resource for the nation. Our environment and infrastructure have become more resilient to the impacts of climate change"* (Paragraph 1.2).

6.2.3 Within NPF3, the Scottish Government highlights its ambitions for Scotland as a whole, stating that: *"Great places support vibrant, empowered communities, and attract and retain a skilled workforce. Emerging technologies for renewable energy and improved digital connectivity are changing our understanding of what constitutes a sustainable community. We must ensure that development facilitates adaptation to climate change,*

*reduces resource consumption and lowers greenhouse gas emissions."* (Paragraph 2.7).

6.2.4 NPF3 is committed to achieving a low carbon place and seeks to achieve at least an 80% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Additionally, NPF3 aims to reduce the total final energy demand by 12% by 2020. Within this, the target is for 30% of overall energy demand (heat, transport and electricity) to be from renewables by 2020, including generating the equivalent of at least 100% of gross electricity consumption from renewables, with an interim target of 50% by 2015.

6.2.5 Paragraph 3.23 of NPF3 states the Scottish Government's position that *"Onshore wind will continue to make a significant contribution to diversification of energy supplies"*, but notes the role of Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) in setting out the approach to preparing spatial frameworks which will guide wind farm development to appropriate locations. It also states the Scottish Government's position that wind farms should be avoided in National Parks and National Scenic Areas. In line with reduction of social and spatial inequalities in Scotland, NPF3 aims to achieve at least 500 MW of renewable energy in community and local ownership by 2020 and work to secure greater benefits from commercial-scale developments.

6.2.6 It is evident from this document that the Scottish Government is committed to achieving its renewable energy targets and that onshore developments, such as the Development, can make key contributions to these targets.

**Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (June 2014)**

6.2.7 The latest SPP was published on 23rd June 2014 and sits alongside NPF3 as the current national land use planning guidance in Scotland. The updated SPP highlights the same four planning outcomes as NPF3, focusing on creating a place which is sustainable, low carbon, natural, resilient and more connected. The relevant subject policies are outlined below:

<u>Sustainability (Paragraphs 24-35)</u>

6.2.8 The SPP's central purpose is to focus government and public services on creating a more successful country through increasing sustainable economic growth. Among the biggest changes included in the latest version of SPP is the introduction of a presumption in favour of sustainable development as a *"significant material consideration"* where development plans are out of date or the plan does not contain policies relevant to the proposal.

6.2.9 Paragraph 27 states the following with regards to achieving sustainable development: *"The Government Economic Strategy indicates that sustainable economic growth is the key to unlocking Scotland's potential and outlines the multiple benefits of delivering the Government's purpose, including creating a supportive business environment, achieving a low carbon economy, tackling health and social problems, maintaining a high-quality environment and passing on a sustainable legacy for future generations".*

6.2.10 This can be achieved through the planning system by supporting economically, environmentally and socially sustainable places and responding to economic issues, challenges and opportunities.

6.2.11 SPP states that policies and decisions should be guided by a number of key principles. These include the supporting the delivery of energy infrastructure and supporting climate

change mitigation and adaptation.

Placemaking (Paragraphs 36-57)

6.2.12 SPP states that placemaking is a creative, collaborative process that includes design, development, renewal or regeneration of our urban or rural built environments. Planning should take every opportunity to create high quality places by taking a design-led approach through the joint consideration of the relationships between higher quality places. Placemaking is supported through, amongst others, optimising the use of existing resources, using land within or adjacent to settlements for a mix of uses, developing brownfield land and locating development where investment in growth or improvement would have most benefit.

Promoting Rural Development (Paragraphs 74 – 91)

6.2.13 The SPP emphases the importance of supporting sustainable economic growth within rural areas and it is identified that the planning system has a large role to play in achieving this. Paragraph 93 states that the Development Plan should reflect the *'overarching aim of supporting diversification and growth in the rural economy'.*

6.2.14 Good quality design and high environmental standards are required for rural development and paragraph 95 states that *'All new development should respond to the specific local character of the location, fit in with the landscape and seek to achieve high design and environmental standards, particularly in relation to energy efficiency'.*

6.2.15 The Development is not located on prime agricultural land. It will provide investment in the local area and support sustainable economic growth within a rural area.

Valuing the Historic Environment (Paragraphs 135 – 151)

6.2.16 The SPP sets out the Scottish Government's policy on the protection, conservation and enhancement of the historic environment which includes SMs, archaeological sites and landscapes, historic buildings, townscapes, parks, gardens and designed landscapes and other features. Non-designated sites as well as designated sites are considered in the SPP as an important element of Scotland's heritage which contributes to national identity.

6.2.17 An assessment of the cultural heritage effects is provided in relation to the Development Plan. As discussed in Section 5 of this statement, the siting of the turbines and infrastructure has been designed to avoid, as far as possible, any significant direct residual effects on known cultural heritage sites. It is reported in the ES that residual significant effects on the setting of two SMs are predicted which are considered as significant in the context of the EIA Regulations, and therefore there is potential non-compliance with policy. However the visibility of parts of the Development from these assets will not detract from an understanding of them. In addition the effects on setting, whilst long term, are not permanent and will be removed upon future decommissioning of the Development.

Delivering Heat and Electricity (Paragraphs 152-174)

6.2.18 SPP recognises that the planning system has a role to play in supporting transformational change to a low carbon economy and in meeting national objectives and targets. National policy supports the full range of renewable energy technologies available.

6.2.19 Scottish Government policy is to generate the equivalent of 100% of Scotland's gross annual electricity consumption and the equivalent of 11% of Scotland's heat demand from renewable sources by 2020. The Development will contribute to delivering the policy intention of SPP policy on renewable energy, by contributing to the 2020 target.

6.2.20 The SPP contains thematic policy on renewable energy and sets out the Scottish Ministers' commitment to increasing the amount of electricity generated from renewable sources. It reiterates the Scottish Government's target for 2020 as 30% of overall energy demand to be generated by renewable resources, with hydro-electric and onshore wind power expected to remain the main sources of renewable energy supply.

6.2.21 Paragraph 155 of the SPP states that development plans should seek to ensure that an area's full potential for renewable energy is achieved, giving due regard to relevant environmental, community and cumulative impact considerations. Paragraph 156 states that strategic development plans should support national priorities and address cross-boundary issues.

6.2.22 The SPP also advises that development plans should support all scales of development associated with the generation of energy and heat from renewable sources, ensuring that an area's renewable energy potential is realised and optimised in a way that takes account of relevant economic, social, environmental and transport issues and maximises benefits.

6.2.23 In terms of onshore wind, the updated SPP notes that planning authorities should set out in the development plan a spatial framework identifying those areas that are likely to be most appropriate for onshore wind farms as a guide for development and support the development of wind farms in locations where technology can operate efficiently. To provide guidance on appropriate locations, a spatial framework is included in the SPP which sets out three groups. Group 1 contains areas where wind farms will not be accepted (National Parks and National Scenic Areas); Group 2 lists areas of significant protection including international and national environmental designated areas where wind developments may be appropriate subject to any significant effects on the qualities of the areas being overcome; and Group 3 includes sites that would be acceptable for wind farms subject to detailed consideration against identified policy criteria.

6.2.24 The Development is not sited with a protected area and therefore would constitute development under Group 3. It can be noted that this spatial framework updates previous SPP guidance to identify areas of search and post-dates the provisions of the adopted HWLDP and the ISGOWE. As referred to in paragraph 6.5.10 below The Highland Council is currently consulting on updated supplementary guidance to take cognisance of this updated national guidance.

<u>Landscape and Natural Heritage Valuing the Natural Environment (Paragraphs 193 – 218)</u>

6.2.25 The SPP provides policy guidance for the conservation, enhancement and sustainable use of Scotland's landscape and natural heritage. Planning Authorities are directed to take a broader approach to landscape and natural heritage than just conserving designated sites and species.

6.2.26 SPP indicates that planning authorities should conserve and enhance international, national and locally designated sites and protected species, taking account of the need to maintain healthy ecosystems and work with the natural processes which provide important services

to communities. Plans should address potential effects of development on the natural environment and authorities should apply the precautionary principle where the impacts of a Development on nationally or internationally significant landscape or natural heritage resources are uncertain but there is sound evidence indicating that significant irreversible damage could occur.

6.2.27 As discussed previously in Section 5 of this statement, potential effects on natural heritage designations are considered within ES Chapters 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation and Chapter 10: Ornithology. The assessments conclude that no significant residual effects are predicted to occur on any habitats or species.

6.2.28 ES Chapter 7: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment notes there are no designated landscapes covering the Development site. Designated landscapes across the wider 35km radius study area have been considered in the assessment which concluded that there are potential significant effects on a small part of one local landscape designation; Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA as a result of the Development. As discussed previously, the cumulative assessment indicates that the addition of the Development to operational and consented wind farms would result in significant cumulative effects on the landscape character of small parts of Strath Brora, including one very small part of the Loch Fleet, Loch Brora and Glen Loth SLA; the minor road from Brora to Rogart, travelling in either direction; and on the view from Creag nam Fiadh. The consideration of application stage wind farms does not lead to any additional significant cumulative effects.

6.2.29 The design iteration process has sought to minimise the effects of the Development on the landscape through significantly reducing the size and extent of the Development. Although limited significant effects remain these are not considered to be prohibitive.

Flood Risk and Drainage (Paragraphs 254-268)

6.2.30 SPP sets out a precautionary approach to flood risk from all sources by safeguarding flood storage and conveying capacity. Planning authorities are required to take into account probability of flooding and associated risks when determining planning applications and preparing development plans, and developers should take flood risk into account prior to committing to development.

6.2.31 Flooding and tidal inundation are not potential concerns at the location of the Development site and therefore there is no potential source of flood risk to the Development site. ES Chapter 9:Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology of the ES describes the drainage mitigation measures proposed to ensure that potential increases in flooding downstream are minimised, including preventing surface water from draining directly into watercourses, and also providing silt traps, settlement ponds and buffer strips to attenuate peak flows. The residual effects on the hydrological and water quality regime are assessed as not significant in the context of the EIA Regulations. Consequently the Development is compliant with SPP in this respect.

Promoting Sustainable Transport and Active Travel (Paragraphs 269 – 291)

6.2.32 SPP sets out planning policy on sustainable transport to optimise the use of existing infrastructure and reduce the need to travel by providing safe and convenient opportunities for walking, cycling and travel by public transport. The design of the Development including internal and external access proposals have been considered in detail and the assessment is provided in the ES Chapter 12: Access, Traffic and Transport.

This concludes that the potential for effects on transport are primarily identified during the construction period and that provided the mitigation measures proposed in Chapter 12 are implemented there are no significant effects predicted.

6.2.33 As discussed in paragraph 5.3.59 of this statement, during the operational phase of the Development the number of people requiring access on a daily basis will be low and limited to operational and maintenance staff. It is not anticipated that the wind farm will become a visitor attraction and as such movements to and from the site would be too low to justify a viable public transport option.

## 6.3 Planning Advice Notes

6.3.1 Table 6.1 lists additional PANs of relevance to this planning application which have been taken into account.

**Table 6.1 Other Relevant Planning Policy Guidance and Advice**

| |
|---|
| The Importance of Design |
| PAN 68: Design Statements (2003) |
| Engaging with Local Communities |
| PAN 3/2010: Community Engagement |
| Renewable Energy and Wind Energy |
| Specific Advice Sheet: Process for preparing spatial frameworks for wind farms (2011) |
| Specific Advice Sheet: Onshore wind turbines (2011) |
| Landscape and Visual Effects |
| PAN 60: Planning for Natural Heritage (2000) |
| Ecology (including Ornithology where applicable) |
| PAN 51: Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation (revised 2006) |
| PAN 60: Planning for Natural Heritage (2000) |
| Traffic, Access and Transport |
| PAN 75: Planning for Transport (2005) |
| Archaeology and Cultural Heritage |
| PAN 2/2011: Planning and Archaeology (2011) |
| Noise |
| PAN 01/2011: Planning and Noise (2011) |
| Technical Advice Note (TAN): Assessment of Noise (2011) |
| Hydrology and Ground Conditions |
| PAN 51: Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation (revised 2006) |
| PAN 61: Planning and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems (2001) |
| PAN 79: Water and Drainage (2006) |
| Other Issues (including Telecommunications and Air Quality) |
| PAN 51: Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation (revised 2006) |
| PAN 62: Radio Telecommunications (2001) |
| Assessment of Development |
| PAN 1/2013: Environmental Impact Assessment |
| Guide to EIA Regulations 2011 – Easy read guide (2011) |

**Onshore Wind Turbines Online Advice (May 2014)**

6.3.2 The Onshore Wind Turbines online advice replaces the revoked PAN 45 Renewable Energy Technologies and provides advice to planning authorities on typical planning considerations and technical information relating to onshore wind turbine developments. The advice sheet was first published in February 2011 but has subsequently been updated (current version published May 2014). It sets out how local authorities should approach proposals and applications for wind farm developments. The document explains some of the technical terms commonly used in wind farm developments and it sets out typical planning considerations in determining planning applications for onshore wind turbines. Issues highlighted include:

- *'landscape impact;*
- *impacts on wildlife and habitat, ecosystems and biodiversity;*
- *buffer zones;*
- *impacts on communities, shadow flicker, noise, electromagnetic interference to communication systems, ice throw;*
- *separation distances;*
- *aviation matters;*
- *military aviation and other defence matters;*
- *historic environment impacts;*
- *road traffic impacts;*
- *cumulative impacts;*
- *construction impacts; and*
- *decommissioning.'*

6.3.3 It is considered that the provisions of this advice have been embedded in the adopted HWLDP, with which the Development is considered to be broadly compliant, although some limited residual effects will remain in relation to landscape and visual, noise (intermittent days during construction only and within acceptable limits) and cultural heritage setting effects.

## 6.4 Scottish Climate Change and Energy Policy and Guidance

6.4.1 Tackling climate change is a devolved matter and the Scottish Government's Policies and Guidance with regard to Climate Change have been discussed in detail in Section 2 of this statement. These documents are also considered material considerations in relation to this application as the Development seeks to contribute towards the Scottish Government's ambitious targets for reducing emissions and increasing the level of sustainable energy produced in Scotland. The Scottish Government seeks to move Scotland to a low carbon society and has published a suite of publications on climate change, energy and the low carbon economy to support this transition.

6.4.2 The Development will contribute towards achieving the targets set outwithin the 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland and will help to maintain the momentum of onshore wind deployment in Scotland. The updated Renewable Action Plan (RAP) seeks to

support development of onshore wind farms in environmentally acceptable locations where cumulative effects can be addressed. Developers should be prepared to demonstrate good practice, in terms of mitigation and measurement of carbon impact. Environmental sensitivities and carbon issues have been addressed within the ES. The Low Carbon Economic Strategy states that the importance of onshore wind as it is at present still the best available technology for producing renewable energy (Scottish Government, 2010).

6.4.3 All these policies seek to meet the target for the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions of 80% by 2050 that the Scottish Government has committed itself and the Scottish community to through the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009. The Development will contribute towards achieving this ambitious target.

6.4.4 Developments such as the extension proposed for Gordonbush are required if Scotland is to realise the full potential and associated benefits that the renewables industry has to offer.

## 6.5 The Highland Council Supplementary Planning Guidance

**Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (March 2012)**

6.5.1 The Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (ISGOWE) provides a spatial framework to guide the location of large wind farms. The guidance sets out the spatial framework for onshore wind energy developments and expands on guidance provided in Policy 67 (Renewable Energy Developments) of the HWLDP. The ISGOWE was approved by Highland Council in March 2012. The ISGOWE is regarded as a material consideration since the main principles have been established in the 'parent' Policy 67 of the HWLDP that was adopted in April 2012. As noted in paragraph 6.5.10 of this statement, the Highland Council has published a consultation paper on updated supplementary guidance in light of revisions to national policy in SPP, however the ISGOWE remains a material consideration at this time.

6.5.2 The ISGOWE states that the Council expects that further onshore wind energy developments will be required to meet UK and Scottish Government targets. Paragraph 2.3 of the ISGOWE states that the spatial framework does not prevent large wind energy developments in any part of Highland provided the constraints have been assessed and considered.

6.5.3 In the process of preparing the guidance The Highland Council assessed and identified areas of the Highlands that require significant protection (Stage 1), areas with potential constraints (Stage 2) and finally identified areas of search (Stage 3). The guidance provides advice on assessing the degree and significance of impact from the wind farm on features, for example, landscape and visual interests, the natural environment and tourism and recreation interests.

6.5.4 Following consultation on the draft SPG wind energy development categories and capacity criteria were updated in the approved ISGOWE. These categories and capacity criteria are set out in paragraph 2.6 of the guidance and state that developments with a capacity of over 20MW, turbines over 50 m to hub and/or 80 metres to tip and groupings of 8 turbines or more will be classed as very large. The Development is a proposed extension to an existing wind farm and the combined capacity exceeds 100MW. As such the Development

is categorised as a very large development when combined with Gordonbush Wind Farm, although it remains under the 'large development' threshold in terms of the number (16) and the height (max up to 130 m to tip) of the turbines in the development.

6.5.5 The site of the Development is entirely located within Stage 3 - Areas of Search. Areas of search are described in the ISGOWE as follows; *'These are the areas within which appropriate proposals are likely to be supported subject to detailed consideration against the Highland-wide Local Development Plan, in particular policies 57 and 67 and the Development Guidelines section of this interim guidance.'* Paragraph 2.8 notes that development outwith a safeguarded area could impact on the area and will require assessment in the context of the HWLDP and Development Guidelines in the ISGOWE. The site is located within the Area of Search and it is concluded that the Development is not located in an area that has been identified to require significant protection or an area that has been identified as having potential constraints.

6.5.6 Paragraph 2.10 of the ISGOWE states that the Council will continue to work on the identification of areas which require significant protection due to cumulative effect of existing and consented wind farms, however, to date this guidance has not been published and as such the site of the Development has not been specifically identified by the Council as being at risk of significant cumulative effects.

6.5.7 The development guidelines provide a fuller interpretation and amplify the Council's policy regarding wind energy proposals as set out in Policy 67 of the HWLDP and the 11 criteria listed in that policy. The guidelines apply to all onshore wind energy developments regardless of whether they are located within or outwith the Areas of Search. Paragraph 2.16 underlines the potential for effects to occur even if the development is outwith the boundary of any designated feature or interest.

6.5.8 Compliance with the criteria listed in Policy 67 is assessed in section 5.3.6-5.3.8 of this statement and the development guidelines provided in the ISGOWE are reflected in that assessment. Following the development guidelines the ISGOWE also provides some additional guidance which is discussed under the relevant headings below:

- *Design and Layout of Wind Farms:* the guidance provides some advice in terms of the number, position and height of turbines relative to separation distances, development footprint, operational efficiency, mitigating cumulative effects as a result of access track and other infrastructure required. ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Alternatives and Design Evolution explains the steps taken in developing the design and layout and how concerns and comments made during consultation have been reflected in the final layout of the Development.
- *Forestry:* the guidance recognises that there is a trend toward targeting commercial forestry plantations for wind farm developments due to the lack of conservation designations and benefits from existing infrastructure. However, this may result in a substantial loss of commercial woodland. The Scottish Government policy is to increase forest cover from 17% to 25% by 2050, therefore woodland loss should be minimised. In the vicinity of Gordonbush there are areas of managed woodland that will remain unaffected by the Development. As stated earlier, the site selection is such that no woodland loss is predicted.
- *Peat:* where development is proposed on peatland relevant information should be provided with regard to the whole life carbon balance of a development. A carbon

assessment has been undertaken and has been reported in ES Chapter 15: Other Issues. ES Chapter 3: Site Selection, Alternatives and Design Evolution describes how the presence of peatland has influenced the site layout and design of the Development and ES Chapter 4: Description of Development explains how effects on areas with peat have been minimised where they cannot be avoided through the utilisation of a floating track construction.

- *Electricity Transmission Cables and Lines and Gas Transmission Underground Pipelines:* As stated earlier in the statement and in ES Chapter 4: Description of Development, the Development will fully utilise the existing Gordonbush Wind Farm's power transmitting facilities, including cabling, substation and connection to grid. The only components required to the Development would be a network of underground cabling to connect each wind turbine to the substation, which will be subject of some modification to accommodate additional cables and equipment.
- *Impacts of other Developments on existing or consented wind farms:* Potential effects of the Development on existing and consented wind farm developments must be considered to avoid conflict. Existing and consented wind farm developments have been considered in the cumulative assessment within individual specialist chapters of the ES where relevant. The nearest wind farm is the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm immediately north of the Development and the Kilbraur Wind Farm and its extension to the south–west, also, the proposed West Garty development approximately 10km to the east.
- *Site restoration:* Site restoration measures have been described in Section 4.6 of ES Chapter 4: Description of Development. The requirement for any financial guarantees will be secured through conditions to the consent.
- *Mitigation:* Appendix 4.3: Schedule of Mitigation of the ES summarises the mitigation measures identified in the ES which are considered necessary to protect the environment prior to and during construction, during operation and during decommissioning of the Development. A draft CEMP has also been provided (refer to Appendix 4.1 in the ES). The appointed principal contractor will be required to develop the CEMP and implement mitigation measures included in the CEMP.

6.5.9 On balance it is considered that the Development is in accordance with the spatial framework and other provisions of the ISGOWE.

**Onshore Wind Energy: Supplementary Guidance (2015)**

6.5.10 The Interim Supplementary Guidance is under the process of being superseded. Initial consultation on key issues and a Consultation Paper was approved by The Highland Council Planning, Development and Infrastructure Committee on the 18th February 2015. The paper, which sets out the main issues and options for revising the Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, was published for public consultation between 16th March and 11th May 2015 and is now currently under review.

**Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments (May 2013, updated March 2015)**

6.5.11 The Visualisation Standards for Wind Energy Developments, first introduced in draft form in June 2009, inform the planning officer's decision making process and help provide clarity to public and community opinion. The standards set out in the document apply to all wind energy developments irrespective of the size or number of turbines proposed and while

they have been produced principally for wind energy developments they are applicable to all submissions. The visualisations included as part of this application have been prepared in accordance with this document (see Volume 3B) and SNH standards (see Volume 3A), as agreed with The Highland Council and SNH.

**Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (May 2006)**

6.5.12 The Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines provide guidance for both developers and the Council on the development, evaluation and implementation of renewable energy systems. The document was adopted by the Council in 2006, but is currently under partial review, and draft replacement guidance for onshore wind energy has been published (refer to paragraph 202 of the strategy). The document provides a vision for renewable energy development in the Highlands and details preferred development areas, development targets and the planning process and requirements for all new projects. Section 6.2.2.3 in particular provides specific guidance on planning requirements for onshore wind farms.

6.5.13 The vision statement for the strategy concludes that renewable energy will not solve all the energy related problems but it can make a significant contribution: *"The aim is to harness both the energy and economic potential presented by renewable technologies in the Highland area to provide benefit for both the global environment and local communities. In doing so, the elements of the natural and landscape heritage that define the Highland area for locals and visitors will be protected. However, it is recognised that change is an integral part of cultural heritage and that the Highland area needs new developments in order for communities and businesses to flourish. Renewable energy projects will, therefore, be developed in ways that protect the integrity of particularly valued sites, maximise local and regional benefits and minimise or avoid negative consequences".*

6.5.14 Policy E.6 of the strategy states that possible development areas have been identified in places where, although constraints are relatively light, their limited extent makes them less optimal than preferred development areas for national scale schemes. In these locations developments will be judged on their merits. The Development is entirely located in such a 'possible development area'. However the policy framework includes a 'sequential approach' which now no longer complies with national planning policy. This policy has now been updated through the renewable energy policies in the HWLDP and the ISGOWE (which are also to be updated to accord with the provisions of SPP3).

6.5.15 Section 8 of the strategy describes detailed policy and the potential for positive as well as negative effects of renewable energy projects. Positive effects would include community benefit in terms of access to employment and investment, combating fuel poverty and local involvement. Possible negative effects of renewable energy projects could relate to natural heritage and biodiversity, archaeology and cultural heritage, neighbour interaction, landscape and visual effects, amenity interests and public attitudes to renewables. These aspects have been discussed in detail in Policy 67 of the recently adopted HWLDP and the approved ISGOWE.

**Supplementary Guidance: Sustainable Design Guide (January 2013)**

6.5.16 This Sustainable Design Guide has been developed to accompany the HWLDP and requires that all developments should:

- *conserve and enhance the character of the Highland area;*
- *use resources efficiently;*
- *minimise the environmental impact of development; and*
- *enhance the viability of Highland communities.*

6.5.17 The guide is intended to encourage the development of high quality and sustainably designed buildings which minimise impacts on the natural environment, help counter the effects of climate change and also promote greater use of local and renewable materials. Compatibility should be demonstrated through the submission of a Sustainable Design Statement where required to do so by the guidance. The guide states that all developments must comply with the greenhouse gas emissions requirements of the Sustainable Design Guide. The Development is for the generation of renewable energy which will help to reduce reliance on carbon based alternatives and reduce carbon emissions in the Highland area as well as count toward the total reduction for Scotland as a whole. In the long term this will safeguard and conserve the habitats and life forms they support in the Highland area, thus conserving the character of the Highland area.

6.5.18 The design of the Development has aimed to use resources efficiently by avoiding sensitive habitats and areas of deep peat where possible and existing borrow pits on site will be reopened and extended for the extraction of construction materials for the turbine foundations and access tracks. The ES has also shown that the process of design iterations and the undertaking of the EIA resulted in minimal effects of the Development on the local environment although some limited and localised significant adverse landscape character and visual effects and indirect visual effects on the setting of cultural heritage sites have been identified. As described in ES Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Tourism the Development will create local jobs not only during the construction period but throughout the operational life of the wind farm. On balance, it is considered that the Development is compliant with the policy set out in this SPG.

**Highland's Statutorily Protected Species: Supplementary Guidance: (March 2013)**

6.5.19 The Highland's Statutorily Protected Species: Supplementary Guidance provides additional guidance to the HWLDP and SPP and provides advice on conservation legislation, the protocol for dealing with protected species and planning applications with European Protected Species issues. The SPG includes guidance on the 2011 Wildlife and Natural Environment Act.

6.5.20 The SPG states that if followed, the principles for furthering the conservation of biodiversity on development sites will minimise the effect on protected species:

- ***Avoid*** *damage to existing habitats from the development.*
- ***Mitigate*** *- take measures to reduce any adverse impacts on habitats and species arising from the development.*
- ***Compensate*** *- if neither avoidance nor mitigation is possible. Offset any residual adverse effects, either on- or off-site (in this context offset means to recreate the habitat that is lost).*
- ***Restore*** *- habitat management beyond any existing requirement for mitigation/ compensation.*

6.5.21 The SPG provides guidance on European Protected Species and species protected under the Wildlife and Countryside Act present within The Highland Council area. Guidance is provided in terms of undertaking species surveys and the formulation of mitigation measures. The design iteration process has resulted in the avoidance of development in particularly sensitive areas. Where potential effects cannot be avoided mitigation measures have been developed to reduce effects. ES Chapters 8: Ecology and Nature Conservation and Chapter 10: Ornithology describe in detail the surveys that have been undertaken on the site, the species identified and describe mitigation measures to reduce potential effects. It is considered that the combination of avoidance of sensitive areas and proposed mitigation measures negates the requirements for compensatory measures.

6.5.22 The ES illustrates that the principle of avoid, mitigate and compensate that is set out in this SPG have been followed and it is considered that the Development complies with the terms of the policy described in the Supplementary Guidance.

**Physical Constraints: Supplementary Guidance: (March 2013)**

6.5.23 The Highland Council has produced and adopted supplementary guidance on physical constraints to development across Highland which acts as supplementary guidance to the HWLDP.

6.5.24 This guidance has been prepared to provide prospective developers with up to date mapping of physical constraints to development within Highland. In order to protect human health and safety, the guidance outlines that, where proposals are affected by any of the constraints, developers will be required to demonstrate compatibility with the constraint or propose appropriate mitigation measures. Physical constraints on development listed within the guidance include, for example, railway lines, major oil and gas pipelines and areas of excessive slope. The guidance provides additional detail on Policy 30 of the HWLDP.

6.5.25 The map on page 10 of the guidance illustrates that parts of the site are constrained as it has been identified as poorly drained land. ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology concluded that the Development would not cause any major drainage issues.

6.5.26 Areas of excessive slope (where gradient is more than 1 in 7) are shown on the map on page 16 and include some parts of the Development site. The design of the layout has avoided the location of turbines within the areas of excessive slope.

**Trees, Woodland and Development: Supplementary Guidance (January 2013)**

6.5.27 The guidance contained within this document sets out key considerations to be taken into account regarding the value of trees and woodlands. The guidance was adopted as Statutory Guidance to the HWLDP in January 2013. The guidance states that developers should assess the value of any trees or woodland on a local, national and international level. While greatest protection will be given to features of international and national importance, for locally/regionally important features development may be allowed where it does not have an unacceptable effect on amenity and heritage values. Any sites containing trees require to be assessed and this assessment should contain the following elements:

- Land survey;
- Tree survey;
- Tree categorisation; and
- Tree constraints plan.

6.5.28 Following the assessment it may be necessary to develop a Tree Planting and Landscape Plan and a Maintenance or Management Programme. Where development necessitates the removal of tree or woodland it is expected that compensatory planting will be provided.

6.5.29 Section 4.2.1 specifically refers to wind farm and renewables development, stating that wind farms are one of the most significant causes of woodland removal in Scotland. To help mitigate against the loss of woodland, developers should look at opportunities for wind farms to co-exist with woodland providing mutual benefits such as improvements to the public road infrastructure to facilitate the extraction of timber. The cumulative effect of adjacent wind farms will be considered when assessing applications.

6.5.30 In addition, section 4.3.1 states that many of the opportunities and constraints influencing the locations of wind farms are similar to those influencing the location of productive woodlands. The development of a wind farm and the associated road infrastructure may also be able to accommodate transportation of timber from previously inaccessible areas thus providing an opportunity for these two interests to co-exist.

6.5.31 The design of the Development aims to complement the current forestry operations in that the access tracks to and from the wind farm will utilise existing routes associated with the operational Gordonbush Wind Farm. The layout of the Development has also avoided the loss of woodland and it is considered that the two interests can co-exist on this site. It is considered that the Development is compliant with the aspirations set out in this policy.

**The Highland Council Community Benefit Policy and Guidance Note "Community Benefit in relation to Renewable Energy Proposals" (2013)**

6.5.32 This policy and guidance note was published by The Highland Council in 2013. It is separate from the development plan supplementary guidance and sets out guidance on management of goodwill contributions offered by developers of renewable energy proposals. It is clearly explained that such contributions are not an expectation or a requirement of gaining planning permission. The Highland Council's policy is to seek funding or in-kind contribution of not less that £5,000 per installed Megawatt, that will annually appreciate in line with the UK Retail Price Index. The policy and guidance explains that this benefit will be available to communities across Highland, as well as local neighbouring communities. The Highland Council decides on the allocation of benefits with consideration of proximity, visual impact, and number of residences affected. It recommends community benefit negotiations to take place as early as possible in parallel with the planning process.

6.5.33 Currently the Applicant pays into the Scottish Hydro Gordonbush Community Fund to support developments in the areas covered by the Community Councils of Brora, Golspie, Helmsdale and Rogart. A further breakdown of the socio-economics, including Applicant contributions, can be found in Chapter 14: Socio-Economics and Tourism.

**Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment SPG (March 2012)**

6.5.34 This new guidance will aid developers when considering development in relation to flooding issues. The developer should provide sufficient information to demonstrate that their proposals will not increase flood risk and where there are already flooding issue within a catchment, demonstrate the betterment. The SPG also sets out aspects to be considered and included in a Flood Risk Assessment.

6.5.35 The design of the Development has been progressed to ensure that infrastructure, comprising the wind turbines, crane hardstandings, new access tracks, Operations Building, temporary construction compound, borrow pits, meteorological mast and concrete batching plant are located at least 50m away from watercourses, surface water drainage features or ponds (refer to ES Chapter 9: Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology). The Development is considered to be compliant with the guidance on flood risk and drainage impact assessment.

## 6.6 Conclusions on Material Considerations

6.6.1 National planning policy and guidance along with The Highland Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance represent important material considerations in support of renewable energy developments where they can be developed in an environmentally acceptable way. The Development has been assessed in the context of these documents and it is considered that the design of the Development has generally avoided or reduced significant environmental impacts. It is noted that whilst there are some limited and localised significant adverse landscape and visual effects and indirect effects on the setting of two SMs, these are balanced against the nationally important social and economic benefits of the development. Overall it is considered that the Development is environmentally acceptable and the development satisfies the key principles of national planning policy and is largely in accordance with The Highland Council's Supplementary Planning Guidance.

6.6.2 On the basis of the above, it is concluded that the Development is supported by relevant material considerations including UK-wide and Scottish Climate Change and Energy policies, Scottish planning policy, guidance and advice. The Development will contribute to delivering the policy intention of SPP policy on renewable energy, by contributing to the 2020 target in a manner that affords appropriate protection to Scotland's natural and historic environment.

# 7 Conclusions

## 7.1 Introduction

7.1.1 This section sets out the overall conclusions. As explained in Section 1 of this Planning Statement the Development Plan is an important consideration. The aims and objectives and key policies in the Development Plan are an important part of the relevant framework against which the Development is to be considered, alongside other material considerations.

7.1.2 The underlying aims and objectives of the Development Plan have been considered and the conclusion is reached at both strategic and local level that these aims and objectives would not be undermined by the Development to the extent of causing harm to the national, strategic and local planning strategy.

## 7.2 Development Plan Conclusions

7.2.1 Following detailed consideration of the relevant policies, it is considered that the Development would be in accordance with the Development Plan when read as a whole. The aims and objectives of the Development Plan are considered in Section 5 and the conclusions reached are that the Development is supported by the aims and objectives of the Development Plan. Furthermore the Development is located within an Area of Search identified in the approved ISGOWE which provides the spatial framework for onshore wind energy development in the Highland area. It is concluded that the significant adverse landscape, visual and cultural effects identified would not undermine the delivery of both the strategic and local land use strategies and these effects would be outweighed by socio-economic benefits of Development that are of local, regional and national importance.

7.2.2 The Development Plan has sustainability at its core and the Development supports that aim. The Development Plan promotes renewable energy projects subject to assessment against various factors within the plan. The Development complies with the detailed criteria set out in Policy 67 of the HWLDP for renewable energy and conforms to other relevant policies with regard to issues such as nature conservation, built and cultural heritage, rural diversification, tourism and economic growth. The identified landscape and visual effects have been minimised through the design iteration process. Mitigation measures have been identified to protect the environment and reduce any potential significant effects of the Development.

7.2.3 From this assessment of planning policy considerations, the Development can draw significant support from the Development Plan.

## 7.3 Material Considerations

7.3.1 Material considerations can be far reaching and involve a variety of factors. These are set out in the EU, UK and Scottish Government renewable energy targets and policies with regard to climate change and these targets and policies provide the basis of the need case for the Development, which will aid the realisation of renewable energy generation targets and make a significant contribution to the Scottish and UK targets.

7.3.2 The Development would also result in significant benefits in terms of CO2 emission savings.

These emission targets are also recognised within the NPF 3 which is a national planning policy statement that has statutory recognition.

7.3.3 The policy framework contained in SPP has also been considered. Subject policies 'economic development' and 'renewable energy' are particularly supportive of the Development with regard to renewable energy generation, climate change action, employment creation and economic benefit. National planning policies regarding the built environment and natural and cultural heritage have also been considered and the Development is considered to be supported by these policies in the context of it having been designed and sited to avoid areas of greatest sensitivity and to minimise environmental effects. In addition, the Development's position as an extension to an existing operational wind farm enables the minimal amount of infrastructural impact to occur on the local environment.

7.3.4 The Development falls entirely within the Area of Search for wind development identified in the ISGOWE. It is considered that limited significant landscape and visual effects and the setting of two SMs are outweighed by the social and economic benefits of the Development. The policies contained within the HWLDP update the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines and it is considered that the Development will contribute toward achieving the vision behind the renewable energy policies and guidelines in the HWLDP.

7.3.5 In conclusion, the material considerations set out are found to be particularly supportive of the Development.

## 7.4 Overall Conclusion

7.4.1 A detailed assessment of the relevant provisions of the HWLDP and associated supplementary planning guidance has been presented in this statement. In considering the underlying aims and objectives of the plan and those individual policies, it is concluded that the Development is broadly in accordance with the aims and objectives of the Development Plan.

7.4.2 The Development when tested against the Renewable Energy Policy 67 of the HWLDP and material considerations demonstrates that the design has sought to minimise landscape and visual effects and that the site is suitable for the Development.

7.4.3 The overall conclusion reached is that it would be appropriate to grant consent for the construction and operation of the Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm subject to appropriate conditions.

# 8 References

Department of Energy and Climate Change (2010) National Renewable Energy Action Plan for the United Kingdom, DECC

Department of Energy and Climate Change (2009), The UK Low carbon Transition Plan, National Strategy for climate and energy, HM Government

Department of Energy and Climate Change (2009). The UK Renewable Energy Strategy. HM Government.

Department of Energy and Climate Change (2014). Meeting Carbon Budgets – 2014 Progress Report to Parliament. HM Government.

Department of Trade and Industry (2006). The Energy Review 2006: The Energy Challenge. Annex D: The Renewables Statement of Need. HM Government.

Department of Energy and Climate Change (2011), UK Renewable Energy Roadmap, DECC

Draft Energy Bill, May 2012, HM Government, http://www.official-documents.gov.uk/document/cm83/8362/8362.pdf

Electricity Act 1989. www.legislation.gov.uk

Scottish Executive (2001). Designing Places: A Policy Statement for Scotland. Scottish Executive.

Scottish Executive (2006). Planning Advice Note 51: (revised 2006) Planning, Environmental Protection and Regulation. Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (1999). Planning Advice Note 58: Environmental Impact Assessment. Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2000). Planning Advice Note 60: Planning for Natural Heritage. Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2001). Planning Advice Note 61: Planning and Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems. Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2001). Planning Advice Note 62: Radio Telecommunications. Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2003). Planning Advice Note 68: Design Statements. Scottish Executive. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2005). Planning Advice Note 75 Planning for Transport Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2006). Planning Advice Note 79: Water and Drainage. Scottish Executive.

http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Executive (2001) Scotland's Renewable Energy Generation on the Electrical Transmission Network in Scotland, Scottish Executive

Scottish Government (2012) Electricity Generation Policy Statement (published March 2012), for consultation, Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2011), Government Economic Strategy, September 2011, Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2011), Guide to EIA Regulations 2011 – Easy read guide, Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2009). National Planning Framework for Scotland 2. Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2011), Onshore wind turbines Specific Advice Sheet, updated May 2012, Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2010) PAN 3/2010: Community Engagement, Scottish Government. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Government (2011) PAN 1/2011 Planning and Noise, Scottish Government. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Government (2011). PAN 2/2011 Planning and Archaeology. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/publications/pans

Scottish Government (2011). Process for preparing spatial frameworks for wind farms. http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Built-Environment/planning/National-Planning-Policy/themes/renewables/spatialframework (updated may 2012)

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

Scottish Government (2001), Scottish Government Interim Guidance on European Protected Species, Development Sites and the Planning System, Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2011), Technical Advice Note (TAN): Assessment of Noise (2011), Scottish Government

Scottish Government (2014). Scottish Planning Policy. Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2014). National Planning Framework 3. Scottish Government.

Scottish Government (2015). Scottish Economic Strategy. Scottish Government.

The Electricity Act 1989. www.legislation.gov.uk

The Highland Council (2011) Draft Supplementary Guidance: Physical Constraints (May 2011)

The Highland Council (2012), Flood Risk and Drainage Impact Assessment SPG (Approved March 2012)

The Highland Council, Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines (under partial review), adopted May 2006

The Highland Council (2012), Highland's Statutorily Protected Species: Supplementary Guidance: (Approved September 2011)

The Highland Council, Highland Wide Local Development Plan, adopted 5 April 2012

The Highland Council, Inner Moray Firth Local Development Plan – Main Issues Report – Spring 2012, April 2012

The Highland Council, Inverness Local Plan (saved provisions only), adopted March 2006

The Highland Council, Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy, approved March 2012

The Highland Council (2011), Interim Supplementary Guidance: Sustainable Design Guide (approved June 2011)

The Highland Council, Special Landscape Area Citations (formerly known as AGLVs) – The Highland Council, Background paper to Proposed Highland Wide Local Plan, finalised June 2011

The Highland Council (2011), Trees, Woodland and Development Interim Supplementary Guidance (approved September 2011)

The Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (Scotland) Regulations 2013. www.legislation.gov.uk

The Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997. www.legislation.gov.uk

The Planning etc. (Scotland) Act 2006. Office of Public Sector Information (OPSI). http://www.opsi.gov.uk.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix A – Development Plan Policy Compliance

Table 1 below summaries the key development plan policies and supplementary guidance discussed in the Planning Statement that are relevant to the Development.

The Development is assessed as compliant against policies that are marked with a tick '✓', and as non-compliant with policies that are marked with '**X**'. Policies that are marked with a '*' denote that although generally compliant, some limited significant environmental effects have been predicted.

Cross reference is provided to the ES chapters relevant to each policy and the paragraphs in the Planning Statement where the policy is discussed.

| Policy | Subject | Supplementary Guidance | Related ES Chapter | Planning Statement Paragraph | Compliance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HWLDP) (2012)** | | | | | |
| 28 | Sustainable Design | Sustainable Design Guide- | **Chapter 3:** Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives<br>**Chapter 4:** Description of Development<br>**Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<br>**Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation<br>**Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology<br>**Chapter 10:** Ornithology<br>**Chapter 11:** Cultural Heritage<br>**Chapter 12:** Access, Traffic and Transport | **5.3.10**<br>**6.5.16-6.5.18** | ✓ |

| Policy | Subject | Supplementary Guidance | Related ES Chapter | Planning Statement Paragraph | Compliance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | **Chapter 13:** Noise and Vibration<br>**Chapter 14:** Socio-Economics and Tourism<br>**Chapter 15:** Other Issues | | |
| 30 | Physical Constraints | Physical Constraints | **Chapter 3:** Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives<br>**Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<br>**Chapter 15:** Other Issues | **5.3.69-6.5.76**<br>**6.5.23-6.5.26** | ✓ |
| 36 | Development in the Wider Countryside | - | **Chapter 3**: Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives<br>**Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology<br>**Chapter 7**: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment | **5.3.16** | ✓ |
| 51 | Trees and Development | Trees, woodlands and development | **Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<br>**Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation | **5.3.17**<br>**6.5.27-6.5.31** | ✓ |
| 52 | Principle of Development in Woodland | Trees, woodlands and development | **Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<br>**Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation | **5.3.17** | ✓ |
| 53 | Minerals | - | **Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology | **5.3.35-5.3.36** | ✓ |

| Policy | Subject | Supplementary Guidance | Related ES Chapter | Planning Statement Paragraph | Compliance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 55 | Peat and Soils | - | **Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology | **5.3.37-5.3.40** | ✓ |
| 56 | Travel | - | **Chapter 12:** Access, Traffic and Transport<br>**Chapter 14:** Land Use, Socio-Economics and Tourism | **5.3.58-5.3.63** | ✓ |
| 57 | Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage | Highland Historic Environment Strategy | **Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<br>**Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation<br>**Chapter 11:** Cultural Heritage | **5.3.19-5.3.23**<br>**5.3.28-5.3.31**<br>**5.3.50-5.3.53** | ✓* |
| 58 | Protected Species | Highland Statutorily Protected Species | **Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation<br>**Chapter 10:** Ornithology | **5.3.28-5.3.31**<br>**6.5.19-6.5.22** | ✓ |
| 59 | Other Important Species | - | **Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation<br>**Chapter 10:** Ornithology | **5.3.28-5.3.31** | ✓ |
| 60 | Other Important Habitats and Article 10 Features | - | **Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation<br>**Chapter 10:** Ornithology | **5.3.28-5.3.31** | ✓ |
| 61 | Landscape | Special Landscape Area Citation | **Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment | **5.3.24** | ✓ * |

| Policy | Subject | Supplementary Guidance | Related ES Chapter | Planning Statement Paragraph | Compliance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 63 | Water Environment | - | **Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology | **5.3.43-5.3.44** | ✓ |
| 64 | Flood Risk | Flood risk and drainage impact assessment | **Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology | **5.3.45-5.3.46**<br>**6.5.34-6.5.35** | ✓ |
| 66 | Surface Water Drainage | - | **Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology | **5.3.47-5.3.48** | ✓ |
| 67 | Renewable Energy Developments | Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (ISGOWE)<br><br>Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines | **Chapter 3:** Site Selection, Design Evolution and Consideration of Alternatives<br>**Chapter 4:** Description of Development<br>**Chapter 7:** Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment<br>**Chapter 8:** Ecology and Nature Conservation<br>**Chapter 9:** Hydrology, Hydrogeology and Geology<br>**Chapter 10:** Ornithology<br>**Chapter 11:** Cultural Heritage<br>**Chapter 12:** Access, Traffic and Transport<br>**Chapter 13:** Noise and Vibration | **5.3.6-5.3.8**<br>**5.4.1**<br>**6.5.1-6.5.9**<br>**6.5.12-6.5.15** | ✓ |

| Policy | Subject | Supplementary Guidance | Related ES Chapter | Planning Statement Paragraph | Compliance |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | **Chapter 15:** Other Issues<br>**Chapter 14:** Socio-Economics and Tourism | | |
| 72 | Pollution | - | **Chapter 13:** Noise and Vibration | **5.3.55-5.3.56** | ✓ |
| 77 | Public Access | - | **Chapter 12:** Access, Traffic and Transport | **5.3.65-5.3.66** | ✓ |
| 78 | Long Distance Routes | - | **Chapter 12:** Access, Traffic and Transport | **5.3.67** | ✓ |

## FIGURES

sse

ash

**Key:**

Site Boundary

1:250,000 @ A3

0 5km 10km

N

**Figure 1**
**Site Location Plan**

**Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm**
**Environmental Statement**

sse

ash

**Key:**

- Site Boundary
- Proposed Wind Turbine (130m Blade Tip)
- Proposed Wind Turbine (115m Blade Tip)
- Existing Wind Turbine
- Proposed Permanent Meteorological Mast

**Access Tracks**

- Existing
- Cut
- Float
- Indicative Passing Places
- Indicative Hardstanding
- Proposed Batching Plant
- Proposed Operations Builing and Temporary Construction Compound Area
- Existing Substation
- Borrow Pits

Scale 1:25,000 @ A3

0 0.2 0.4 Kilometers

N

**Figure 2**
**Site Layout Plan**

**Gordonbush Extension Wind Farm**
**Environmental Statement**