

Gordonbush wind farm Proposed extension



Overview

SSE Renewables

'SSE' is a Scottish registered and British owned energy company, headquartered in Perth, and employs over 2,000 employees and contractors in the north of Scotland.

'SSE Renewables' is the renewable energy development division of SSE and is responsible for the development of renewables in the UK, the Republic of Ireland. We have been building and operating wind farms since 2002, and have over 30 onshore wind farms in operation in Scotland and Ireland, in addition to those in development or under construction.

Combined with our hydro-electric schemes, many of which have been in operation for over 50 years, our wind farms make us the largest generator of renewable energy across Great Britain and Ireland.

Wind power is one of the most developed of the renewable technologies and it is estimated that Scotland has 25% of Europe's wind resource. It is important to harness this energy in order to help meet Scotland's climate change targets:

- Scotland's electricity consumption to come from 100% renewables by 2020
- Reduce Scotland's greenhouse gas emissions by 42% by 2020

We are committed to helping meet Scotland's climate change targets and believe that renewables play an important part in this. As the UK's leading generator of renewable energy we are proud to be at the forefront of helping tackle climate change.

Site location



The area outlined in red above shows the location for the proposal. It does NOT show the specific areas within the site where turbines are proposed.

This exhibition

The purpose of this exhibition is to engage with the local community on the proposed extension to Gordonbush wind farm, north-west of Brora. We are interested in hearing people's views, and want to provide them with the opportunity to talk to us about any questions, concerns, or comments they may have.

This exhibition also initiates the start of the public consultation period which is being run by SSE Renewables to gather comments on the proposal at this early stage. Comments forms are available at this exhibition for people to fill in.

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The proposed development

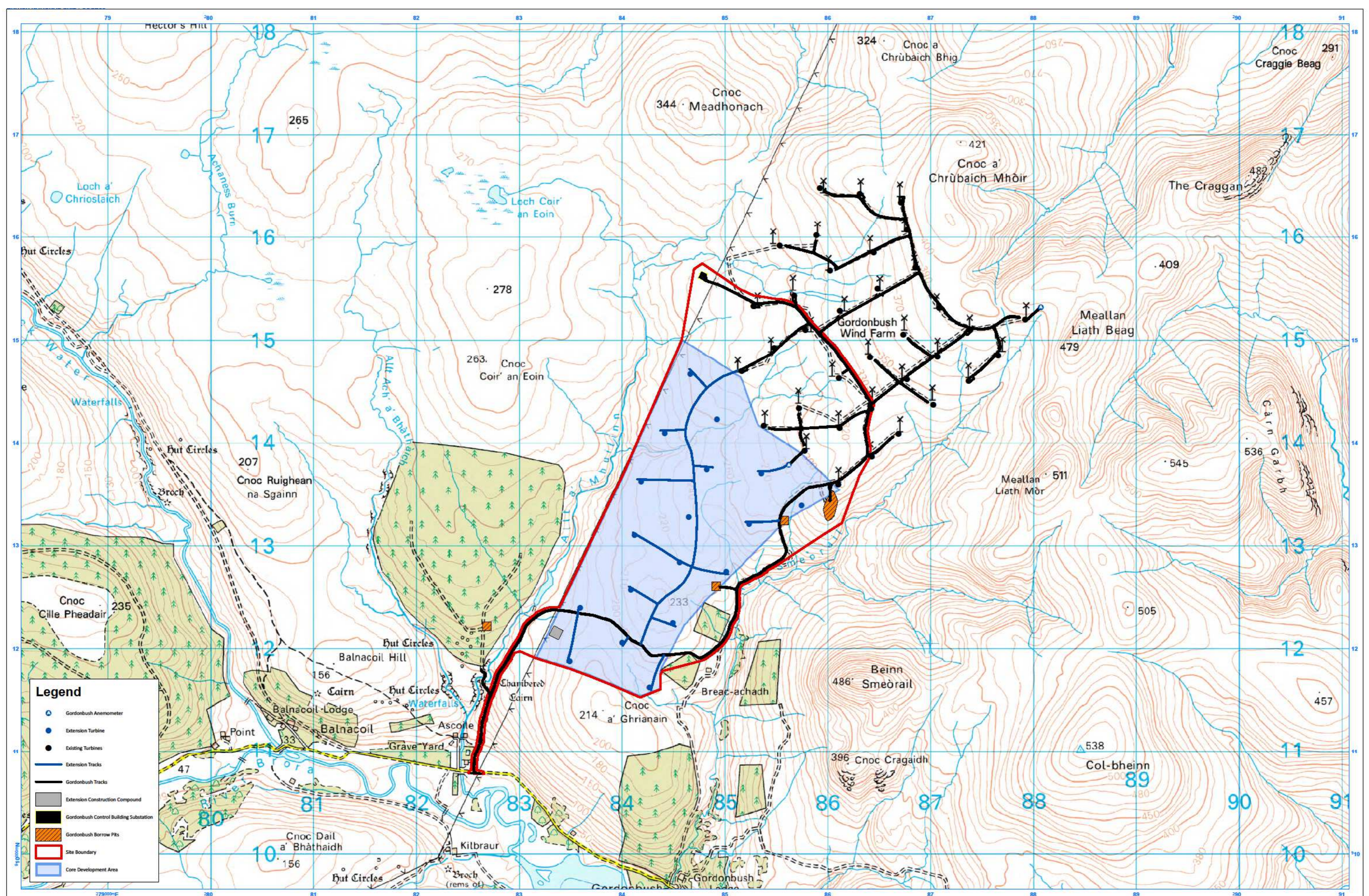
Background

Gordonbush is an operational 35 turbine wind farm at Balnacoil, north-west of Brora, in Sutherland. The main construction work began in Autumn 2010 and full commissioning was completed in June 2012. The wind farm generates enough electricity each year to power around 70,000 homes (based on an average household consumption of 3.3 megawatt hours a year).

We are currently in the early stages of looking at a potential extension to Gordonbush wind farm of up to 20 turbines. The search area that we are looking at sits to the south-west of the current site, approximately 9.5km from Brora, and lies wholly within Brora Community Council's area. The area is owned by Gordonbush Estate and is predominantly moorland used for deerstalking and other hunting sports.

Initial layout (early stage of design)

At this early stage, the number of turbines proposed for the extension could be up to 20 turbines, with a turbine tip height of up to 132m (this differs from the existing Gordonbush turbines which have a tip height of 110m). The map below shows an initial 18 turbine layout with a tip height of 132m and reflects the optimum design from a wind resource perspective. The turbine layout is therefore likely to change in terms of number and arrangement as we receive information back from our environmental site surveys and assessments over the coming months.



Other elements of the design

In addition to the turbines themselves, the extension will also include crane hard-standings, on-site access tracks (utilising existing tracks where possible), and a new welfare building. During the construction phase, there will also be temporary works to create construction compounds, borrow pits (from which construction aggregates would be extracted), and laydown areas.

Power generated by the turbines would be transferred via underground cables to the on-site substation. From here, the extension would be connected into the national grid together with the existing site, and this falls under a separate consent process.

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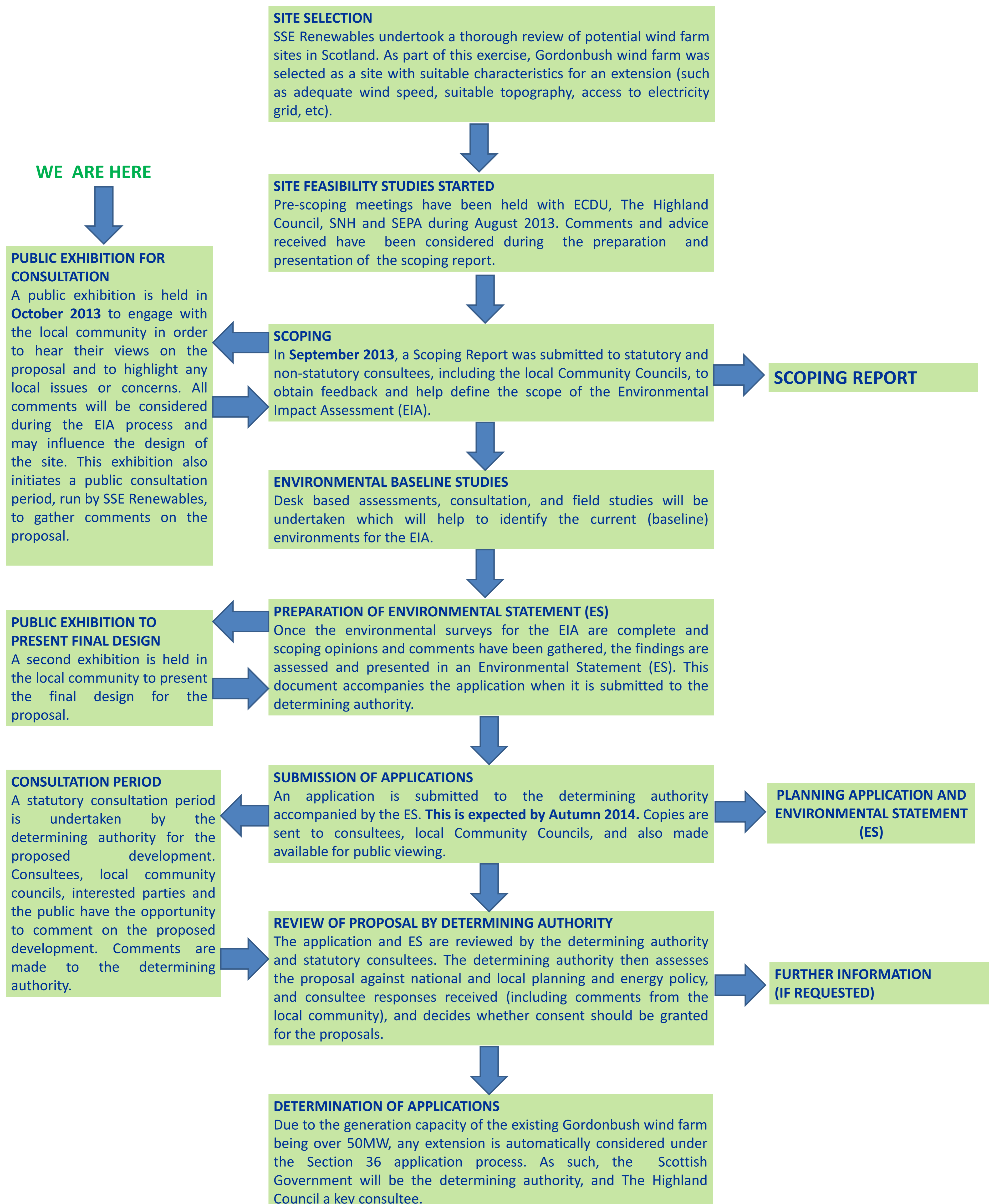


The development process

CONSULTATION

PROCESS

FORMAL PUBLICATION



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Environmental considerations

The environmental impact assessment (EIA)

We are currently preparing to undertake an EIA for the proposed extension to Gordonbush wind farm. This is a process which identifies and assesses possible significant environmental effects of the development and will help shape the design from an environmental perspective. The process involves desk studies and site visits, baseline surveys, technical assessments, and consultation with statutory and non-statutory consultees. The EIA process will assess a wide range of environmental factors, including those listed below.

We will report the findings in an Environmental Statement (ES) which we will submit, together with the application, to the determining authority. The application and ES will be made available to the public at the time of submission.

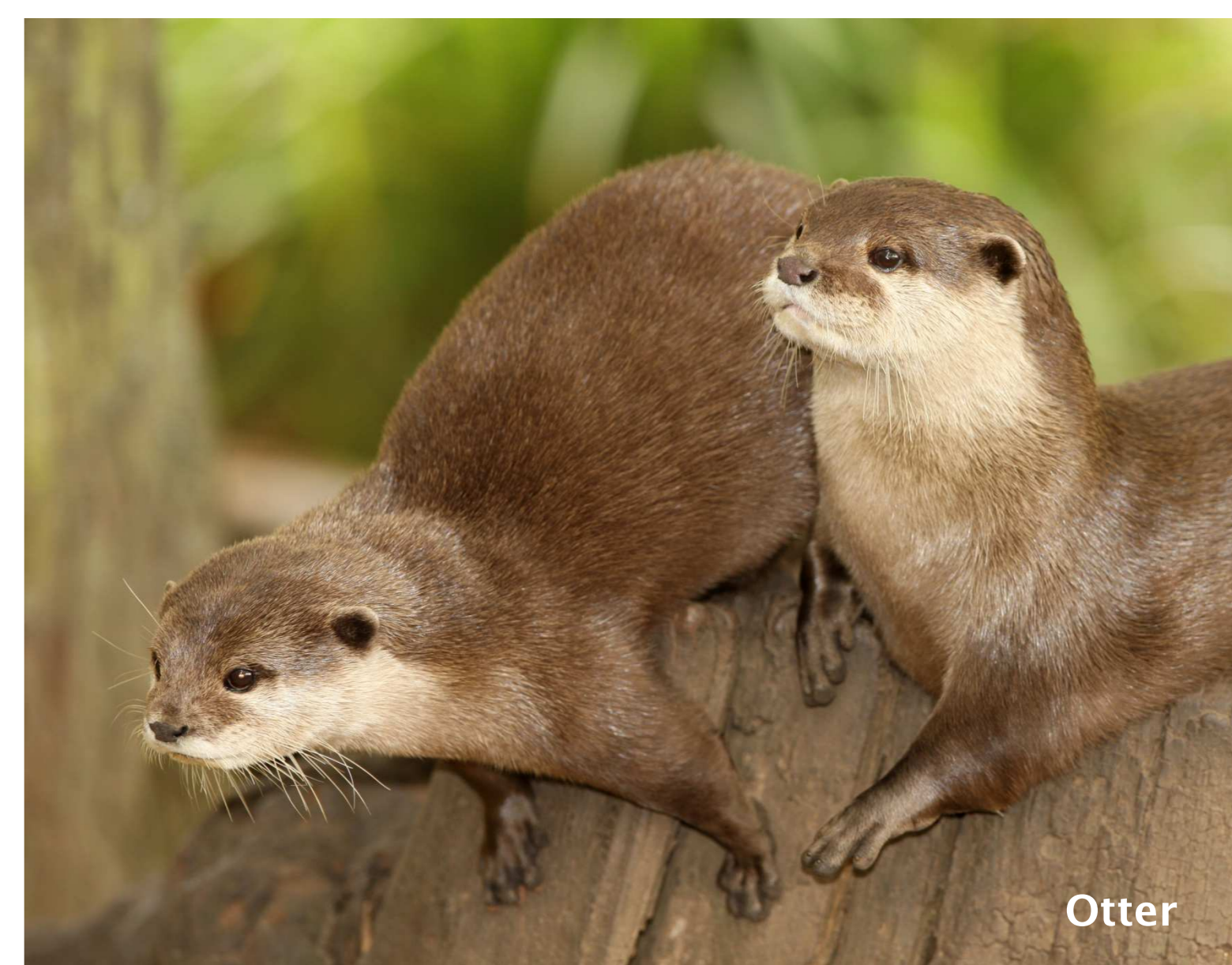
Ornithology

We have a good understanding of the bird activity in the area due to the bird survey work that has been undertaken since 2003 in relation to the existing site. This work has included:

- o Vantage point bird surveys
- o Breeding bird surveys
- o Raptor surveys

In addition, subsequent pre-construction, construction, and post-construction surveys have been undertaken between 2009 and 2012.

All of this historical survey information will be used to understand the current bird species using the site. Further bird survey work has been carried out in 2012 and 2013 in relation to the proposed extension.



Ecology

Much of the proposed area for the extension has already been extensively surveyed to identify habitats, protected species and mammals in relation to the existing Gordonbush wind farm site.

We will use this historical information, in addition to further surveys and assessments, to build up a good understanding of the site to help inform the design.

Landscape and visual

This is an important part of the EIA process. More information is provided on the Landscape and Visual board.

Other considerations

We will also assess the potential effects of the development on other environmental topics including (but not limited to):

- Cultural Heritage
- Soils, hydrology and geology
- Traffic and transport
- Land use, socio-economics and recreation
- Noise

Current stage

We have just entered the 'Scoping' stage which helps identify the scope of the environmental work which is required to support the application. A 'Scoping Report' was issued in September 2013 to the Scottish Government and other statutory and non-statutory consultees, including local Community Councils, for their feedback on our proposed scope of works. The report will be used to initiate further consultation and identify specific environmental issues and potential impacts that need to be assessed through the EIA process.

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Landscape and visual assessment

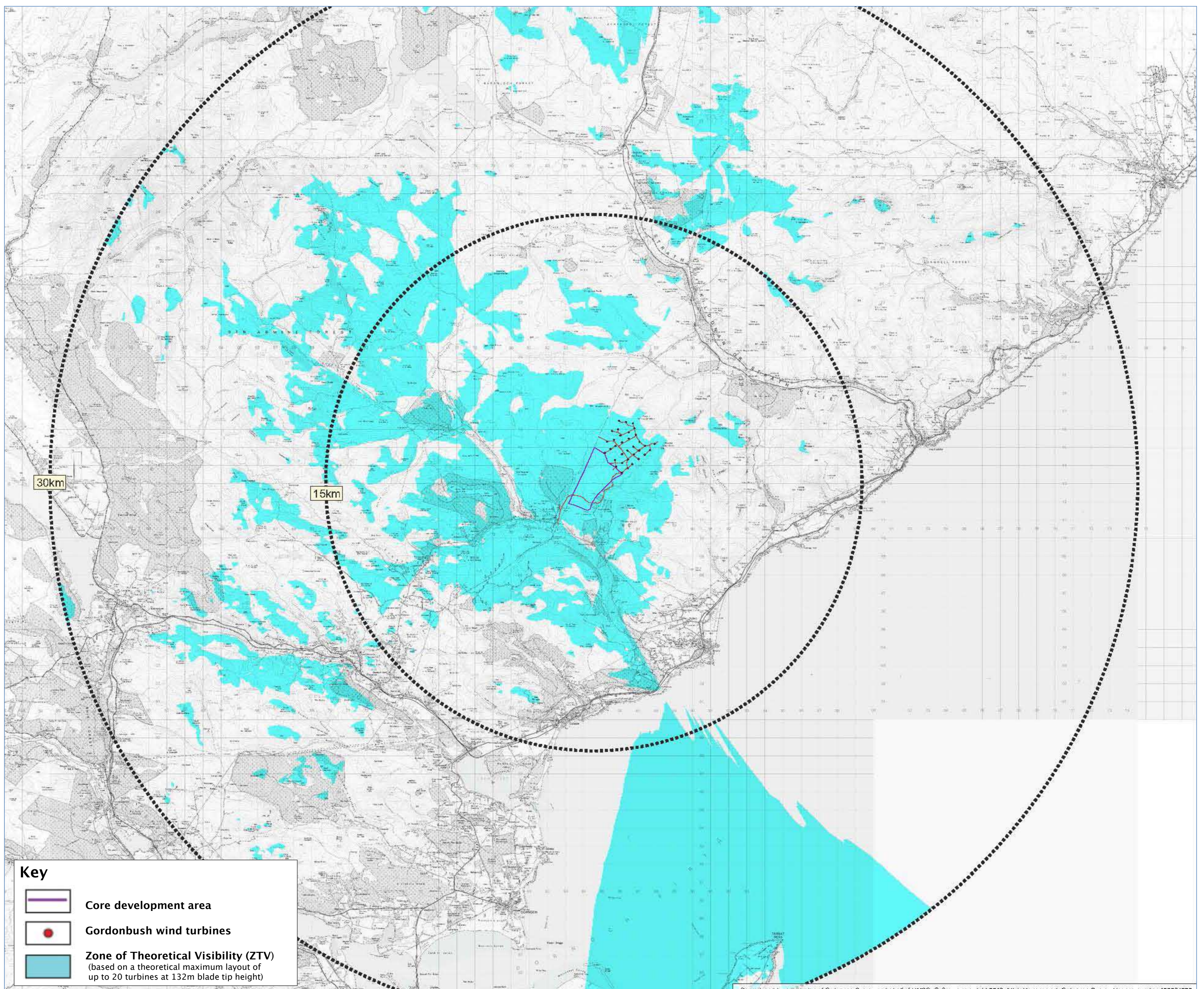
Background

As part of our Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) we will be undertaking a landscape and visual assessment to understand how the proposed extension will look within the surrounding area and identify any significant effects.

The map below shows the 'Zone of Theoretical Visibility' (ZTV) which illustrates the indicative theoretical visibility of the proposed extension within a 30km radius. It is based on a theoretical maximum layout of up to 20 turbines at 132m blade tip height, and does not take into account any screening effects such as vegetation or buildings.

An updated ZTV will be produced once a final design is reached, in addition to photomontages and other visualisations, and submitted as part of the application.

Zone of theoretical visibility (ZTV) – 30km



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Habitat management

Existing habitat management on Gordonbush estate

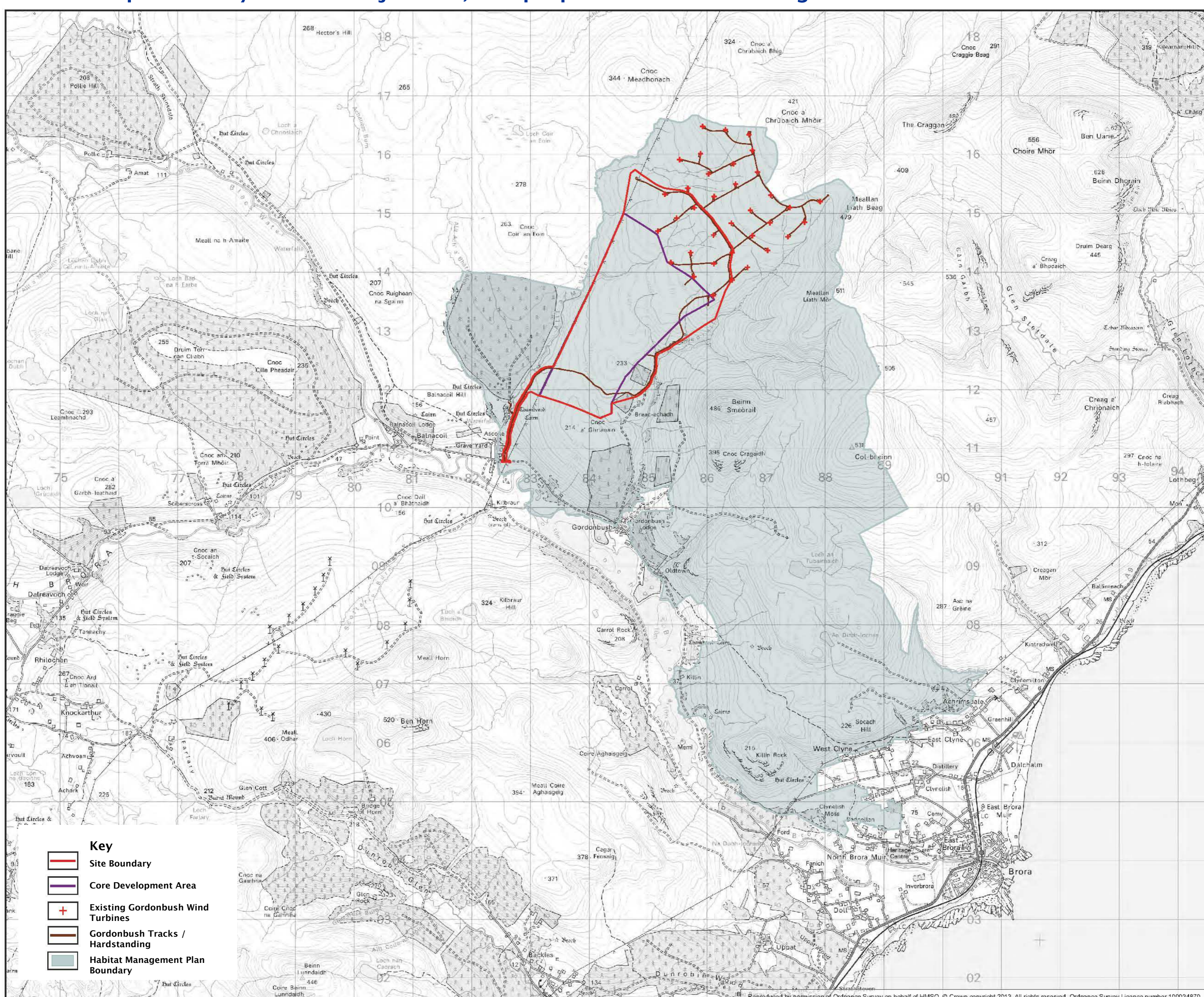
As part of the Gordonbush wind farm development, a Habitat Management Plan (HMP) was designed and implemented to deliver a range of long-term mitigation and enhancement measures on Gordonbush Estate.

Our approach

The existing Habitat Management Plan (HMP) covers an area of approximately 5,361 hectares, as shown on the figure below. The overall aim of the HMP is to provide mitigation for any potential adverse effects of the Gordonbush 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. This aim is being met by implementing the following measures:

- o Reduction in deer on the Estate to promote heather moorland;
- o Removal of coniferous forestry plantations to restore peatland habitats;
- o Improved moorland and heather management;
- o Blocking of drains on peatland;
- o Native woodland management; and
- o Low-intensity cattle grazing.

The proposed Gordonbush Extension core development area overlaps a small part of the existing Gordonbush wind farm HMP area. Therefore, consideration will be given to how the proposed extension would impact the HMP objectives. If there was a predicted impact on any of these objectives, it is proposed that the existing HMP would be amended.



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Next steps

What happens next?

Once the Scoping process is complete, and the scope of the environmental works has been agreed, we will undertake further surveys and assessments as part of the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA). These will help us to identify any physical, environmental or technical constraints and refine the design layout.

We will also review the comments received from this exhibition and subsequent consultation period, and consider these in relation to the development of the proposal.

Once all of the survey work is complete and the final design has been developed, we will hold another public exhibition in order to present the final design to the local community.

How do I comment on the proposal?

We are keen to receive comments and views from the local community on the proposed extension at this early stage. Please also take the time at the exhibition to speak to our project team and raise any questions, concerns or comments that you may have about the proposal. Comments can be submitted as follows:

- o **At the exhibition** - complete a comments form and place it in the box provided
- o **By post** - complete a comments form and post it to our Liaison Manager (details below)
- o **By email** - complete a comments form and email it to our Liaison Manager (details below)

Comments forms and information can be downloaded from the project website (details below) or posted out to you by our Liaison Manager, upon request. Please make your comments as specific as possible in order to help us assess them in relation to the proposal. The closing date for comments is 29th November 2013.



Comments can be sent to:

Ruth Liddicoat
Liaison Manager (Gordonbush proposed extension)
Corporate Affairs
10 Henderson Road
Inverness
IV1 1SN ruth.liddicoat@sse.com

If you have any queries, or would like to discuss the proposal or comments process, our Liaison manager is also the first point of contact and can be reached on 07767 852826.

Further information can also be found on our project website at www.sse.com/gordonbush.

Will there be a further opportunity to comment on the proposal?

We will hold a second public exhibition, prior to submission of the planning application, to update the local community on the proposal and final design and gather further comments. Once the planning application is submitted there will be a further opportunity to comment on the proposal by submitting comments to the determining authority as part of the formal statutory consultation period.



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Investing in the community

Community investment funds

For over 10 years now SSE has established community funds to enable communities to benefit from renewables developments in their area. The value of each fund varies from project to project depending on the size (or 'installed capacity' in megawatts) of the wind farm.

In January 2012, we launched what we believe to be the most generous community investment fund package of any of the major developers operating in Scotland, amounting to £5,000 for each megawatt (MW), every year, for up to 25 years, and this

Local fund

Half of the fund (£2,500 per MW) is 'ring-fenced' for the communities in the immediate vicinity of the wind farm, and a panel made up of members from these communities reviews the applications and decides which projects to support.

We work closely with the panel, and applicants, to ensure opportunities are maximised for the benefit of the community.

Regional fund

We set aside the other half of the fund (£2,500 per MW) for larger strategic projects that will benefit the wider community in the local authority area where the wind farm is located.

Our regional funds are administered through an independent panel of experts chaired by Lord McConnell, and preference will be given to locations near SSE's existing developments.

The Highland Regional Fund will launch in November this year.

Sutherland Schools Pipe Band

SSE Renewables is the proud sponsor of the Sutherland Schools Pipe Band.



The Sutherland Schools Pipe Band at Gordonbush wind farm



Image courtesy of TYKES (The Young Carers East Sutherland) who received £4,000 in 2013 from the existing Gordonbush wind farm fund for a drop-in worker during one of their activity days.

Existing Gordonbush fund

Our existing Gordonbush wind farm community fund was established in 2011 and benefits the local areas of Golspie, Brora, Helmsdale and Rogart.

The fund has already awarded over £300,000 to local projects in the area, such as:

- o TYKES (The Young Carers East Sutherland) – £4,000
- o Rogart in Bloom – £3,000
- o Brora Golf Club – £18,000
- o Golspie Youth Action Project – £3,120
- o Helmsdale Primary PTA – £5,000
- o Sutherland Partnership – £5,000
- o Brora Wanderers AFC – £3,146
- o Golspie Lunch Club – £500
- o Feis Chataibh – £5,000

Further information

If you have any questions or would like further information on our community funds, please speak to our project team or visit our community website at www.sse.com/Community/CommunityFunds. In addition, our booklet 'Investing in the Community' (copies of which are available at this exhibition) provides a summary of our approach to community funds, and how they work.

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Working with the community

Being a responsible developer

As a company, we are committed to working closely with the local community throughout all stages of a project. This means keeping people informed about what we're doing, and listening to comments and feedback. We also aim to ensure that the lasting legacy of our developments is a positive one for the communities within which we live and work.

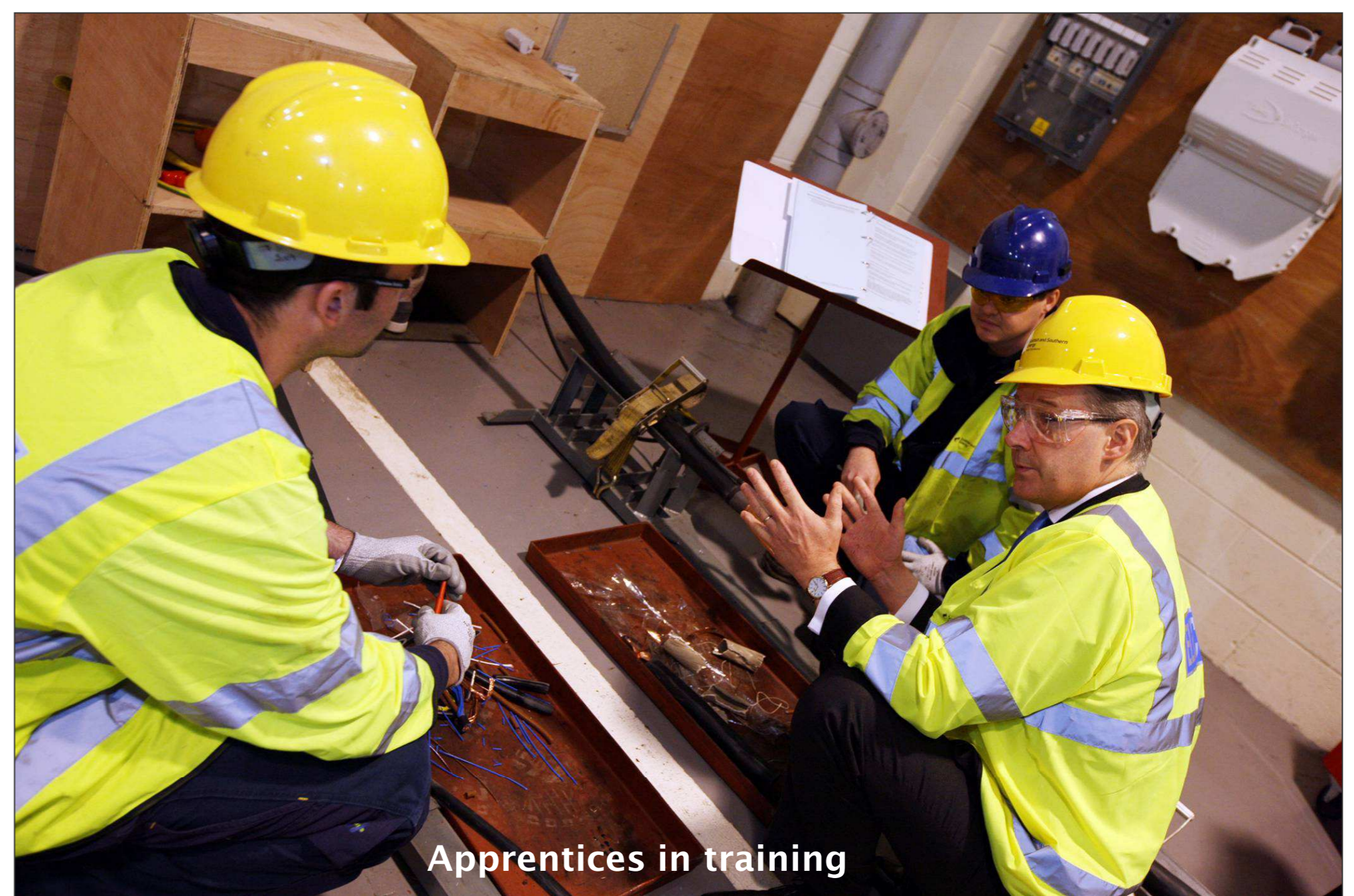
When we built the existing Gordonbush wind farm we worked hard to develop a strong working relationship with the community and ensure that the project was delivered as smoothly as possible, with minimal impact, and that any concerns or issues were addressed quickly. We also involved local businesses wherever possible and made sure that the project delivered socio-economic benefits to the area. This is the same approach that we are adopting for the proposed extension.

Engaging with the community

Whilst we are aware that there will always be a mix of views about a new development within a community, we are keen to understand what people think about the proposed extension.

We are also keen to engage early so that we have the chance to consider people's comments in relation to the development of the proposal, and identify ways that we can help minimise any impacts on the community.

In addition to this exhibition we will also be engaging and offering meetings with the local Community Councils, and providing information and updates on our project website at www.sse.com/gordonbush.



Apprenticeships

SSE currently recruits around 100 apprentices across the UK each year and the Highlands, including Sutherland, will be targeted to recruit apprentices in support of new project proposals and other energy developments.

At some of our sites we have also set up apprenticeship schemes, supported by the community fund, which encourage local businesses to take on apprentices, with the fund offsetting the cost of employing the apprentices while they learn their trade.



Opportunities and benefits from our projects

In June 2012 SSE launched its new Highlands and Islands 'Open4Business' web-portal which promotes upcoming business opportunities with SSE's projects, and also provides a platform for businesses to advertise their services to other users. More information can be found on the portal itself at www.sseopen4business-highlands.com or in our 'open4business' booklet which is available at this exhibition.

Over £100m was invested in Gordonbush wind farm, and a number of local businesses benefited from the project through the provision of materials, services, labour, and accommodation. Local roads were also upgraded and a 25 year Habitat Management Plan is underway which is aimed at helping restore some of the area around the wind farm back to its native habitat. More information is provided in our 'Socio-economics' booklet which is available at this exhibition.

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Volunteering in the community

Community at heart initiative

As part of its 'Community at Heart' initiative, SSE gives each one of its employees the opportunity to take a day off from their usual work programme and swap it for a day working with a local charity or supporting a community project. These days are carried out all over the country, and we are keen to raise awareness of them within the communities that we work.

Brora ice house

A local example of a Community at Heart day is the restoration of the path around the Historic Ice House in Brora. The Ice House was used heavily back in the day when Brora exported a lot of salmon to London; the crofters used to cut the ice from the river in winter and store it in the Ice House for use during the summer to keep the salmon fresh.

We were asked if we would be willing to help restore the path by 'A Brighter Brora', and four of our employees from the Gordonbush construction team volunteered for the work.

We helped to tidy up the overgrown path from Brora Bridge down past the Ice House, and re-surface it with new gravel. We also replaced a section of fencing between the path and river and cleared the area of litter.



Kathleen Cunningham, Secretary for 'A Brighter Brora', said: "We're delighted with the excellent job that the Gordonbush team has done."

"They've given this popular local walk, which is also a section of the 'Brora Heritage Village Trail' such a facelift."



Lairg footpaths



Another example of a Community at Heart day within the wider area is the resurfacing of a local footpath in Lairg which we were asked if we would be willing to get involved with by Lairg Community Council. Some of our staff who work in the area were only too happy to help, and armed with wheelbarrows, spades and rakes, the team of six worked through the heat to complete the work.

The work was completed over two days and in association with Lairg Community Council who provided some of the materials and equipment.

Do you have a project we could help with?

If you would like more information about our Community at Heart initiative, please speak to one of our members of staff.

Alternatively, you can pick up a form at the exhibition, or visit our website at www.sse.com/aboutus/employeevolunteering.