

Scottish Natural Heritage

Spatial Planning for Onshore Wind Turbines – natural heritage considerations

Guidance



June 2015



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Introduction

The purpose of this guidance is to set out the main natural heritage considerations that should be taken into account when planning for onshore wind turbines. It is in line with Scottish Planning Policy 2014 (SPP) and provides further information and data that should underpin both spatial frameworks and wider information on planning for wind turbines in the Development Plan. It replaces our Strategic Locational Guidance for onshore wind farms.

The guidance covers all natural heritage considerations that should be taken into account. However, it contains a greater level of detail on landscape considerations because recent experiences have highlighted that these are often the determining factor in wind farm applications.

SPP identifies a clear need for wind energy development to be accommodated in appropriate locations across Scotland to meet energy generation targets and mitigate climate change. Most planning authorities should therefore assume that there will be a future level of landscape change within some of their areas from wind turbines; obvious exclusions will include the National Park Authorities¹ and the most densely populated areas. This guidance seeks to help planning authorities plan for this change and is focused on helping to guide development to the right locations (SPP para 39).

The guidance is aimed at planning authorities. However, it may also be of use to a broader range of stakeholders, including development and community interests, by outlining how they can interpret the natural heritage considerations included in spatial frameworks. This can help both site selection and development management.

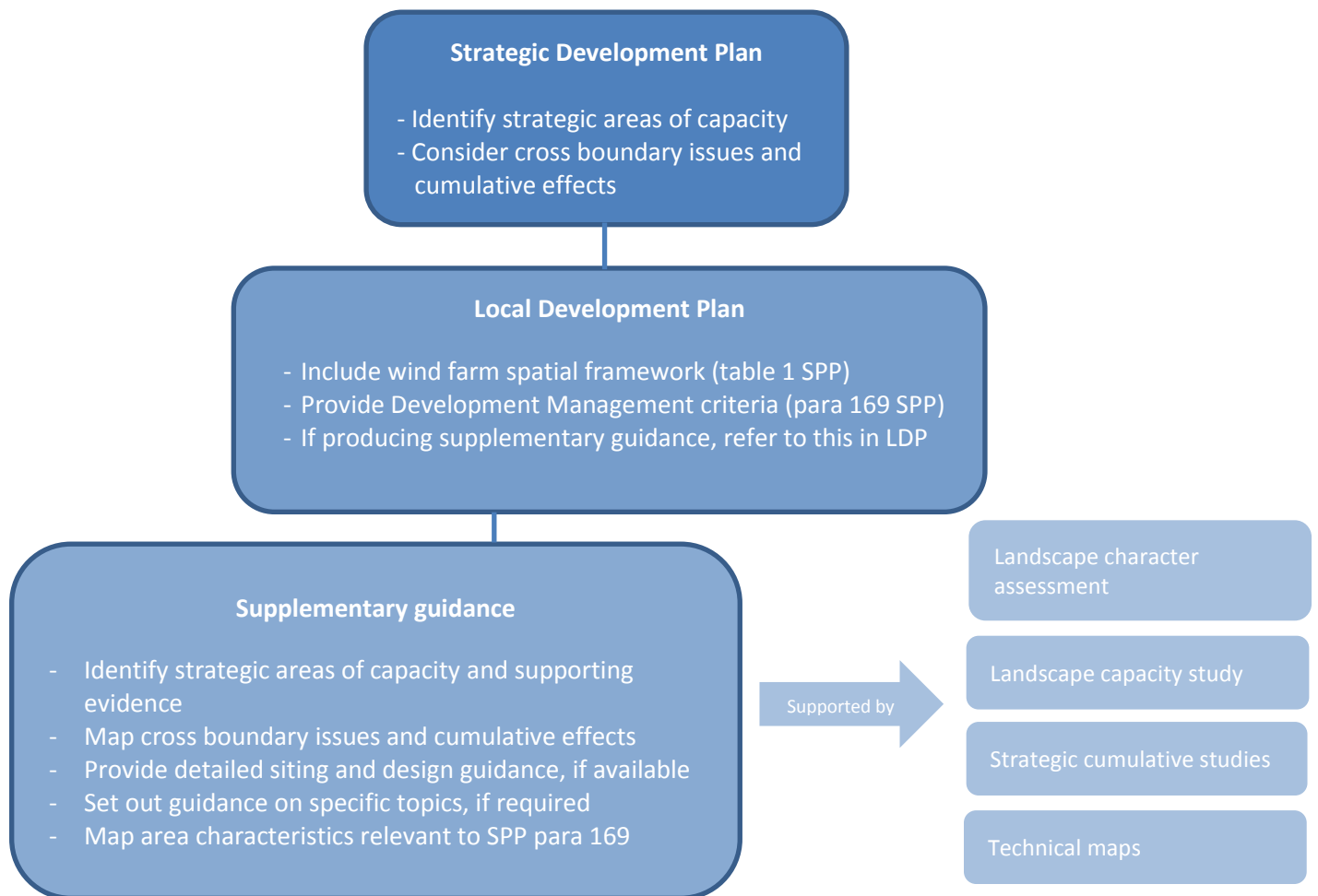
The guidance covers both the process of taking the natural heritage into account in Development Plans, and the methods and data that can be used to do this. Further guidance on planning for onshore wind turbines is available from the Scottish Government in [online planning advice](#) and "[Some Questions Answered](#)".

Spatial plans are capable of being more than just an initial steer in the development plan. They can help to inform the scoping stage of an EIA and provide a framework for site selection, environmental assessment and decision making. The guidance also makes the links between the SPP section on onshore wind (paras 161-172) and other parts of the policy which relate to the natural heritage.

The guidance provides advice on additional assessments, such as landscape capacity studies, which can provide an evidence base for the Development Plan and the production of supplementary guidance. It also provides advice on natural heritage considerations in the development management process and refers to relevant guidance from SNH and others. **Figure 1** below illustrates how these considerations should be integrated into the plans and guidance produced by planning authorities.

¹ Table 1 in SPP is clear that wind farms in National Parks or National Scenic Areas will not be acceptable

Fig. 1 Integrating natural heritage considerations in to Development Plans and supporting guidance



The guidance is split in to three parts:

- **Part 1 Development Planning:** provides advice for planning authorities on the preparation of the spatial framework and sources of spatial data relevant to SPP Table 1. It also describes how strategic tools such as landscape character assessment, landscape capacity studies and strategic cumulative impact assessment can be used to identify strategic capacity for wind farm development and underpin supplementary guidance.
- **Part 2 Site selection:** provides advice to developers on using the wind farm spatial framework at the site selection stage. It also points towards other sources of information on natural heritage issues which are useful in the early stages of the planning process.
- **Part 3 Development Management:** provides advice on the natural heritage considerations set out in paragraph 169 of SPP. It includes advice on development plan policies and on scoping an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).

Our role in supporting wind farm development

We are committed to supporting the Scottish Government to get the right development in the right places. We offer advice on the impact of onshore wind farms on the natural heritage at each stage of the planning process.

Our role in the planning system is set out in more detail in [Planning for Development – Our Service Statement](#).

To provide as much certainty as possible, and as soon as possible, we support a plan-led approach to onshore wind farm development. This seeks to steer development to the right locations (SPP, paras 39 & 40).

We will therefore use this guidance to steer our input to Main Issues Reports and Proposed Development Plans, and help planning authorities to:

- provide a spatial framework as required in Table 1 of SPP;
- identify the area's natural heritage characteristics to be taken into account in the spatial framework, supporting studies and development management;
- undertake, or update, supporting work such as landscape capacity studies;
- identify appropriate cumulative thresholds of landscape change and consider cross boundary effects; and
- make information on the natural heritage readily available to applicants.

This will help deliver Development Plan policies which maximise opportunities for renewable energy generation alongside appropriate protection for key natural heritage resources.

Part 1: Development Planning

Planning authorities are required by SPP to set out in the Development Plan a spatial framework for onshore wind farms (SPP para 161). This serves as a guide for developers and communities and is reinforced by wider planning policy considerations and, where appropriate, supplementary guidance.

The approach to spatial frameworks is set out in Table 1 in SPP. It requires planning authorities to identify three groups:

- Group 1: Areas where wind farms will not be acceptable,
- Group 2: Areas of significant protection, and
- Group 3: Areas with potential for wind farm development.

1.1 The spatial framework

This section sets out the data sources for the spatial framework and provides additional links to guidance.

1.1.1 Natural heritage data sources

Designated sites and other areas (e.g. Wild Land Areas and Carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats) can be mapped using published data sources and separated into Groups 1 and 2. Group 3 is the remaining land area, once planning authorities have mapped the community separation distance.

The GIS data for Groups 1 and 2 are downloadable through [Natural Spaces](#) on the SNH website, under 'Protected Areas' and 'Landscape, Open Space and Access'².

Wild land

The 2014 SNH map of Wild Land Areas is also available from [Natural Spaces](#). Wild land is not a designation but is afforded significant protection by Table 1 in SPP. Only the areas shown on the Wild Land Areas 2014 map should be included in the spatial framework.

Carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat

Table 1 of SPP requires planning authorities to map carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat and to afford these areas significant protection. To provide a consistent approach across Scotland, we have developed a map of these resources and this map should be used in the wind farm spatial framework. The consultation on the map concluded in March, and the final version is due to be published in July 2015.

The map is provided to inform the wind farm spatial framework. It is not a definitive guide to the distribution of Carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat across Scotland. It indicates where these resources are likely to be found and should be used to guide development away from the most sensitive resources. Guidance on its use in development management is provided in part 3.

² Data can be provided in alternative formats if required by contacting: DATA_SUPPLY@snh.gov.uk.

1.1.2 Further information on special natural heritage qualities and links to further guidance

Table A: Sources of further information for spatial frameworks. The table includes both natural and cultural heritage information for completeness.

	Information from SNH	Other information	SPP paragraph references
National Parks	Background information on the SNH website. Information on National Parks and links to founding legislation .	Further information on Scotland's National Parks can be found on the Scottish Government's website . Cairngorms National Park website Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National park website .	212, 213, 84-86
National Scenic Areas	Background information on the SNH website. Information on special qualities and links to legislation as well as more detailed planning guidance .		212, 213
World Heritage Sites	Background information on SNH website.	Information from UNESCO . Further information on St Kilda from Historic Scotland .	147
Natura and Ramsar Sites	Background information on the SNH website, including links to the Birds Directive and Habitats Directive.	Information on the Habitats Regulations .	207-211
SSSIs	Background information on the SNH website. Information on protection and management . Information on how SSSIs are selected .		212
National Nature Reserves	Background information on the SNH website. Interactive map of		212

	NNRs. Full NNR website . SNH Policy on NNRs .		
Gardens and Designed Landscapes	Background information . Guidance on the roles of SNH and Historic Scotland .	Historic Scotland website.	148, 151
Historic Battlefields³		Historic Scotland website.	149
Wild land Areas	Wild Land Areas map 2014 .		91, 169, 200, 215, Table 1 Spatial Frameworks
Carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitats	Background information is available here . When published, the map will be available on Natural Spaces .		Table 1, 169, 205

1.1.3 Community separation distance

Table 1 of SPP requires planning authorities to map a community separation distance in the spatial framework and this involves the consideration of the impacts on visual amenity in and around settlements. Further information is in [‘some questions answered’](#) from the Scottish Government.

1.2 Other material landscape policy considerations

1.2.1 Identifying strategic capacity

In addition to preparing the spatial framework, SPP states that planning authorities:

“should identify where there is strategic capacity for wind farms, and areas with the greatest potential for wind development, considering cross-boundary constraints and opportunities.” (SPP para 162)

The aim of this work is not to introduce constraints additional to those in Table 1, but to identify capacity for onshore wind farm development, and guide development to the best locations.

The additional studies to support these considerations are described below. They are a material development management consideration and will support good

³ Cultural heritage rather than natural heritage, but included for completeness with respect to table 1 in SPP.

decision-making. However, **they do not form part of the spatial framework itself.** We recommend that such studies are therefore referred to in a separate section of the Development Plan (or supplementary guidance) and are supported where appropriate by maps and technical studies.

These additional considerations are intended to provide a strategic approach which identifies both sensitivities and capacity in the Development Plan. They should not be used to put a sequential approach to wind farm planning in place.

Landscape Character Assessment

Landscape Character Assessment (LCA) is a standard methodology for identifying, describing, classifying and mapping what is distinctive about our landscapes. It describes their variety, and helps to identify what makes one landscape different from another.

LCA provides baseline information that can be used to guide landscape change. It can, for example, inform development plans, decisions on proposed development, land management plans, indicative forestry strategies and agri-environment schemes. They are equally useful when identifying the baseline for landscape capacity studies for wind farms.

The whole of Scotland has been mapped and described through LCA. The full suite of assessments is available on our [landscape character assessment](#) webpage. We are currently conducting a review of the LCAs in Scotland and more information on this is available [here](#).

Landscape capacity studies

Landscape capacity studies are a well-established tool which can be used to identify the capacity for any type of development. We have developed a [landscape capacity toolkit](#) for planning authorities which sets out key principles and methods.

[Landscape capacity studies in Scotland - a review and guide to good practice](#) provides further guidance. Some examples of capacity studies are available [here](#).

Whilst landscape capacity studies are not used to generate the spatial framework, they can support the requirements of paragraph 162 in SPP by:

- identifying landscape sensitivities early in the process;
- identifying capacity for further development;
- providing additional context for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment at the Development Management stage;
- providing advice on general design, such as turbine height and layout, taking account of the likely form of development to be proposed in the area;
- exploring the scope to change existing development, for example through repowering;

- building consensus on the best locations for wind farm development through consultation and dialogue;
- identifying acceptable levels of change against criteria agreed by the planning authority; and
- identifying cumulative issues, including cross-boundary effects (see below).

Box 1 Landscape capacity study process

It is important that landscape capacity studies for wind farms are robust and transparent. We are keen to work with planning authorities to ensure that landscape capacity studies are kept up to date. Authorities are encouraged to approach SNH for further support where this is required.

In order to achieve this, capacity studies should be:

- easy to access, particularly in electronic format located and referenced clearly on appropriate web pages.
- developed through a transparent process, including an open formal public consultation.
- underpinned by a robust and objective assessment.
- easy to follow and understand.
- ideally, kept up to date, to reflect the rapidly evolving pattern of development. In some areas they may require updating every 2-3 years, and this may not fit in with the regular development plan cycle.
- referred to in the development plan, which should include policies on how they will be used to support decisions.

The absence of a completed (or up to date) landscape capacity study should not be used to delay decision making.

Considering cumulative impacts

SPP acknowledges that:

“...in some areas the cumulative impact of existing and consented energy development may limit the capacity for further development “ (SPP, para 169)

SPP defines cumulative impacts as:

“Impact in combination with other development. That includes existing developments of the kind proposed, those which have permission, and valid applications which have not been determined. The weight attached to

undetermined applications should reflect their position in the application process” (SPP, page 70).

To support consideration of these issues, planning authorities can map the baseline cumulative issues to be taken in to account within their areas as factual information in supplementary guidance. It is important to bear in mind that this information will be subject to continuous change as planning applications for wind farms/turbines are determined. Planning authorities will therefore require detailed and up to date information on the wind farm applications (including Electricity Act section 36) in their area to do this. Several authorities already use online mapping tools to achieve this.

In identifying the potential for cumulative effects on natural heritage resources, planning authorities may find it useful to identify:

- the broad pattern of existing wind farm development, including large and small scale and identifying clusters of different types of development.
- areas where clearly identified, existing cumulative effects limit the capacity for further development (for example, the area between two existing, well defined clusters of wind farms). This would have to be backed up by robust reasons, such as the need to protect the character of a settlement or key transport corridor.
- clusters of wind farms that are in separate landscape character types and where the objective is to maintain the distinction between those character types (SPP para 194).
- any potential cross boundary issues such as effects on key transport corridors, or effects on key landscape features which cross, or are adjacent to, several planning authority areas.
- regional landscape features (such as a Firth or distinct hill range) which are important to the distinctive landscape character of the area (SPP para 194).
- local landscape designations and Regional Parks (SPP para 196).

In all of the above examples, a clear explanation of why the feature has been included; the policy protection provided by the Development Plan; and a description of the qualities which are considered important, will aid good decision-making.

For example, a key transport route should include a description of why it is important (e.g. a gateway; known tourist or scenic route) and what the objectives are for wind farm development (e.g. manage the visibility of multiple wind farms, protect key views or to maintain the transitional character as the viewer moves through different landscape types).

Our guidance on [Siting and designing wind farms in the landscape](#) provides more detailed advice on planning for multiple wind farms and managing cumulative impacts. When identifying the capacity for an area to absorb further wind farm

development a number of key landscape characteristics should be considered. These should be used to identify the objectives for wind farm development and to provide design guidance. These are summarised in Box 2 below.

1.2.2 Identifying thresholds for change

To aid future development management considerations and manage cumulative change, it may be helpful to establish baseline criteria against which changes in landscape character and visual amenity can be assessed. It is then possible to set out limits to changes in landscape character and visual amenity.

Box 2 Landscape factors relating to capacity for wind farms

Effects on landscape designations – or landscape value

The effects of additional development on the qualities, integrity and objectives of any relevant landscape designation should be analysed and described.

Effects on landscape character

The effect of development on existing landscape character should be described, including characteristics such as ruggedness and remoteness. It is likely that as more wind farms are developed they will begin to be perceived as a key landscape feature and will therefore change landscape character, especially (but not exclusively) where wind farms are close to each other.

Effects on sense of scale

Tall structures are likely to dominate and alter the perception of vertical scale in the landscape. This is more likely when larger turbines are seen in comparison with developments using smaller turbines or when turbines are viewed in comparison with other key landscape features.

Effects on sense of distance

Effects on distance may be distorted with additional wind farm development. For example, if larger turbines are located in the foreground of smaller turbines or vice versa.

Effects on existing focal points in the landscape

An existing wind farm development, or many other features, may act as a focal point in the landscape and the effects of further wind farm development on this should be considered.

Effects of skylining

A viewer's eye tends to be drawn towards the skyline. Where an existing wind farm is already prominent on a skyline, the introduction of additional structures along the horizon may result in development that is disproportionately dominant. The proportion and prominence of developed and non-developed skyline is therefore an important landscape consideration.

Effects from other forms of development

The effects of other development (such as housing or forestry) on the landscape should also be considered. For example, this may include consideration of the effects on the landscape setting of settlement or other cultural interests and associations with the landscape.

This could include identifying ways for additional development to be accommodated in an area where there are multiple wind farms already in operation or where there are multiple development proposals affecting the landscape capacity of an area. For example, limiting the geographical extent, or height of turbines, might help to limit change to one landscape character type.

This process involves:

1. identifying landscape policy objectives (see **annex 1**);
2. identifying the inherent capacity of the landscape to accommodate wind turbine development (see *section 1.2.1*);
3. assessing the degree of cumulative change that has resulted from the operating and consented wind turbines in the study area (see *section 1.2.1*); and
4. assessing the level of further development that could be acceptably accommodated within areas without unacceptable negative cumulative effect.

In judging whether or not an area should be kept free of wind farms of a particular size and scale, it is helpful to develop a clear view about which of three possible landscape objectives could apply⁴: landscape protection, accommodation, or change. Further guidance on these objectives is provided in **annex 1**. Having identified the overall landscape objectives and examined the factors set out in Box 2, it is possible to identify thresholds for change for each area.

Even where thresholds for change have been identified however, individual proposals should always be evaluated on merit and there may be a need to review such thresholds in light of changing circumstances and priorities.

1.3 Strategic Development Plans (SDP)

As set out in section 1.2, a strategic approach to landscape capacity studies and cumulative assessments within SDP areas is essential to ensure that large clusters of development remain well designed and well defined.

Many of the issues described above include cross boundary effects. SDPs have a key role in identifying these effects and planning proactively for them. For example, some landscape constraints cross multiple planning authorities (the Highland Boundary Fault for example) as do some existing clusters of wind farms (such as the development in the Lammermuir hills).

In addition, large scale wind farm development is generally clustered in areas with good access to the grid, good wind speed and lower environmental sensitivity. Many of these areas are quite close to urban areas (such as the cluster of development around Whitelee) and require careful planning to take account of the effects on communities, as well as recreational opportunities close to our major cities. SDPs

⁴ For further discussion on landscape objectives see SNH's Landscape Policy Framework. [Policy Statement No. 05/01](#)

can help plan for wind farm development in these areas. More guidance on recreation interests is available on our [website](#).

Further guidance is contained within '[some questions answered](#)' from the Scottish Government.

1.4 Repowering

As existing wind farms near the end of their operating lives, applications for repowering are steadily increasing. In some cases, wind farms will be repowered well within the 25 year planning consent due to rapidly evolving technology and changing financial incentives.

Repowering will make an increasing contribution towards renewable electricity targets as it becomes more difficult to find new sites in acceptable locations. In some cases repowering may provide an opportunity to increase strategic capacity by improving the pattern and design of wind farm development.

In most cases applicants will seek to install larger turbines when repowering an existing site. Planning authorities could consider potential development scenarios when developing landscape capacity studies and, where possible, offer an early steer on whether larger turbines will be appropriate on existing sites. The studies described above can help to achieve this.

SPP para 170 states that:

'areas identified for wind farms should be suitable for use in perpetuity'.

We should therefore assume that in most cases an operator will apply to repower the wind farm and that the wind farm will become a long term, rather than temporary, change to the landscape.

SPP para 174 also states that:

'Proposals to repower existing wind farms which are already in suitable sites where environmental and other impacts have been shown to be capable of mitigation can help to maintain or enhance installed capacity, underpinning renewable energy generation targets. The current use of the site as a wind farm will be a material consideration in any such proposals.'

Repowering should be considered in landscape capacity studies and strategic assessments of cumulative effects. Where existing wind farms are identified as a significant constraint on further development, or are deemed to be poorly located when tested against current policy criteria, planning authorities should consider highlighting this in supporting information.

Part 2: Site Selection

This section is aimed at wind farm developers and seeks to ensure that all relevant sources of information are taken in to account.

Site selection for wind farms should take account of spatial frameworks for wind farms as set out in Development Plans. Natural heritage considerations will vary relative to the scale of the proposal and area characteristics, but should include all those listed in [para 169 in SPP](#).

These issues should be considered as part of the site selection process and used to identify potentially significant issues early in the process. This can identify the key issues for discussion with the decision maker and statutory consultees at the earliest stages. For example, the identification of a Golden Eagle nest is likely to be a key consideration in the EIA process which would not have been identified in the spatial framework.

Links to further information on the considerations set out in para 169 are included in Table B below. These should be used at the site selection stage to screen out proposals which are unlikely to be appropriate, or to identify the key issues to be addressed at the development management stage (see [Part 3](#)).

Table B: sources of further information for site selection

Cumulative impacts	<p>Sources such as Renewable energy planning data and the UK wind energy database can be used for further information. We are currently working with the Scottish Government to develop a comprehensive, mapped dataset in Scotland. Several planning authorities also maintain online datasets.</p> <p>If the site is chosen to progress to an application, applicants should source up to date information from the planning authority on the status of applications within the study area before undertaking a cumulative impact assessment.</p>
Landscape and visual impacts	<p>Landscape character assessments</p> <p>Local Landscape designations</p> <p>Landscape capacity studies where these are available</p> <p>Siting and designing wind farms in the landscape</p>
Recreation	<p>Guidance on enjoying the outdoors and links to information on Scotland's Great Trails.</p>
Birds	<p>Bird sensitivity map for Scotland and Raptor Study Groups</p>
Nature conservation	<p>Local Nature Reserves including Local Nature Conservation Sites</p> <p>Sensitive habitats: e.g. sand dune and machair, coastal grassland and heathland</p>

	Other sources of information on the natural heritage including our website , the National Biodiversity Network and sources of local information such as Local Biodiversity Action Plans .
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2.1 Exploring previous decisions

At the earliest stages of site selection, it can be helpful to explore previous decisions by the planning authority, Scottish Ministers and reporters where these relate to the natural heritage. This could help identify the determining issues for sites in the local area and help to identify potential constraints on development. These can be sourced as follows:

- planning authority determinations are available via [e planning](#) web portals;
- determinations by Scottish Ministers are available [here](#); and
- determinations by Reporters from the Directorate for Planning and Environmental Appeals are available [here](#)

Where appropriate, we will refer to previous decisions, or our previous advice, to give developers an initial steer on the issues associated with new applications. Box 3 below sets out our role in the early stages of development.

Box 3 Early engagement with SNH and planning authorities

We encourage developers to engage with both us and planning authorities early in the process to discuss site selection. This allows us to:

- identify any additional natural heritage sensitivities early in the process and agree the scope of on-site surveys;
- provide local information and knowledge which may not be readily available from the sources listed above;
- help identify solutions to potential constraints, including mitigation or re design; and
- influence early design iterations.

We will engage in applications which meet the tests set out in [Planning for development – our service statement](#) (April 2015)

Part 3 Development management

This section sets out the key natural heritage considerations during the development management stage, including development plan policies relevant to the natural heritage.

3.1 Applying Development Plan policies

Development Plan policies should deliver the aims set out in paragraphs 155 – 157 of SPP. In particular:

“They should set out the factors to be taken into account in considering proposals for energy developments. These will depend on the scale of the proposal and its relationship to the surrounding area and are likely to include the considerations set out at paragraph 169”. (SPP para 157)

As part of the Development Plan process, planning authorities should review and where appropriate update their policies on wind energy development to ensure the natural heritage factors set out in paragraph 169 of SPP are covered.

Further information on the natural heritage issues identified in paragraph 169 is set out in Table C below.

In addition, Development Plans should set out policy principles on the use of conditions, mitigation and the need for detailed restoration plans. Further guidance is available in [Decommissioning and Restoration Plans](#).

Table C: Additional natural heritage issues relevant to Development Plan Policies.

Natural heritage consideration	Additional SPP and NPF3 paragraph references	Available data source/tools not shown in tables A & B	Links to SNH guidance
Landscape and visual impacts	SPP: 202 NPF3: 4.4, 4.18, 4.32	Guidelines for landscape and Visual Impact Assessment .	Landscape impacts guidance Landscape capacity and sensitivity
Public access, including long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes	SPP: 197, 226, NPF3: 193, 251	Core Paths Plans	Managing access and recreation
Tourism and	SPP: 197,	Out There – sportscotland’s	

recreation;	233	policy on sport and recreation in the outdoors Scottish Tourism Strategy	
Natural heritage	SPP: 196, 197		
Habitats	SPP: 194	Sensitive habitats: peatland, sand dune and machair, coastal grassland and heathland	
Carbon rich soils	SPP: 205	Further information on developments on peatland and the carbon calculator .	
Cross boundary effects	SPP: 162	Landscape capacity tools	

3.2 Considering carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat

Wind farm spatial frameworks should contain a map of carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat. This map is a general guide to the location of these resources across Scotland. It provides a useful steer for developers on the likelihood that peat soils will be present and may be a significant site constraint.

The map cannot (and should not) be used in isolation to determine the impacts of a specific development proposal on peat. This should be based on a detailed, site specific survey of peatland habitats and peat depths across the site using existing methods. However, the map does provide useful context on the overall extent of these resources across Scotland and can be used to put the impacts of a specific application in context.

The location of a proposal in the mapped area does not, in itself, mean that the proposal is unacceptable, or that carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat will be adversely affected. The quality of peatland tends to be highly variable across an application site and a detailed assessment is required to identify the actual effects of the proposal, and to inform the location of site infrastructure.

Similarly, the lack of carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat on the map does not mean that soils and habitats in the area have no current or potential ecological value. For example peatlands that have been over-planted with trees (included in Class X on the soil map) may be capable of habitat restoration.

3.3 Protecting woodland resources

There is a strong policy presumption in favour of protecting Scotland's woodland resources (SPP para 218). The control of woodland removal policy aims to protect the existing forest resource in Scotland and supports woodland removal only where it would achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits. The criteria

for determining the acceptability of woodland removal and further information on the implementation of the policy is explained in the [Control of Woodland Removal Policy](#), and this should be taken into account when preparing development plans and determining planning applications. More information for developers can be found on the [FCS website](#).

3.4 Additional guidance on onshore wind

The following guidance is relevant to the EIA process for onshore wind farms, as well as those which do not require EIA. Development Plans, or Supplementary Planning Guidance may wish to refer to these where appropriate:

- [Visual representation of wind farms](#) (SNH, version 2.1, December 2014)
- [Siting and designing wind farms in the landscape](#) (SNH, 2014)
- [Visual Assessment of Wind farms: Best Practice](#) (SNH, 2002)
- [Siting and Design of Small Scale Wind Turbines of between 15 and 50 metres in height](#) (SNH, 2012)
- The [EIA handbook](#) (SNH, 2013)
- [Guidance on bird survey methods and assessment](#)
- [General advice and information on onshore wind](#)
- Local records centres
- Planning authority websites and [Local Biodiversity Action Plans](#)
- [Agreement on roles between SNH and the National Park Authorities](#)
- National Park Partnership Plans
- [Assessing the impacts of small scale wind energy proposals on the natural heritage](#) (2012)

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Annex 1 – Landscape objectives

Landscape Protection:

The aim of landscape protection is to maintain the existing landscape and visual resource, retaining or reinforcing its present character and protecting its quality and integrity. It is likely to be difficult to accommodate wind farms in areas which are identified as requiring landscape protection. Development may nonetheless be possible where it relates well to the existing landscape in terms of both scale, siting and design. Micro generation may be acceptable where this relates well to the existing built environment.

Where a landscape designation is in place, or where the value of the landscape has been otherwise identified (such as in Wild Land Areas) it is useful to identify the special qualities for which the area is designated and to consider how the proposal could affect these qualities⁵.

This approach is likely to only be acceptable in those areas defined within group 1 and potentially group 2 of table 1 in SPP and only after the spatial framework is defined. However, cumulative effects and local landscape considerations may also lead to the need for a Landscape Protection approach in group 3 where this is justified by supporting studies and information.

Landscape Accommodation:

The aim of landscape accommodation is to retain the overall character of the landscape, yet accepting that development may be allowed which will have an impact on the landscape at the local scale. Development fits within the landscape and does not change its character to a significant extent.

Landscape accommodation implies that there may be important landscape-related constraints in terms of the siting, design and scale of wind farms, but that suitably designed wind farms can be compatible with this objective.

Within local landscape designations and Wild land Areas, the degree of landscape protection will be less than for National Scenic Areas. In these areas, an appropriate objective may be to accommodate wind farms, rather than seek landscape protection. Where this approach is chosen, the justification will need to be clearly articulated in relevant planning policy.

Landscape Change:

This objective recognises that the area is one whose landscape character may be allowed to change, which could result in a perception of a wind farm landscape.

Landscape change does not imply that ‘anything goes’, nor that change should occur across the whole area: good landscape design principles still need to be followed to ensure that the development is appropriate for the scale and character of the landscape. For example our [Siting and Design Guidance](#) describes how turbines should be appropriately planned in their local context.

⁵ Note - Wild Land Areas are not designations. Descriptions of their special qualities will be provided later in 2015.

www.snh.gov.uk