



Limekiln Wind Farm Section 36C Application:

Planning Statement Update

February 2022

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background & Scope

1.1.1 The Applicant's original Planning Statement for the Limekiln Section 36C application is dated June 2021.

1.1.2 There have been a number of developments in terms of renewable energy policy and national planning policy over the last six months, therefore the opportunity is being taken to update the policy position relevant to the determination of the application.

1.1.3 The original Planning Statement made reference to both the Onshore Wind Policy (OWPS) Statement of 2017. A 'Refresh' of the OWPS has been issued for consultation. In addition, a draft National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) has also issued for consultation. Both of these documents are therefore material considerations.

1.2 Structure of Planning Statement Update

1.2.1 This report is structured as follows:

- > Chapter 2 provides an update on Scottish Government provisions, energy policy considerations including reference to the draft OWPS Refresh published by the Scottish Government in October 2021 for consultation.
- > Chapter 3 addresses proposed changes to national planning policy in terms of the draft NPF4 which was published by the Scottish Government in November 2021 for consultation.
- > Chapter 4 provides overall conclusions.

2. Update on the Scottish Government Energy Policy

2.1 The Scottish Government & Scottish Green Party: Shared Policy Programme

2.1.1 The Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party agreed a formal Cooperation Agreement for the next five years of Government on 20 August 2021. A shared policy programme entitled 'The Bute House Agreement' was published on 20 August 2021 which sets out areas of mutual policy interest including energy and planning. The content has been reflected in the formal 'Programme for Government' published in September 2021. Key points of relevance from the Shared Programme include the following.

2.1.2 In terms of energy, on page 12 of the document it sets out the parties:

"believe that the climate emergency means we need to use the limited powers we have to accelerate the decarbonisation of our energy system. While electricity has already been largely decarbonised, our plans will see a significant increase in electricity demand for heating and transport. To accommodate this, we will support the continued and accelerated deployment of renewable energy".

> In order to do this the parties state that they will "set an ambition to deliver, subject to consultation, between 8 and 12GW of additional installed onshore wind by 2030... - this will be supported by the changes in the planning system needed to permit the growth of this essential zero carbon sector". (underlining added)

> At the present time Scotland has approximately 8.4GW of installed onshore wind capacity. Therefore, the Government is looking to, at the minimum, double this capacity, by adding a minimum additional further 8GW in just less than ten years.

> In terms of planning, the Agreement (page 17) states that the parties will inter alia:

"agree to ensure approval and adoption of Scotland's Fourth National Planning Framework (NPF4) which will be vital in supporting the delivery of net zero by 2045 with significant progress by 2030;

actively enable renewable energy.... supporting repowering of existing windfarms and planning for the expansion of the grid".

2.2 The Programme for Government

2.2.1 The content of the Bute House Agreement (referenced above) has been reflected in the formal 'Programme for Government' 'a fairer, greener Scotland' published in September 2021. Key points of relevance from the Shared Programme including the following (page 64):

> The Government will ensure that NPF4 "*actively enables renewable energy, supporting repowering of existing wind farms*".

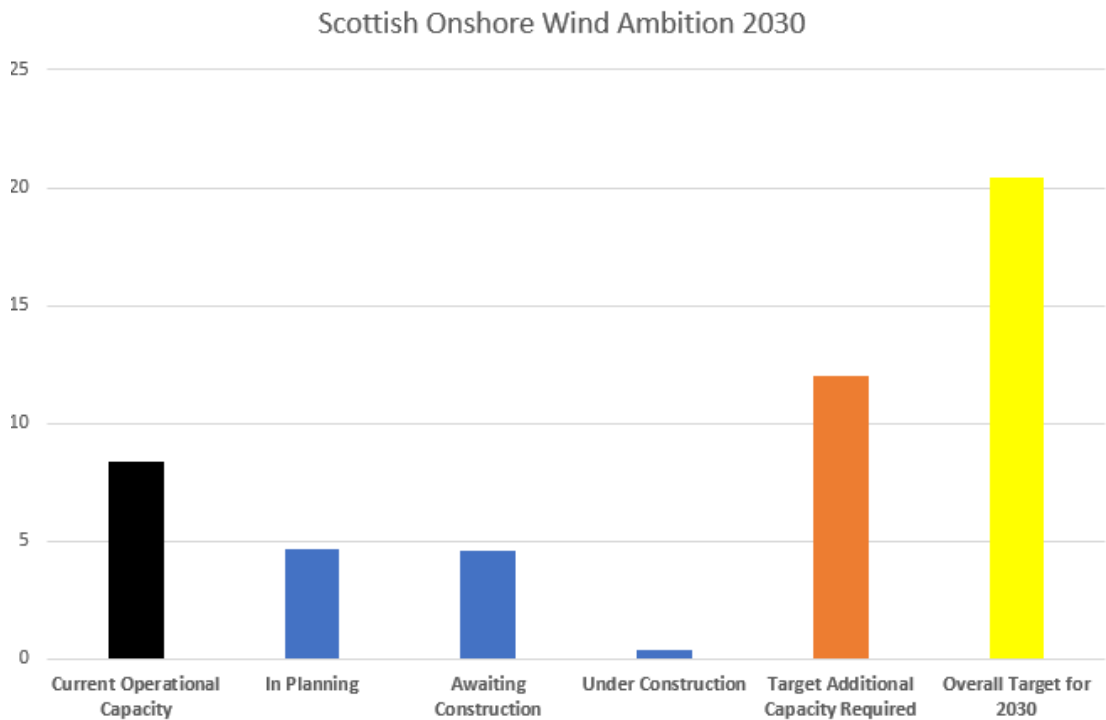
> Subject to consultation, "*we are committed to securing between 8 and 12 GW of installed onshore wind by 2030*". The draft OWPS (see below) confirms that this relates to additional onshore wind capacity.

2.3 The Draft Onshore Wind Policy Statement

- 2.3.1 The draft OWPS was published in October 2021 and, when adopted, will replace the existing OWPS published in 2017. The OWPS is a statement of Scottish Government policy in relation to onshore wind developments and will be a significant material consideration in determination of applications for onshore wind developments. Notwithstanding this is a draft document, it contains various statements of the Scottish Government's current position and views on onshore wind. The draft OWPS covers five main areas as follows:
- > The current position with regard to onshore wind in Scotland;
 - > The future position of 'net zero';
 - > Barriers to deployment, covering technical and reserved matters;
 - > Barriers to deployment in terms of environmental factors; and
 - > Economic opportunities in relation to the supply chain.
- 2.3.2 In the **Ministerial Foreword**, by Michael Matheson, Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport, it is stated that:
- "onshore wind remains vital to Scotland's future energy mix and we will need much more as we continue our progress to meet Scotland's legally binding net zero target"*.
- 2.3.3 In terms of the current position (Chapter 1), reference is made at the outset to the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 and it is stated that *"meeting these commitments and targets will require decisive and meaningful action over the next 12 months, across all sectors"*. (paragraph 1.1).
- 2.3.4 The draft OWPS therefore recognises the urgency of the situation and the need to take decisions to meet ambitious targets within a short, indeed immediate, timescale.
- 2.3.5 In terms of current deployment, paragraph 1.2.2 sets out that:
- "We must now go further and faster than before. We expect the next decade see a substantial increase in demand for electricity to support net zero delivery across all sectors, including heat, transport and industrial processes. Some estimates from the CCC suggest that we could expect a doubling in electricity demand. This will undoubtedly require a substantial increase in installed capacity across all renewable technologies."***
(emphasis added)
- 2.3.6 Paragraph 1.2.3 sets out that the Scottish Government's *"aim is to maintain the supportive policy and regulatory framework which will enable us to increase that deployment still further"*.
- 2.3.7 In terms of **future position and net zero** (Chapter 2), paragraph 2.1.1 sets out that:
- "the transition to net zero means that our demand for green electricity will increase substantially over the course of the next decade. This means that a consistently higher rate of onshore wind, and other renewables capacity, will be required year-on-year."***
(emphasis added)
- 2.3.8 This Chapter of the draft OWPS sets out key statistics in relation to onshore wind in the UK and Scotland. Additionally, it sets out the statistics of Scotland's onshore wind projects that are currently at different stages of the planning /consenting process, as follows:
- > In planning – 4.69 GW;
 - > Awaiting construction – 4.64 GW; and
 - > Under construction – 0.43 GW.

- 2.3.9 The Proposed Development represents a valuable part of the current ‘in planning’ capacity figure.
- 2.3.10 Reference is also made in the draft OWPS to the RenewableUK ‘Onshore Wind Industry Prospectus’ which sets out the need for Scotland to develop an additional 12GW of onshore wind capacity which the draft OWPS states will mean “a total of 20.4GW installed capacity by 2030”. (paragraph 2.1.4) – see **Figure 3.1** below.

Figure 3.1: Scottish Onshore Wind Capacity & Ambition (GW)



- 2.3.11 It is important to note the scale of onshore wind development required to install an additional 8-12GW of onshore wind capacity. It has taken 20 years to develop 8.4GW of operational onshore wind capacity in Scotland – this illustrates the massive increase in the rate and volume of consenting that is required. There is therefore a step change in the required urgency of deployment of onshore wind. The Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution to the additional 12GW of *installed* capacity required.
- 2.3.12 Reference is also made to CCC Sixth Carbon Budget which (as already noted) sets out exploratory scenarios for emissions reduction to 2050. The draft OWPS states at paragraph 2.1.5 that:
*“these estimate that, in every scenario, the UK will require a total of 25-30 GW of installed onshore wind capacity by 2050 to meet governmental targets – which would mean **doubling the current UK installed capacity**”.* (emphasis added)
- 2.3.13 The draft OWPS states that against this context the Government seeks views on:
*“**an ambition for an additional 8-12 GW of onshore wind to be installed in Scotland by 2032 to help us meet our binding net zero commitment.** This follows initial discussions with our stakeholders and will be subject to further analysis as part of a wider work to refresh Scotland’s Energy Strategy”.* (emphasis added)

- 2.3.14 At paragraph 2.1.7, the draft OWPS acknowledges that the capacity ultimately developed will depend on a range of factors including decarbonisation pathways and demand growth across other sectors such as heat, transport and industrial demand, but it adds (paragraph 2.1.8) *“however, we believe it vital to send a strong signal and set a clear expectation on what we believe onshore wind capacity can contribute”*.
- 2.3.15 At paragraph 2.2.3. there is reference to **turbine blade tip heights**, and it is set out that: *“the Scottish Government acknowledges that tip heights for onshore wind farms are increasing and welcomes the resulting efficiencies in generation that this enables”*.
- 2.3.16 It is acknowledged in this paragraph that the tallest tip heights may not be appropriate in every landscape or for every development.
- 2.3.17 Section 3.4 references **transmission and distribution networks**. There is recognition that further network investment is required and will be supported, but there is no suggestion that it should be considered a negative consideration in individual cases.
- 2.3.18 In terms of **barriers to deployment** covering environmental factors, this is set out in Chapter 4 and covers the topics of noise, land use, peatlands and carbon rich soils, forestry, biodiversity and landscape and visual considerations.
- 2.3.19 In terms of **landscape and visual considerations**, this is covered at section 4.4. and paragraph 4.4.2 states: *“Scotland’s most cherished landscapes are a key part of our natural and cultural heritage and must be afforded the necessary protections. **However, we also recognise that climate change, and our net zero ambitions, require decisive action, will change how Scotland looks and that we will need to deploy significant volumes of onshore wind generation over the next decade to help us meet our challenging legal obligations. This is likely to comprise modern, efficient turbines** which will maximise the generation possible at each site and a mix of current technologies and taller turbines.”* (emphasis added)
- 2.3.20 The draft OWPS therefore recognises that the decisive action required in order to rapidly deploy very substantial additional onshore capacity will change Scotland’s landscapes. This is an inevitable result of the deployment of onshore commercial wind farms and the larger, more efficient turbines welcomed in the draft OWPS. It is considered that the reference to “Scotland’s most cherished landscapes” must be read in the context of the NPF4 proposed policies.
- 2.3.21 Chapter 5 relates to **economic opportunities**, and covers the topics of supply chain, contracts for difference, benefits to Scotland skills, tourism and cultural economics and other related matters.
- 2.3.22 In terms of supply chain, at paragraph 5.1.3 the Government references the recent RenewableUK ‘Onshore Wind Prospectus’, which has estimated that approximately 17,000 jobs and the equivalent of £27.8 billion in gross added value (GVA) could be achieved in Scotland if there is deployment of an additional 12 GW of onshore wind by 2030.
- 2.3.23 Furthermore, in terms of economic benefits, reference is made to the Just Transition Commission’s ‘a national mission for a fairer, greener Scotland’ (paragraph 5.3.1) and it is stated at paragraph 5.3.2 that *“the rapid expansion of Scotland’s onshore wind capacity, and associated manufacturing opportunities, will play a key role in this new future”*.
- 2.3.24 The Scottish Government is clearly setting out that there is an important opportunity to capitalise on in relation to the socio-economic benefits from onshore wind.
- 2.3.25 In terms of **tourism and cultural economics**, the draft OWPS sets out at paragraph 5.7.4 that public support for onshore wind has grown significantly across the UK reaching a new record of 79% in 2019 with opposition decreasing to only 5% in 2020.

- 2.3.26 Whilst the document is clearly issued for consultation it sets out on the above topics the Scottish Government's current position and a clear direction of travel of strong support for onshore wind.
- 2.3.27 Furthermore, for the first time a technology specific target relating to onshore wind is proposed. This is set out in bold text in the Ministerial Foreword where the overall aim of the consultation is set out to encourage input and evidence to: *"help support work that we are doing to establish an ambition for the additional onshore wind capacity needed to help Scotland achieve net zero, as set out in the Cooperation Agreement between the Scottish Government and the Scottish Green Party"*.
- ## 2.4 CCC Report to Parliament 'Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland'
- 2.4.1 The CCC published a report to the Scottish Parliament entitled 'Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland' in December 2021. It sets out (page 10) that:
- "achievement of Scotland's legislated climate targets would be a strong contribution to global efforts, consistent with the Paris Agreement and a path to 1.50C. COP 26 in Glasgow marked a step forward in international commitment to address climate change. As globally, so in Scotland, the focus must now be to deliver against the commitments that have been made"*.
- 2.4.2 The key messages in the report (pages 10 and 11) include, in summary:
- > Delivery of rapid emissions reductions cannot wait – it is set out that it has taken 30 years to halve Scottish territorial emissions and **"they must halve again in a decade to meet the legislated 2030 target."** (emphasis added)
 - > The annual targets during the 2020s will be very difficult to meet – *"even with the strongest climate policies"*. Emissions in 2019 were above the annual target. This represents a warning in respect of future annual targets, as there will be unavoidable inertia in scaling up to reduce emissions in those sectors that have made only slow progress to date.
 - > Meeting the 2030 target – the CCC set out that *"climate policy in Scotland must focus on the transition to net zero and the need for rapid focus by 2030"*.
- 2.4.3 The Executive Summary also sets out that while Scottish emissions fell 2% in 2019, the latest year for which data are available, Scotland missed its annual target by a significant margin. The CCC add (page 10) that **"the 2020s is the critical decade in changing course for net zero"**. (emphasis added)

3. The Draft National Planning Framework 4

3.1 Key Provisions in the draft NPF4

Introduction

3.1.1 The draft NPF4 was published in November 2021. Once approved, it will become part of the statutory Development Plan. Now that the draft document has been published, it is a material consideration, setting out draft policy and is not simply an indication of direction of travel.

3.1.2 The Applicant has highlighted the key Scottish Government objective of net zero emissions by 2045 and how this objective was underpinned by legislation, specifically the provisions of the Climate Change (Emissions Reductions Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.

3.1.3 In the Ministerial Foreword, the Minister for Public Finance, Planning and Community Wealth states:

“This, our fourth National Planning Framework sets out how our approach to planning and development will help to achieve a net zero, sustainable Scotland by 2045.”

3.1.4 As noted, the 2020s are seen as a critical decade and this is referenced in Part 1 (page 3) of the draft OWPS where the Minister states:

“we have set a target of net zero emissions by 2045, and must make significant progress towards this by 2030. This will require new development and infrastructure across Scotland.”

National Developments

3.1.5 The draft NPF4 (Part 2, page 44) continues the planning policy approach from the current NPF3 of identifying ‘national development’ which refers to specific land use allocations and also applies national development status to certain classes of development. The draft NPF4 states that *“national developments are significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver our spatial strategy”*.

3.1.6 In the draft NPF4 18 national developments are proposed to support the delivery of the Spatial Strategy and it has set out that *“this designation means that the principle of the development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes, providing more certainty for communities, business and investors”*.

3.1.7 There are three categories of national development proposed namely ‘liveable places, productive places and distinctive places’. Within the ‘productive places’ category is proposed national development 12 entitled ‘strategic renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure’.

3.1.8 A statement for this national development is provided as follows (page 59):

“This national development supports renewable electricity generation, repowering, and expansion of the electricity grid.

A large increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets. Certain types of renewable electricity generation will also be required, alongside developments and increases in storage technology and capacity, to provide the vital services, including flexible response, that a zero-carbon network will require. Generation is for consumption domestically as well as for export to the UK and beyond, with new capacity helping to decarbonise heat, transport and industrial

energy demand. This has the potential to support jobs and business investment, with wider economic benefits.”

3.1.9 A statement of ‘need’ is also provided as follows:

“Additional electricity generation from renewables and electricity transmission capacity of scale is fundamental to achieving a net zero economy and supports improved network resilience in rural and island areas”. (emphasis added)

3.1.10 In terms of designation and classes of development, it is set out that a development within one or more of the classes of development set out in the draft NPF4 and that is of a scale or type that would otherwise have been classified as ‘major’ by the Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Development) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 is designated as a national development - these include (page 59):

“Electricity generation, including electricity storage, from renewables of or exceeding 50 megawatts capacity”.

3.1.11 The Proposed Development would be considered as national development and the statement of need as set out above is an important consideration. The Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution in supporting the transition to a net zero economy.

Draft National Planning Policy

3.1.12 Part 3 of the draft NPF contains proposed new ‘National Planning Policy’ and with regard to sustainable places, it sets out that (page 68):

“To achieve a net zero, nature positive Scotland, we must rebalance our planning system so that climate change and nature recovery are the primary guiding principles for all our plans and all our decisions. That includes emissions reduction and the adaptations we need to make in order to be resilient to the risks created by a warmer climate.” (emphasis added)

3.1.13 The draft universal policy of particular relevance to the proposed development is **Policy 2 entitled ‘Climate Emergency’**. This states at Part A that *“when considering all development proposals significant weight should be given to the Global Climate Emergency”*.

3.1.14 It is important to note that climate change and nature recovery are stated to be *the primary guiding principles for all our plans and decisions, including emissions reduction*. This is a strong and unequivocal statement. It must follow, as reflected in Policy 2, that this affords substantial policy support to any proposed development which makes a substantial contribution towards combatting climate change.

3.1.15 Part C of the policy sets out that:

“development proposals for national, major or EIA development should be accompanied by a whole life assessment of greenhouse gas emissions from the development. In decision making the scale of the contribution of development proposals to emissions in relation to emissions reduction targets should be taken into account.”

3.1.16 In terms of the emissions reduction that the Proposed Development would give rise to, this was set out in the original Planning Statement (page 21) where there is a reference to the Proposed Development having the potential to offset a substantial amount of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gas emissions¹.

3.1.17 Under the theme of ‘productive places’ (page 90) contains **draft Policy 19 in relation to ‘Green Energy’**. The preamble to the policy states:

¹ It is expected that the annual carbon savings would be in the order of 4,962,151 tCO₂e over the lifetime of the development.

“We want our places to support continued expansion of low carbon and net zero energy technologies as a key contributor to net zero emissions by 2045.

*Scotland's energy sector has a significant role to play in reducing carbon emissions and contributing to a green, fair and resilient economic recovery. A wide range of renewable technologies are capable of delivering these benefits, although **it is likely that the onshore wind sector will play the greatest role in the coming years.** The planning system should support all forms of renewable energy development and energy storage, together with new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure.” (emphasis added)*

- 3.1.18 It is recognised that the detailed wording of the proposed policies may well change as a result of public consultation and indeed through the Parliamentary process for draft NPF4. However, in terms of Policy 19 ‘Green Energy’ (page 90) the key elements of the policy as currently proposed, include the following:
- > *“Local Development Plans should seek to ensure that an area's full potential for electricity and heat from renewable sources is achieved. Opportunities for new development, extensions and repowering of existing renewable energy development should be supported.*
 - > *Development proposals for all forms of renewable energy and low carbon fuels, together with enabling work such as transmission and distribution infrastructure and energy storage, such as battery storage should be supported in principle.*
 - > *Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks and National Scenic Areas should not be supported.*
 - > *Outwith National Parks and National Scenic Areas and recognising the sensitivity of any other national or international designations, development proposals for new wind farms should be supported unless the impacts are identified (including cumulative effect) are unacceptable. To inform this, site specific assessments including where applicable environmental impact assessments (EIA) and landscape and visual impact assessments (LVIA) are required.*
 - > *Areas identified for wind farms should be suitable for use in perpetuity. Consent may be time limited, but wind farms should nevertheless be sited and designed to ensure impacts are minimised and to protect an acceptable level of amenity for adjacent communities.”*
- 3.1.19 The proposed section ‘K’ of the policy sets out that specific considerations for green energy proposals will vary relative to the scale of a proposal and the area characteristics. Reference is then made to 17 considerations which replicate those set out in the current Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) at paragraph 169.
- 3.1.20 A key change therefore is that there is no Spatial Framework as per the current SPP and the clear spatial planning policy direction is that wind farms will not be acceptable in National Parks or National Scenic Areas, but outwith these areas, and recognising the sensitivity of any other national or international designations, development proposals for new wind farms “should be supported unless the impacts are unacceptable”.
- 3.1.21 In the planning balance that will need to be struck, there will need to be recognition of the Climate Emergency and on this particular matter, draft Policy 2 is clear that significant weight should be given to the Global Climate Emergency.
- 3.1.22 As noted in the overall conclusions below, the Applicant’s position is that the local impacts that would result from what is a relatively modest tip height increase would not outweigh the benefits with the current policy and guidance in place and this draft new policy adds further positive reinforcement of that position.

- 3.1.23 Draft **Policy 32 'Natural Places'** sets out at criterion B) that development proposals that would have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment should not be supported.
- 3.1.24 The policy references **wild land** at criterion i) and states that development proposals for development *in areas* identified as wild land, should only be supported there the proposed development cannot be located outside of the wild land area, or it would be for small scale development linked to a rural business and, based on a site based assessment of any significant effects on the qualities of the areas is undertaken, and use of siting, design or other mitigation, minimises adverse impacts.
- 3.1.25 This draft policy only refers to development *within* wild land. Nevertheless, the Applicant has taken an approach whereby a carefully designed layout has been formulated which minimises adverse effects in relation to wild land to an acceptable level.

Contribution to National Outcomes

- 3.1.26 In terms of the matter of weight to be afforded to the draft NPF4, although the document is currently in draft form it needs to be recognised that the amended Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 directs that the NPF must contribute to a series of six outcomes and one of these includes "*meeting targets for emissions of greenhouse gases*" (draft NPF4 page 1). Annex A of Part 5 to the draft NPF4 refers to six 'outcome statements' which are described as "*how the Scottish Ministers consider that the development will contribute to each of the outcomes identified in section 3A(3)(c) of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997.*"
- 3.1.27 Outcome E is "*meeting any targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, within the meaning of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009, contained in or set by virtue of that Act*".
- 3.1.28 The outcome statement sets out that the Scottish Ministers consider:
- "that development of land supported by the policies and proposals in the NPF will contribute to this outcome by placing the global climate emergency at the heart of our strategy which addresses both emissions reduction and adaptation. Policy 2 'Climate Emergency' states that when considering all development proposals significant weight should be given to the global climate emergency.*
- More generally, on emissions reduction our policies addresselectricity generation from renewable sources and support for appropriately emissions abated low carbon fuels".*
- 3.1.29 It is therefore clear that the generation of renewable energy (in particular from onshore wind) "*in the coming years*" is recognised as being of national importance and is a key part of the way in which the emissions reduction statutory 'outcome' and the attainment of the legally binding net zero will be fulfilled. These statutory outcomes are not being consulted on and are set in law.
- 3.1.30 The Proposed Development would make an important and valuable contribution to outcome E and the delivery of net zero target. Therefore, whilst it would be appropriate to only place limited weight on the detailed wording of the specific policies in the draft NPF4 at this stage, the contribution that the Proposed Development would make to statutory outcomes can, it is considered, be afforded some weight.

4. Conclusions

4.1 Conclusions

4.1.1

The urgent need for onshore wind has been set out: a large increase in the deployment of this renewable energy technology is supported through a number of UK level policy documents including the latest UK Energy White Paper and Net Zero Strategy. Scottish Government policy commitments are also clear – most recently expressed in the draft OWPS and in the draft NPF4 which are material to the energy and national planning policy positions to be considered for the determination of the application. Key points which can be drawn from the documents include:

- > The central requirement for a rapid transition to net zero and the crucial role of further onshore wind development in achieving legally-binding targets, especially through the 2020s.
- > Unequivocal Scottish Government policy support for the future role of onshore wind.
- > The urgency of the Climate Emergency and the scale of the necessary ambition – there is express recognition in the draft OWPS of the need for “*meaningful action over the next 12 months*”, “*further and faster*” delivery and that a “*consistently higher rate of onshore wind, and other renewables capacity, will be required year-on-year*”. The scale of deployment required to be operational before 2030 is very considerable and way beyond what has happened in the past.
- > There is a clear recognition that the planning system must be “rebalanced” so that climate change is a primary guiding principle for all plans and decisions. This is an express statement that significant change in the status quo is needed and must be reflected in consenting decisions.
- > There is a policy requirement that significant weight must be given to the Global Climate Emergency and the contribution of individual developments in tackling climate change.
- > The importance of renewable developments is recognised in the new “*strategic renewable electricity generation and transmission infrastructure*” category of national developments a significant change from NPF3 and confirming that an individual wind farm of scale will be of national importance. The Proposed Development would be above the threshold for a national development.
- > The draft OWPS is clear (paragraph 4.4.2) that the “*most cherished landscapes*” must be afforded the necessary protections, but climate change and net-zero require decisive action and this will inevitably change how Scotland looks. Combatting climate change requires modern and efficient turbines (which paragraph 2.2.3 of the draft OWPS confirms means taller turbines). In short, this is policy support for rapid deployment of bigger turbines. As noted The Proposed Development has turbines that are however, of a relatively modest height compared to many proposals being considered at the present time in Highland.
- > The acknowledged landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development must be considered within a planning balance that *affords increased weight to the benefits* of the Proposed Development. **Furthermore, the existing consented Limekiln development is an important material consideration.**

4.1.2

It is no part of the Applicant’s case that site-specific landscape and visual effects are not material considerations, or that the emerging onshore wind policy gives *carte blanche* to wind farm developments. However, the relative weight to be attached to the renewable energy benefits has increased.

- 4.1.3 This position was supported by the Reporter in the very recent Strathy Wood Wind Farm section 36 Scottish Ministers' decision (December 2021). At paragraph 11.93 of the Inquiry Report², the Reporter stated the following, which was adopted by Ministers in their Decision of 08 December 2021:
- "At the same we recognise that these current planning policy documents pre-date the recent changes to the energy and climate change position, in particular the declaration of a climate emergency. Consequently, we consider it is appropriate to attribute greater importance to the benefits of renewable energy in the overall planning balance." (underlining added)*
- 4.1.4 It is clear that NPF4 will be "vital in supporting delivery of net zero by 2045 with significant progress by 2030" and that onshore wind is the key technology which the Scottish Government wishes to see more of, delivered faster.
- 4.1.5 The draft NPF4 and draft OWPS are not yet adopted and may be subject to amendment. However, the documents unequivocally set out the Scottish Government's current views and are entirely consistent with the direction of travel in energy and planning policy as set out in the Applicant's Planning Statement of June 2021.
- 4.1.6 These new documents are also consistent with the Scottish Government and Scottish Green Party Shared Policy Programme of September 2021, which includes an ambition to deliver between 8 and 12 GW of additional installed onshore wind by 2030. Significantly, and in terms of the weight to be ascribed to the contents of the documents, the policies contained in the draft NPF4 and the draft OWPS are clearly formulated to give effect to the actions necessary to meet Scotland's statutory emission reduction targets. These targets are not subject to consultation.
- 4.1.7 The firm direction of travel signalled by the NPF4 Position Statement has now continued into the draft NPF4 and the draft OWPS. That point is of itself important since the consistency of approach shown within them adds markedly to the weight to be given in the planning policy drive to attain net zero. Material change in relation to these policy objectives is most unlikely. However, the fact of the acceleration of support for up to 12GW of additional onshore wind capacity clearly evidenced in the two documents in turn means that they cannot be categorised and dismissed as just a continuing of what might be termed a 'business-as-usual' approach.
- 4.1.8 The NPF4 Position Statement heralded a rebalancing of the planning system, so as to recognise the climate and nature crises. Draft NPF4 delivers this rebalanced approach which means that all decision makers will have to recalibrate their decision-making considerations.
- 4.1.9 Therefore, the 'tilt point' along the scale of possible decisions represented by the concept of the planning balance has been shifted by law and the clearest direction of policy. This is put into sharp focus by the targets to be met as a matter of law by 2030 and 2045. The 2030 target is a considerable challenge, as has been underlined by the most recent CCC Report to the Scottish Parliament (December 2020) and as set out in the Minister's introduction to the draft OWPS..
- 4.1.10 It is the cumulative effect of a large number of individual renewable projects which will move Scotland towards where it needs to be, and the Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution to the Scottish Government's objective for an accelerated deployment of installed onshore wind capacity by 2030.

² DPEA Case Reference WIN-270-12.

- 4.1.11 It is important to note that the Applicant is not relying on future policy changes to make its case and has been quite clear that the Proposed Development should obtain consent as matters stand. The Planning Statement highlighted the policy considerations that have arisen or changed since SPP and NPF3 were published in 2014 and that increased weight should be given to the need for and benefits of the Proposed Development. The policies contained in the draft NPF4 and draft OWPS further strengthen this submission
- 4.1.12 The Applicant submits that these new material documents further underpin the conclusion as set out in the submitted Planning Statement document that consent should be granted for the Proposed Development subject to appropriate conditions.

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