DAVID BELL PLANNING
CHARTERED TOWN PLANNERS

Giant's Burn Wind Farm
Section 36 Application:

Planning Statement

July 2025

Statkraft

dbplanning.co.uk

Contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 This Planning Statement has been prepared by David Bell Planning Ltd ('DBP') on behalf of GB Wind Farm Limited ('the Applicant') in relation to the proposed Giant's Burn Wind Farm ('the Proposed Development') on land (hereafter referred to as 'the Site') approximately 1.3 km north-west of Dunoon and 1.5 km south-west of Sandbank located in the Argyll and Bute Council ('ABC' or 'the Council') administrative area.

1.1.2 The Planning Statement supports a Section 36 application submitted under the Electricity Act 1989 ('the 1989 Act'), for consent to construct and operate the Proposed Development. In addition, the Applicant is also seeking consent for deemed planning permission under Section 57 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 ('the 1997 Act'), as amended.

1.1.3 The application is accompanied by an Environmental Impact Assessment Report ('EIA Report') which has been undertaken in accordance with the Electricity Works (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2017 ('the EIA Regulations'). The Environmental Impact Assessment Report ('the EIA Report') presents information on the identification and assessment of the likely significant positive and negative environmental effects of the Proposed Development.

1.1.4 This Planning Statement presents an assessment of the Proposed Development against relevant policy with due regard given to the provisions of the statutory Development Plan now made up of both National Planning Framework 4 ('NPF4') and the Local Development Plan for the Council area, national energy and planning policy, and other relevant material considerations.

1.1.5 This Planning Statement is supplementary to, and should be read in conjunction with, the EIA Report submitted with the Section 36 application. The Planning Statement considers the potential benefits and adverse effects which may arise and concludes as to the overall acceptability of the Proposed Development in relation to the planning policy framework and relevant material considerations.

1.2 The Applicant

1.2.1 The Applicant, GB Wind Farm Limited, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Statkraft UK Limited ('Statkraft').

1.2.2 Statkraft is a leading company in hydropower internationally and Europe's largest generator of renewable energy. The Group produces hydropower, wind power and solar power, generating 62 TWh of renewable electricity in 2024. Statkraft also provides energy storage and grid stability services and is a global company in energy market operations. The company has 7,000 employees in over 20 countries.

1.2.3 Statkraft is at the heart of the UK's energy transition. Since 2006, Statkraft has gone from strength to strength in the UK, building experience across wind, solar, hydro, storage, grid stability, EV charging, green hydrogen and a thriving markets business. Statkraft has invested over £1.3 billion into the UK's renewable energy infrastructure and facilitated over 4GW of new-build renewable energy generation through Power Purchase Agreements. Statkraft develops, constructs, owns and operates renewable facilities across the UK and employs over 600 people in offices across Scotland, England and Wales.

1.3 The Statutory Framework

1.3.1 An application under Section 36 of the 1989 Act for consent for the construction of an electricity generating station whose capacity exceeds 50 megawatts ('MW') is significantly different from an application for planning permission for a generating station whose capacity is 50 MW or less.

1.3.2 Section 25 of the 1997 Act does not apply to the determination of applications under Section 36 of the 1989 Act, as confirmed in the case of *William Grant & Sons Distillers Ltd v Scottish Ministers* [2012] CSOH 98 (paragraphs 17 and 18).

1.3.3 Schedule 8 of the 1989 Act references consents under Section 36 and 37 of the Act. In addition, there are certain environmental duties in relation to preservation of amenity and fisheries provisions in Schedule 9, paragraph 3 that apply to the Scottish Ministers as decision maker.

1.3.4 The Applicant does not hold a generation licence or exemption under the 1989 Act and therefore the statutory duties set out in paragraph 3(1) of Schedule 9 to the 1989 Act do not apply to the Applicant. The Applicant has however, through the EIA process, had full regard to the matters set out in paragraph 3(1)(a) of Schedule 9.

1.3.5 The EIA Report identifies how various factors were taken into account in the formulation of the application. In addition, each EIA Report chapter includes assessment of the likely significant effects and also, where appropriate, the identification of appropriate mitigation. This includes both embedded mitigation which is integral to the design, construction and operation of the Proposed Development and also additional specific measures which have been identified, along with proposed monitoring as appropriate.

1.3.6 In accordance with paragraph 3(2) of Schedule 9 to the 1989 Act, the Scottish Ministers are obliged to have regard to the desirability of the matters mentioned in paragraph 3(1)(a). The Applicant has provided sufficient information to enable the Scottish Ministers to address their duties under sub-paragraph 3(1)(a) of Schedule 9 to the 1989 Act. The duty on the Ministers is to have regard to the matters specified in Schedule 9 which is not a development management test.

1.3.7 In considering the overall statutory and regulatory framework within which the Proposed Development should be assessed, the statutory Development Plan is a material consideration which should be taken into account in the round with all other relevant material considerations. It is important to note, however, that Section 25 of the 1997 Act is not engaged as there is no 'primacy' of the Development Plan in determining an application made under the 1989 Act.

1.4 Site Location and Description

1.4.1 The Site is located approximately 1.3 km west of Dunoon and includes Bishop's Seat (504 m AOD) and Giant's Knowe, with the Proposed Development located on the northeastern side of these features. The area is topographically complex and is characterised by several raised peaks including Tom Odhar (256 m AOD) to the east, and Kilbride Hill (396 m AOD) to the south. The area reaches a topographic height at Cruach nan Capull to the north-west, at an elevation of 611 m AOD.

1.4.2 The Proposed Development would sit at an elevation of approximately 304 – 469 m AOD between Strone Saul and Eilligan. While there is commercial forestry surrounding the Site, it is most prominent along the eastern boundary.

1.4.3 The Site lies within the steep ridges and mountains Landscape Character Type ('LCT'). The Bute and South Cowal Local Landscape Area ('LLA') is located to the west of the Site, 1.9 km from the nearest turbine. Additionally, the Spout Burn traverses the central portion of the Site, flowing in a northwestern direction to join Glenkin Burn.

1.4.4 There are no landscape, ecological, geological, or archaeological designations within the Site boundary. However, within 10 km of the Site, the following designations are present:

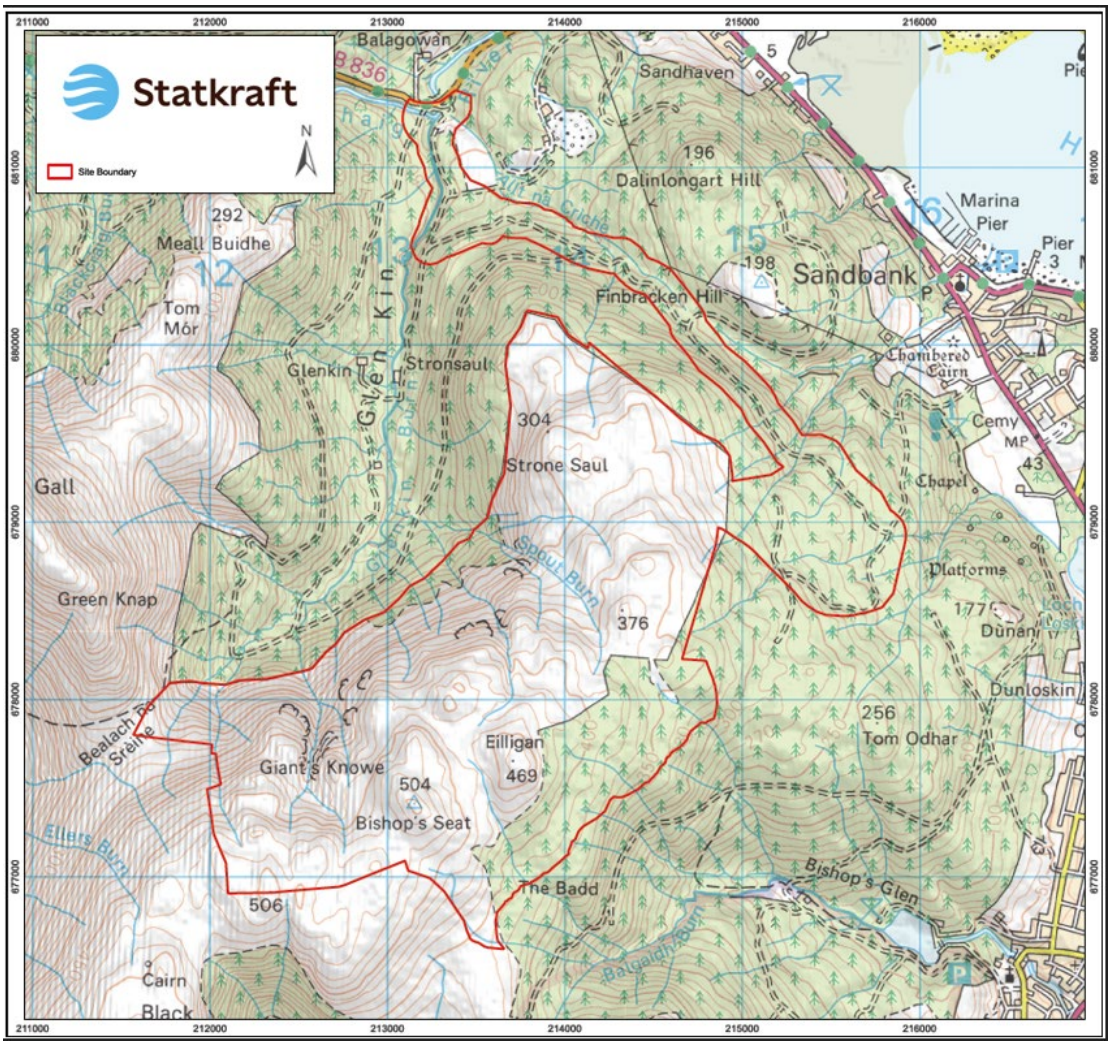
- Loch Lomond and the Trossachs National Park ('LLTNP') is located 1.8 km to the north;
- Loch Eck Wood Site of Special Scientific Interest ('SSSI') (5.4 km to the north), Shielhill Glen SSSI (8.9 km south-east) and North End of Bute SSSI (9.8 km south-west);
- Holy Loch Nature Conservation Site ('LNCS') 1.3 km north-east;

- Six Scheduled Monuments ('SM') within 5 km of the Site – Dunloskin Wood, Platforms and Charcoal Production Area SM (0.1 km to the east), Ardnadam Settlement, Chapel and Enclosure SM (0.4 km to the east), Adam's Cave, Chambered Cairn, Ardnadam SM (0.8 km to the northeast), Ardhallow Battery and Defences SM (2.3 km to the southeast), Kilmun Collegiate Church, Tower and Burial Ground SM (2.6 km northwest), and Dunoon Castle SM (2.7 km to the southeast);
- A further 16 Sms are located within 10km of the Site; and
- Fifteen Category A-Listed Buildings are located within 10 km of the Site. Forty-nine Category B Listed Buildings and fifty-one Category C Listed Buildings are also located within 5 km of the Site.

1.4.5 The closest operational wind farms to the Site are Cruach Mhor, Inverclyde, and High Mathernock & Priestside, all are located between 10 and 20 km from the Site. Additionally, a wind farm known as Inverchaolain is proposed adjacent to the Site; however, at the time of submission of this EIA Report, it remains at the EIA Scoping stage.

1.4.6 The Site location is shown in **Figure 1.1**.

Figure 1.1: Site Location Plan



1.5 The Proposed Development: Summary

1.5.1 A detailed description of the Proposed Development is contained in Chapter 3 (Description of Proposed Development) of the EIA Report. The Proposed Development layout is illustrated in **Figure 1.2** below. The Proposed Development will comprise the following key components:

- Seven variable pitch (three bladed) wind turbines, five each with a maximum blade tip height of up to 200m and two up to 180m with a combined rated output of over 50 MW; and a battery energy storage system ('BESS') with a rated power of approximately 23 MW giving a total site output of over 73 MW;
- turbine foundations (up to 25m diameter) and a crane hardstanding area which includes areas for blade, tower and nacelle storage at each wind turbine;
- BESS with energy storage capacity of 53 MWh;
- up to 6.4 km of new on-site access track with a typical running width of 5m (wider on bends) and 3.8 km of upgraded existing access track (widened from 2.5m to minimum 5m & wider on bends) and associated drainage, three turning heads and nine passing places;
- underground cabling and electrical infrastructure along access tracks to connect the turbine locations, and the on-site electrical substation;
- one on-site substation compound which would accommodate a control building for the Scottish and Southern Energy Networks ('SSEN') substation and the wind farm substation;
- one temporary SSEN construction compound;
- one main construction compound for the Applicant;
- clearance forestry and restocking.

1.5.2 Biodiversity enhancement measures for the Site are also proposed and are contained in a proposed Biodiversity and Enhancement Strategy ('BES') (see Appendix 6.5 of the EIA Report) This would be further developed for the operational phase and would be agreed with consultees and secured by way of a planning condition.

1.5.3 The exact model of wind turbine to be installed will be selected through a competitive procurement process; however, for the purposes of the assessments in the EIA Report, the candidate turbine has a generation capacity of 7.2 MW. The Proposed Development would have a total maximum wind output capacity of up to 50.4 MW.

1.5.4 The proposed turbine locations and ancillary infrastructure would be subject to a maximum micro-siting tolerance of 100m in any direction.

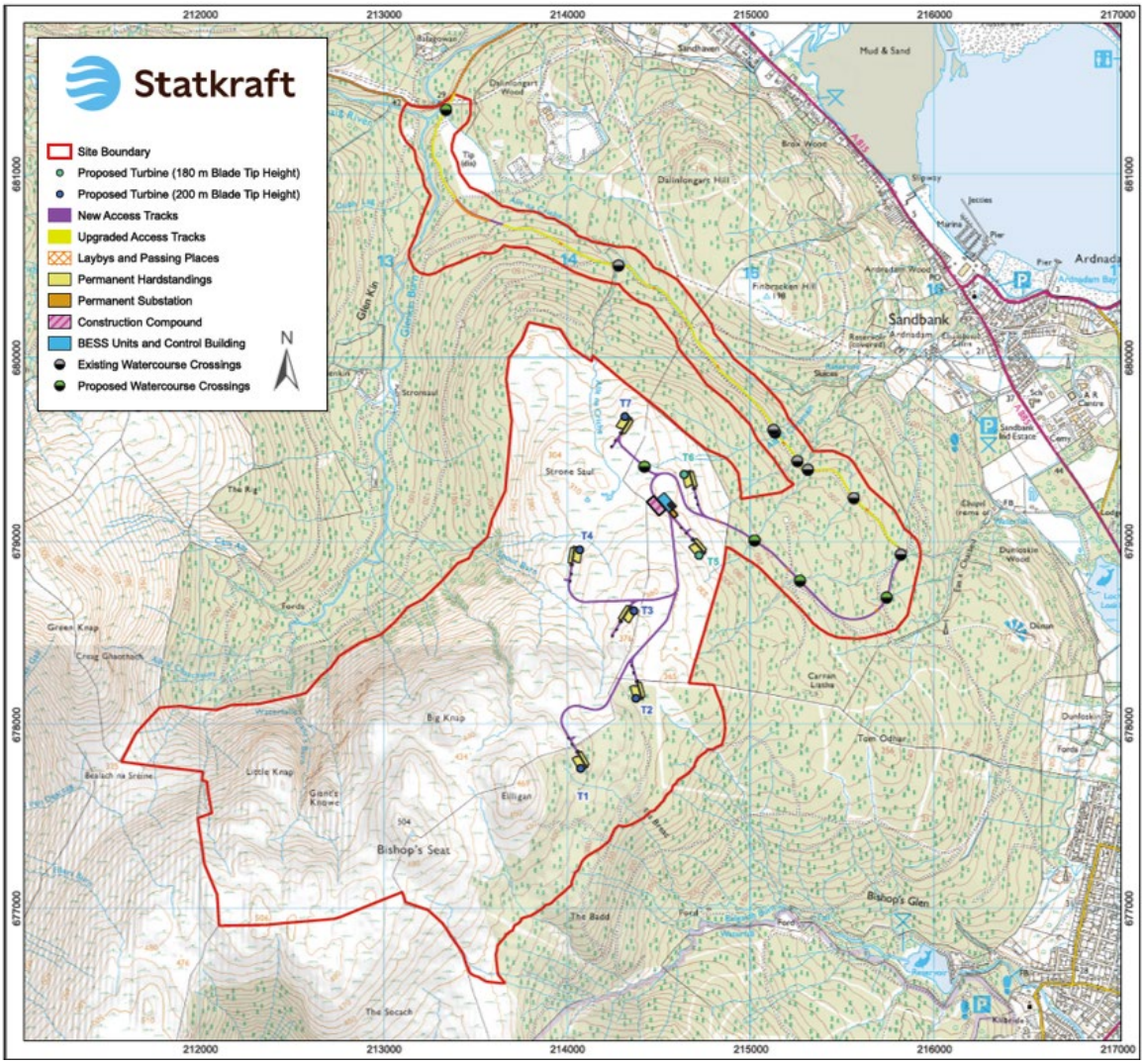
1.5.5 The turbines would be fitted with aviation obstacle lighting to meet the requirements of both the Civil Aviation Authority ('CAA') and the Ministry of Defence ('MOD'). As the turbine tip heights exceed 150m they are within the scope of Air Navigation Order 2016 ('ANO') Article 222 for aeronautical obstacle lighting. In order to mitigate the nighttime visual impact of the Proposed Development on non-aviation receptors a reduced lighting scheme has been designed and has been approved by the CAA. It is anticipated that three of the turbines (T1, T3 and T7) will be fitted with visible aviation warning lights.

1.5.6 The proposed abnormal load route required to transport turbine components to the Site is is based on an assessment from King George V Docks on the River Clyde via the M8 and M898 to cross the Erskine Bridge where the abnormal load would join the A82 westward to Tarbert. Loads would then join the A83 using a new bypass at Tarbert before joining the A815 to head south towards Dunoon. Loads would turn right onto the B836 and proceed westbound. After approximately 2 km, loads would turn into a new site access junction. From this point the route mainly follows an existing forestry track into the Site.

1.5.7 The grid connection point for the Proposed Development is subject to confirmation by the network operator. It is current anticipated that the Proposed Development would connect to Dunoon substation.

1.5.8 The operational life of the Proposed Development would be 50 years. Following the operational period, the Proposed Development would be fully decommissioned. Any alternative outcome would require separate consent such as to extend its operational life, or an application made to repower the site.

Figure 1.2: Site Layout Plan



1.6 Structure of Statement

1.6.1 This Planning Statement is structured as follows:

- **Section 2** sets out the up-to-date position with regard to the renewable energy policy and emissions reduction legislative framework and includes reference to the Onshore Wind Policy Statement and the Scottish Government's draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan;
- **Section 3** describes the benefits of the Proposed Development;
- **Section 4** appraises the Proposed Development against the most up to date element of the Development Plan, namely the relevant provisions of NPF4;
- **Section 5** appraises the Proposed Development against the relevant provisions of the Local Development Plan and related guidance; and
- **Section 6** examines the planning balance and presents overall conclusions.

2. The Renewable Energy Policy & Legislative Framework

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 This section refers to the renewable energy policy and emissions reduction legislative framework with reference to relevant international, UK, and Scottish provisions. The framework of international agreements and obligations, legally binding targets and climate change global advisory reports is the foundation upon which national energy policy and greenhouse gas emissions ('GHG') reduction law is based. This underpins what can be termed the need case for renewable energy from which the Proposed Development can draw a high level of support.

2.1.2 The Proposed Development requires to be considered against a background of material UK and Scottish Government energy and climate policy and legislative provisions, as well as national planning policy and advice. These taken together provide very strong support for the Proposed Development in principle.

2.1.3 It is evident that there is clear and consistent policy support at all levels, from international to local, for the deployment of renewable energy generally, to combat the global climate crisis, diversify the mix of energy sources, achieve greater security of supply, and to attain legally binding emissions reduction targets.

2.1.4 UK and Scottish Government renewable energy policy and associated renewable energy and electricity targets are important considerations. It is important to be clear on the current position as it is a fast-moving topic of public policy. The context of international climate change commitments is set out. This is followed by reference to key UK level statutory and policy provisions and then a detailed description of relevant Scottish Government statutory and policy provisions is set out.

2.2 International Commitments

The Paris Agreement (2015)

2.2.1 In December 2015, 196 countries adopted the first ever universal, legally binding global climate deal at the Paris Climate Conference ('COP21'). It entered into force in November 2016. The Paris Agreement within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change sets out a global action plan towards climate neutrality with the aims of stopping the increase in global average temperature to well below 2^0C above pre-industrial levels and to pursue efforts to limit global warming to 1.5^0C.

2.2.2 It is clear that moving to a low carbon economy is a globally shared goal and will require absolute emission reduction targets. The UK Government's commitment under the Paris Agreement links to the Climate Change Committee's ('CCC') advice to both the UK and Scottish Governments on 'net zero' targets which have now, at both the UK and Scottish levels, been translated into legislative provisions and targets for both 2045 (Scotland) and 2050 (UK). This is referred to below.

2.2.3 The Paris Agreement does not itself represent Government policy in the UK or Scotland. However, the purpose of domestic renewable energy and GHG reduction targets is to meet the UK's commitment in the Paris Agreement.

United Nations - Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change

2.2.4 The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change ('IPCC') is the United Nations ('UN') body for assessing the science related to climate change.

2.2.5 The IPCC prepares comprehensive assessment reports about the state of scientific, technical and socio-economic knowledge on climate change, its impacts and future risks and options for reducing the rate at which climate change is taking place. IPCC reports are commissioned by the world's Governments and are an agreed basis for COP[1] negotiations.

2.2.6 The IPCC's Special Report on Warming of 1.5°C, published in 2018, was a key piece of evidence for the CCC's recommendation to the UK Government for a 2050 net zero greenhouse gas emission target. The IPCC's reports since 2018 have provided estimates of how close global temperatures are to 1.5°C of warming above pre-industrial levels and the remaining volume of global cumulative carbon dioxide that could be emitted to be consistent with keeping global warming below any particular threshold (such as the 1.5°C and 2°C levels referred to in the Paris Agreement).

2.2.7 The IPCC's 6th Assessment Report was published in March 2023. The Summary for Policymakers Report (page 10) states that it is likely that warming will exceed 1.5°C during the 21st century and make it harder to limit warming 2°C. Page 24 of the report states "*There is a rapidly closing window of opportunity to secure a liveable and sustainable future for all (very high confidence)*".

COP 28, Dubai 2023

2.2.8 The United Nations Climate Change Conference ('COP28') closed on 13 December 2023. The UN press release of the same date states that the agreement reached "*Signals the 'beginning of the end' of the fossil fuel era by laying the ground for swift, just and equitable transition, underpinned by deep emissions cuts and scaled up finance*."

2.2.9 The statement adds:

"*The stocktake recognises the science that indicates global greenhouse gas emissions need to be cut 43% by 2030, compared to 2019 levels, to limit global warming to 1.5°C. But it notes parties are off track when it comes to meeting their Paris Agreement goals.*

The stocktake calls on parties to take actions towards achieving, at a global scale, a tripling of renewable energy capacity and doubling of energy efficiency improvements by 2030. The list also includes accelerating efforts towards the phase down of unabated coal power, phasing out inefficient fossil fuel subsidies, and other measures that drive the transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems, in a just, orderly and equitable manner, with developed countries continuing to take the lead." (underlining added)

UN Emissions Gap Report (2024)

2.2.10 The UN Emissions Gap Report (October 2024) and its 'key messages' summary provides the annual independent science-based assessment of the gap between the pledged GHG reductions, and the reductions required to align with the long-term temperature goal of the Paris Agreement.

2.2.11 The Report states that against the background of GHG emissions reaching new highs and climate impacts intensifying globally, nations are preparing what are termed Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) for submission ahead of COP30 in Brazil to be held in November 2025.

2.2.12 The Report states that in order to avoid the present trajectory of temperature increase far beyond 2^0C over the course of this century:

"*Nations must use COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan, as the launch pad to increase ambition and ensure the NDCs collectively promise to almost halve greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. They must then follow up with rapid delivery of commitments, building on actions taken now.*

[1] United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, Conference of the Parties (COP).

If they do not do so, the Paris Agreement target of 1.5^{0}C will be gone within a few years and the 2^{0}C target will be in danger".

2.2.13 The Report adds "*It remains technically possible to get on a 1.5^{0}C pathway, with solar, wind and forests holding real promise for sweeping and fast emissions cuts*".

2.2.14 The Report also states (page 1) that there must be "*unprecedented cuts to greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 to keep 1.5^{0}C alive*".

2.2.15 In order to put the challenge of emissions reduction in context, the key messages document (page 2), sets out that if only current NDCs are implemented and no further ambition is shown in the new pledges to come, "*the best we could expect to achieve is catastrophic global warming of up to 2.6^{0}C over the course of the century*".

COP 29, Baku 2024

2.2.16 The 29th UN Climate Conference hosted in Baku, Azerbaijan concluded on November 24th 2024. New financial goals at COP 29 will build on the significant strides on global action at COP 27, which agreed a historic Loss and Damage Fund, and COP 28, which delivered a global agreement to transition away from fossil fuels in energy systems in a swift and fair manner as well as triple renewable energy and boost climate resilience. Unlike COP 27 and 28 however, COP 29 reached an agreement on carbon markets which will help countries deliver their respective climate plans on a quicker and cheaper basis, as well as make faster progress in halving global emissions.

2.3 UK Climate Change & Energy Legislation & Policy

The Climate Emergency

2.3.1 A critical part of the response to the challenge of climate change was the climate emergency which was declared by the Scottish Government in April 2019 and by the UK Parliament in May 2019. The declaration of climate emergency needs to be viewed in the context in which it was declared (advice from the CCC), and in response to commitments under the Paris Agreement and what followed from it as a result of the declaration (new emissions reduction law).

The Climate Change Act 2008 & Carbon Budgets

2.3.2 The Climate Change Act 2008 (the 2008 Act) provides a system of carbon budgeting. Under the 2008 Act, the UK committed to a net reduction in GHG emissions by 2050 of 80% against the 1990 baseline. In June 2019, secondary legislation was passed that extended that target to at least 100% against the 1990 baseline by 2050, with Scotland committing to net zero by 2045.

2.3.3 The 2008 Act also established the CCC which advises the UK Government on emissions targets, and reports to Parliament on progress made in reducing GHG emissions.

2.3.4 The CCC has produced seven, four yearly carbon budgets, covering 2008 – 2042. These carbon budgets represent a progressive limitation on the total quantity of GHG emissions to be emitted over the five-year period as summarised in **Table 2.1** below. Essentially, they are five yearly caps on emissions.

2.3.5 These legally binding 'carbon budgets' act as stepping-stones toward the 2050 target. The CCC advises on the appropriate level of each carbon budget and once accepted by Government, the respective budgets are legislated by Parliament.

Table 2.1: Carbon Budgets and Progress[2]

Budget	Carbon budget level	Reduction below 1990 levels	Progress on Budgetary Period
1st carbon budget (2008 – 2012)	3,018 $MtCO_2e$	26%	-27%
2nd carbon budget (2013 – 2017)	2,782 $MtCO_2e$	32%	-42%
3rd carbon budget (2018 – 2022)	2,544 $MtCO_2e$	38% by 2020	-50%[3]
4th carbon budget (2023 – 2027)	1,950 $MtCO_2e$	52% by 2025	n/a
5th carbon budget (2028 – 2032)	1,725 $MtCO_2e$	57% by 2030	n/a
6th carbon budget (2033 – 2037)	965 $MtCO_2e$	78% by 2035	n/a
7th carbon budget (2038 – 2042)	535 $MtCO_2e$	87% by 2042	n/a
Net Zero Target	100%	By 2050	

2.3.6 The Sixth Carbon Budget ('CB6') requires a reduction in UK greenhouse gas emissions of 78% by 2035 relative to 1990 levels. This is seen as a world leading commitment, placing the UK "*decisively on the path to net zero by 2050 at the latest, with a trajectory that is consistent with the Paris Agreement*" (CB6, page 13).

2.3.7 Page 23 of CB6 refers to the devolved nations and sets out that UK climate targets cannot be met without strong policy action across Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Key points from CB6 include:

- UK climate targets cannot be met without strong policy action in Scotland.
- The CCC is clear in setting out that new demand for electricity will mean that electricity demand will rise 50% by 2035 and double or even treble by 2050.
- CB6 needs to be met and that will need more and faster deployment of renewable energy developments than has happened in the past.
- The related 'Methodology Report' from the CCC advice, states that in all scenarios for the carbon budget and looking ahead to 2050, the CCC sees new onshore wind generation being deployed by 2050. They set out that their modelling reflects this by almost doubling onshore wind capacity to 20-30 GW in all scenarios by 2050.

2.3.8 Following the Sixth Carbon Budget, the UK Government announced on 20 April 2021 that it would set the world's most ambitious climate change target into law (by the Carbon Budget Order 2021 (the Order)[4]) to reduce emissions by 78% by 2035 compared to 1990 levels. This effectively brings forward the UK's previous commitment of an 80% reduction by 2050 by 15 years.

2.3.9 The Seventh Carbon Budget ('CB7') was published by the CCC in February 2025. The CCC's recommended level for CB7, namely a limit on the UK's GHG emissions over the five-year period 2038 to 2042 is 535 including emissions from international aviation and shipping.

[2] Source: CCC.

[3] Confirmed by CCC in 'Final Statement for the Third Carbon Budget' May 2024. By the end of the period in 2022, UK net GHG emissions were 50% lower than the base year emissions.

[4] The Order sets the carbon budget for the 2033-2037 budgetary period at 965 million tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent. The net UK carbon account is defined in section 27 of the Climate Change Act 2008.

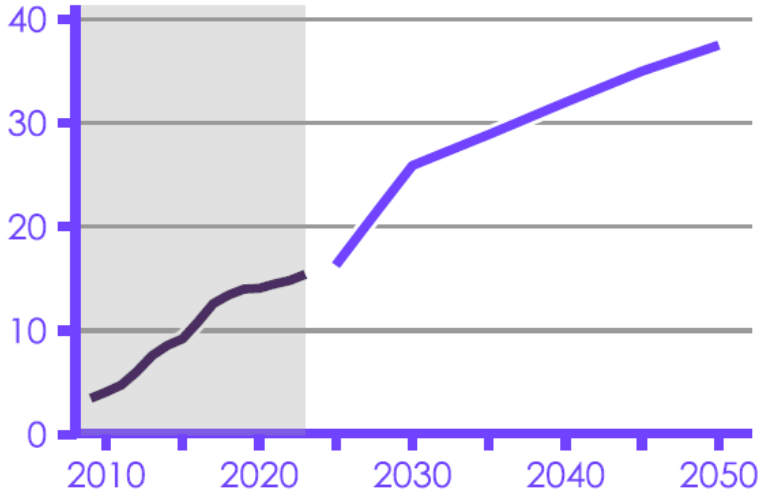
2.3.10 Page 12 of the CB7 states:

"*By the middle of the Seventh Carbon Budget on our pathway, emissions in the UK will be only a quarter of the level they are today, and 80% lower than levels in 1990 (90% lower excluding emissions from international aviation and shipping.) Achieving this will require a significant reduction in emissions across sectors including surface transport, buildings, industry and agriculture*."

2.3.11 It sets out (page 12) that achieving CB7 will mean that UK based renewable energy provides the bulk of generation and this will replace oil and gas across most of the economy. It adds that "*this requires twice as much electricity as today by 2040*".

2.3.12 In relation to onshore wind, capacity doubles to 32 GW. The anticipated growth of onshore wind capacity is shown in the Report (page 109) and illustrated in **Figure 2.1**.

Figure 2.1: Onshore Wind Operational Capacity (GW) in CCC 'Balanced Pathway'



2.3.13 The report notes that this will require recent annual installation rates to treble this decade, requiring installation rates comparable to the annual roll-out rates previously sustained during the mid-2010s.

2.3.14 The Balanced Pathway requires an average deployment rate of 0.8 GW per year, with deployment peaking at 1.9 GW in 2030, which is comparable to the historical peak of 1.8 GW in 2017.

2.3.15 CB7 states that *"there are a range of barriers that will need to be overcome to enable the levels of deployment required. This will require concerted action on several areas, including planning, grid connections, and supply chain bottlenecks."*

The UK Energy White Paper (December 2020)

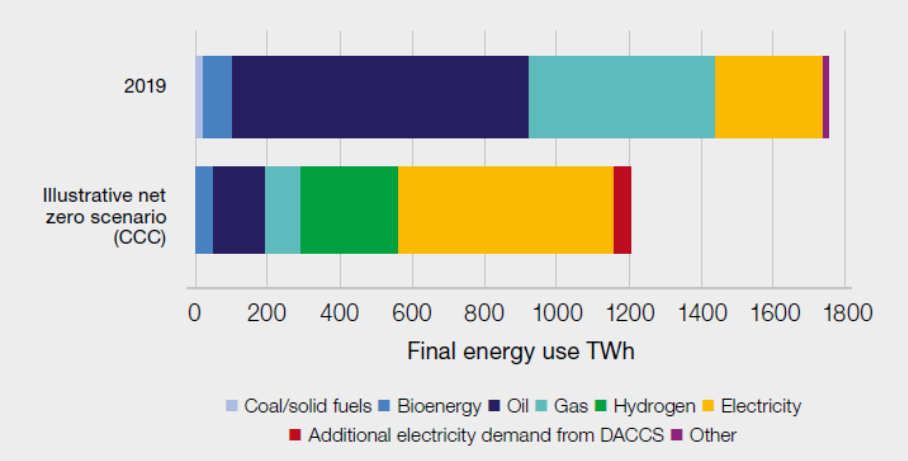
2.3.16 The Energy White Paper 'Powering our Net Zero Future' was published on 14 December 2020, represents a sea change in UK policy, and highlights the importance of renewable electricity.

2.3.17 It sets out that "*electricity is a key enabler for the transition away from fossil fuels and decarbonising the economy cost-effectively by 2050".* A key objective is to *"accelerate the deployment of clean electricity generation through the 2020s*" (page 38).

2.3.18 Electricity demand is forecast to double out to 2050, which will "*require a four-fold increase in clean electricity generation with the decarbonisation of electricity increasingly underpinning the delivery of our net zero target*" (page 42).

2.3.19 This anticipated growth of renewable electricity is illustrated in the graph below – **Figure 2.2**.

Figure 2.2: Illustrative UK Final Energy Use in 2050[5]



2.3.20 **Figure 2.2** illustrates that achieving net zero requires a significant increase in the use of electricity, all of which must be generated from low-carbon sources.

2.3.21 Whilst offshore renewables are expected to grow significantly, the White Paper also sets out that "*onshore wind and solar will be key building blocks of the future generation mix, along with offshore wind. We will need sustained growth in the capacity of these sectors in the next decade to ensure that we are on a pathway that allows us to meet net zero emissions in all demand scenarios*" (page 45). (underlining added)

The British Energy Security Strategy (April 2022)

2.3.22 The British Energy Security Strategy was published by the UK Government on 7 April 2022. It focuses on energy supply and states that in the future nuclear will have an expanded role and that renewables have an important role: the foreword states *inter alia*:

"*Accelerating the transition away from oil and gas then depends critically on how quickly we can roll out new renewables….*

The growing proportion of our electricity coming from renewables reduces our exposure to volatile fossil fuel markets."

2.3.23 Reducing Scotland's and the wider UK's dependency on hydrocarbons has important security of supply, electricity cost and fuel poverty avoidance benefits. Those actions already urgently required in the fight against climate change are now required more urgently for global political stability and insulation against dependencies on rogue nation states.

Climate Change Committee Report to UK Parliament (2024)

2.3.24 The CCC published the report 'Progress in Reducing Emissions 2024 Report to Parliament' in July 2024 (the "CCC Report"). The Executive Summary (page 8) states:

"*The previous Government signalled the slowing of pace and reversed or delayed key policies. The new Government will have to act fast to hit the country's commitments.*

The cost of key low-carbon technologies is falling, creating an opportunity for the UK to boost investment, reclaim global climate leadership and enhance energy security by accelerating take-up. British-based renewable energy is the cheapest and fastest way to reduce vulnerability to volatile global fossil fuel markets. The faster we get off fossil fuels, the more secure we become."

[5] Source: Energy White Paper page 9 (2020).

2.3.25 The CCC Report makes it clear that urgent action is needed to get on track for the UK's 2030 emissions reduction target. In this regard it states:

"*The UK has committed to reduce emissions in 2030 by 68% compared to 1990 levels, as its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) to the Paris Agreement. It is the first UK target set in line with Net Zero. Now only six years away, the country is not on track to hit this target despite a significant reduction in emissions in 2023. Much of the progress to date has come from phasing out coal generated electricity, with the last coal-fired power station closing later this year. We now need to rapidly reduce oil and gas use as well.*

Our assessment is that only a third of the emissions reductions required to achieve the 2030 target are currently covered by credible plans. Action is needed across all sectors of the economy, with low carbon technologies becoming the norm."

2.3.26 The CCC Report sets out priority actions (page 9) and they include:

> The UK should now be in a phase of rapid investment and delivery, however CCC note that all indicators for low carbon technology roll out are "*off track, with rates needing to significant ramp up*." In this regard in terms of renewable technologies it states onshore wind installations will need to double.

2.3.27 Chapter 2 of the CCC Report confirms that the third Carbon Budget was met (covering the period 2018 to 2022), however "*future carbon budgets will require an increase in the pace and breadth of decarbonisation. It is imperative that an ambitious path of emissions reduction is maintained towards Net Zero*." (Page 33).

2.3.28 Section 2.3 of the CCC Report addresses emissions reductions required for future Carbon Budgets. Paragraph 2.3.1 states that:

"*emissions reductions across most sectors will need to significantly speed up to be on track to meet the UK's climate targets in the 2030s, and therefore the long term target of Net Zero by 2050. Emissions reductions will need to outperform the legislated Fourth Carbon Budget for the UK to be on a sensible path to achieve its 2030 NDC, the Sixth Carbon Budget and Net Zero*."

2.3.29 Chapter 3 of the CCC Report examines indicators of current delivery progress and it sets out (page 50) a number of key points including *inter alia*:

"*Required pace – substantial progress is needed on a range of key indicators over the rest of this decade, to get the UK on track to meet its 2030 emissions targets. Low carbon technologies need to quickly become the default options in many areas…*

Renewable energy capacity has been growing steadily. However, roll-out rates will need to increase, compared to those since the start of this decade, to deliver the capacity needed by the end of the decade. Annual installations of offshore wind will need to more than treble, onshore wind more than double and solar increase by a factor of five."

2.3.30 Reference is made to electricity supply (page 56). With regard to onshore wind the CCC Report states that only 0.5 GW of new onshore wind was installed in 2023 and "*this is considerably below the peak of 1.8 GW in 2017. Onshore wind installation rates will need to more than double compared to the average pace of deployment over the past three years*."

2.3.31 Chapter 2 of the CCC Report addresses the risks to the UK in achieving its emissions reduction targets.

2.3.32 With regard to the Fourth Carbon Budget (2023-2027) it states that although credible plans cover almost all of the emissions reductions required to meet it "*this budget was set before the UK's Net Zero target was legislated. The UK will need to reduce emissions by double the amount implied by the target to be on a sensible path to Net Zero*…."

2.3.33 With regard to the 2030 NDC and Sixth Carbon Budget (for the period 2023 to 2037) the CCC Report states that credible plans cover only around a third of emissions reductions needed to meet the UK's 2030 NDC and a quarter of those needed to meet the Sixth Carbon Budget. It adds "*that 2030 NDC is now only six years away. While our assessment of the policies and plans to deliver it has improved slightly, there remains significant risks to achieving these goals*."

Climate Change Committee Report to UK Parliament (2025)

2.3.34 The CCC published the report 'Progress in adapting to climate change' Report to Parliament' in April 2025 (the "CCC 2025 Report"). The CCC 2025 Report's focus is on climate adaptation and an assessment of the UK's readiness for climate change. It states that:

2.3.35 The CCC 2025 Report's focus is on climate adaptation to the extreme weather already being experienced in the UK as a result of climate change. It is a reminder of the urgent ongoing need to increase energy generation from renewable sources to tackle the climate crisis.

Labour Government & Commitment to Renewables (2024)

2.3.36 The UK Government change at Westminster in 2024 and a Labour administration for the UK is of relevance in terms of the new UK Government policy approach to Net Zero.

2.3.37 Energy policy is reserved to Westminster and although the Scottish Government has progressed its own energy policy in parallel with its full devolved authority over the planning system in Scotland, UK Government policy is an important material consideration.

2.3.38 The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero ('DESNZ') issued a Statement on 8 July 2024 which included references to double UK onshore wind capacity from its current level of approximately 15 GW to a planned capacity of 30 GW by 2030.

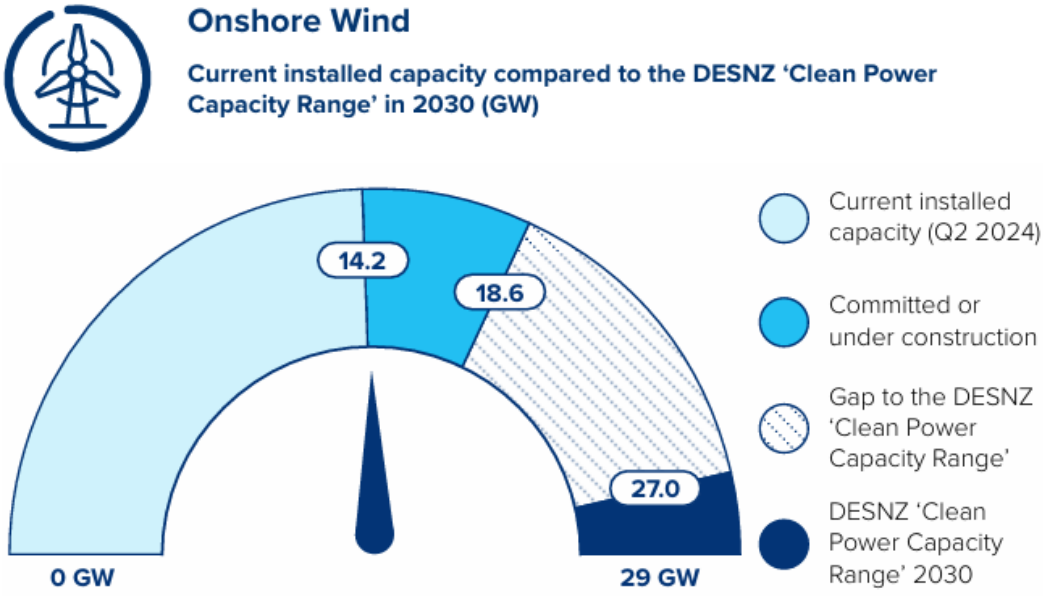
UK Government: Clean Power 2030 Action Plan (2024)

2.3.39 The Clean Power 2030 Action Plan was published by DESNZ in December 2024. It sets out (page 9) that Britain needs to install "*clean sources of power at a pace never previously achieved*". It further adds (page 10):

"*clean power by 2030 will herald a new era of clean energy independence and tackle three major challenges: the need for secure and affordable energy supply, the creation of essential new energy industries supported by skilled workers in their thousands, the need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit our contribution to the damaging effects of climate change. Clean power by 2030 is a sprint towards these essential goals*".

2.3.40 Within the Action Plan, it sets out that by 2030 there should be 27-29 GW of onshore wind operational within the UK. At present, there is only some 14.2 GW of installed onshore wind capacity in the UK.

Figure 2.3: Onshore Wind & 'Gap' to reach 2030 UK Target



2.3.41 The document adds that "*Meeting the clean power 2030 goal is key to accelerating to net zero, not only in eliminating emissions that currently come from electricity generation, but also via the application of clean power in the buildings, transport and industry sectors… The shift to a clean power system by 2030 forms the backbone of the transition to net zero, as we move to an economy much more reliant on electricity*".

2.3.42 Page 74 of the Action Plan states that "*Meeting the renewable capacity set out in the DESNZ 'clean power capacity range' is achievable but will require deployment at a sharply accelerated scale and pace*".

The Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy (July, 2025)

2.3.43 The Department for Energy Security and Net Zero ('DESNZ') published the Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy in July 2025. The strategy sets out over 40 actions, primarily Government commitments to resolve key blocks to onshore wind within the UK. The Strategy's overall aims are to boost onshore wind deployment and to deliver economic benefits for local communities, businesses and the consumer.

2.3.44 The Ministerial Forward by the Secretary of State for Energy Security and Net Zero states:

"As one of the cheapest and fastest to build sources of power we have, onshore wind will play a critical role in boosting our energy independence with clean power by 2030. The reality is that every turbine we build helps protect families, businesses and the public finances from future fossil fuel shocks.

That's why in our first 72 hours in office, we lifted the onshore wind band in England - in place for nine years under the previous Government. And it's why last July we established the Onshore Wind Taskforce to bring Government, industry and trade unions together to explore how we can radically accelerate deployment of this critical technology.

The Onshore Wind Taskforce strategy is the outcome of that work. It sets out more than 40 steps Government and industry will take to help deliver up to 29GW of onshore wind by 2030. That includes driving ambitious reforms to planning, grid connections, and routes to market, while building the supply chains and skilled workforce we need."

2.3.45 In addition, within the forward the statement by the Head of Clean Power 2030 within DESNZ states *inter alia*:

"Clean Power 2030 is our ambitious mission to grow rapidly Britain's clean electricity infrastructure, reducing Britain's dependency on imported oil and gas, securing key clean industries and readying the country for the expected growth in electrical demand over the next 20 years.

Our Clean Power Action Plan targets a near doubling of onshore wind capacity up to 29GW by 2030. That will require rapid development of new onshore wind across Britain and repowering of existing sites to bring British consumers some of the cheapest homegrown power that can be produced. We are already working with NESO to slash the queue of projects waiting to connect to the grid to accelerate the best onshore wind development.

Rapid deployment of onshore wind is our first line of defence against future gas price spikes - every megawatt added displaces imported gas in the power system. With the steps in this new strategy, we will cement the growth of an important homegrown industry. The momentum behind clean power continues to grow."

2.3.46 The various commitments and actions within the strategy cover:

- Scoping, planning and consenting improvement for onshore wind projects;
- Networks and systems reform;
- Communities and public perception actions;
- Aviation and defence commitments to improve the interface between wind energy and civil and military radar and related matters;
- Finance and routes to market; and
- Supply chains, skills and workforce.

2.3.47 The Strategy refers to the Government's Clean Power Action Plan, which was published in December 2024 and which set out a pathway to achieving the mission of clean power by 2030. Page 10 of the strategy states that:

2.3.48 *"All routes to achieving this mission are reliant on mass deployment of renewable electricity technologies, including onshore wind. The Clean Power Plan stated that to decarbonise the power sector by 2030, 27-29GW onshore wind will be needed within GB*[6]*.* That is a significant increase above the current installed capacity, which stands at 14.8 GW in GB (over 16GW in the UK)".

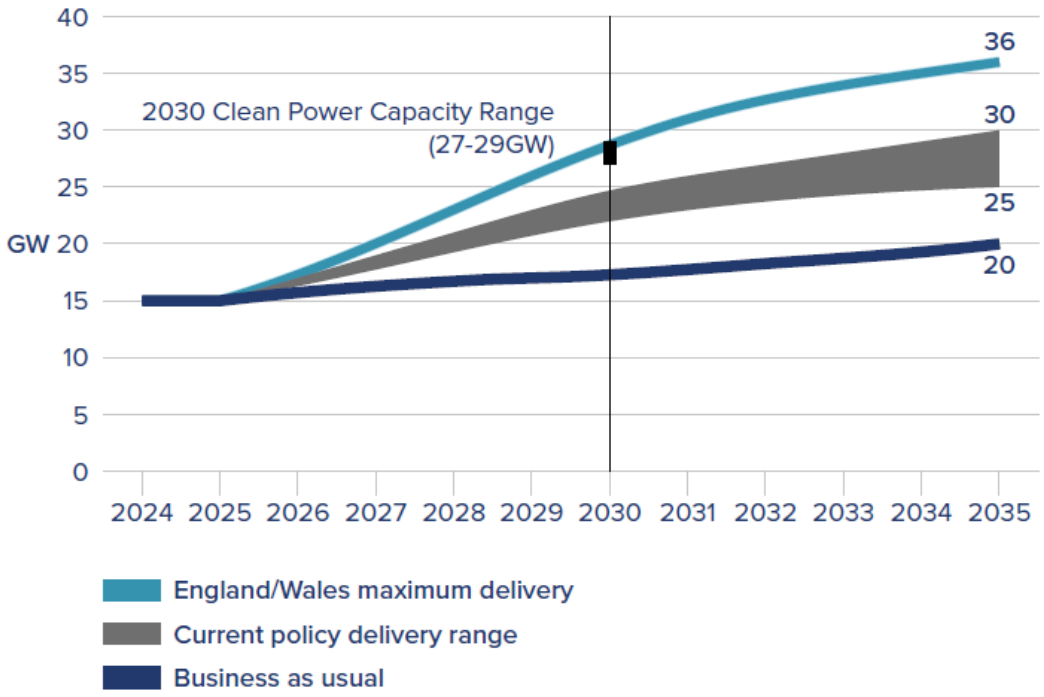
2.3.49 It is explained that the delivery of up to 29 GW of onshore wind by 2030 would involve around 10-12 GW more than would have been deployed under historic growth rates, with England contributing around 2 GW by 2030.

2.3.50 The strategy also emphasises the significant economic opportunity that further onshore wind deployment will deliver (page 10). It states that meeting the onshore wind 2030 targets together with the actions within the Strategy, could deliver up to 45,000 direct and indirect jobs in Great Britain and result in £70 million per year of extra investment in community benefits.

2.3.51 At page 18 of the Strategy, reference is made to illustrative deployment scenarios which it states emphasises "*the challenge in meeting the 2030 clean power range in GB which will require significant deployment in Scotland, England and Wales*." This is illustrated in **Figure 2.4** below.

[6] The strategy explains that this means delivery of a system with at least 95% of GB's generation being produced from clean sources

Figure 2.4: Clean Power Deployment Scenarios (Onshore Wind)



The scenarios as illustrated in **Figure 2.4** include:

- *Business as usual* - under this scenario onshore wind only reaches in the region of 17 GW by 2030 and 20 GW by 2035.
- *Current policy delivery range* - this assumes the implementation of the reform announced as part of the Clean Power 2030 Action Plan and the action set out in the Onshore Wind Taskforce Strategy. In this scenario around 25 GW is installed by 2030 and 30 GW by 2035.
- *England / Wales maximum delivery* - this is set out as the most optimistic scenario and shows the potential of increasing onshore wind deployment through strengthened policies in England and Wales. Under this scenario onshore wind deployment could reach levels consistent with the 2030 Clean Power range but also increases to in excess of 35 GW by 2035.

2.3.52 The Strategy addresses implementation and states (page 71) that the Government is committed to delivering the level of onshore wind needed by 2030 and is establishing a new Onshore Wind Council to oversee the implementation of the Strategy.

2.4 Climate Change & Renewable Energy Legislation and Policy: Scotland

The Scottish Energy Strategy (2017)

2.4.1 The Scottish Energy Strategy ('SES') was published in December 2017. The SES preceded the important events and publications referred to above but nevertheless sets out that onshore wind is recognised as a key contributor to the delivery of renewable energy targets – specifically 50% of energy to be attained from renewable sources by 2030. The SES did not and could not take account of what may be required in terms of additional renewable generation capacity to attain the new legally binding 'net zero' targets so it is out of date in that respect.

2.4.2 The SES refers to "*Renewable and Low Carbon Solutions*" as a strategic priority (page 41) and states "*we will continue to champion and explore the potential of Scotland's huge renewable energy resource, its ability to meet our local and national heat, transport and electricity needs – helping to achieve our ambitious emissions reduction targets*".

2.4.3 The SES sets out what is termed the "opportunity" for onshore wind and there is explicit recognition that onshore wind is amongst the lowest cost forms of power generation. It is also recognised as "*a vital component of the huge industrial opportunity that renewables creates for Scotland*".

2.4.4 The SES sets out the Government's clear position on onshore wind namely:

"*our energy and climate change goals mean that onshore wind must continue to play a vital role in Scotland's future – helping to decarbonise our electricity, heat and transport systems, boosting our economy, and meeting local and national demand."* (page 44)

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019

2.4.5 The Scottish Government has set legal obligations to decarbonise and reduce emissions. Most notably, the Scottish Government has a statutory target to achieve "net zero" by 2045. It is clear that to have any hope of achieving the net zero target, significant expansion of renewable generation capacity is required.

2.4.6 When it was enacted, the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 set world leading greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets, including a target to reduce emissions by 80% by 2050. The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 amended the 2009 Act and has set more ambitious targets.

CCC Report to Scottish Parliament – Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland (March 2024)

2.4.7 The CCC produced a report to the Scottish Parliament entitled 'Progress in reducing emissions in Scotland' in March 2024. The related press release of the same date states that Scotland's 2030 climate goals are no longer credible. It states:

"*Continued delays to the updated Climate Change Plan and further slippage in promised climate policies mean that the Climate Change Committee no longer believes that the Scottish Government will meet its statutory 2030 goal to reduce emissions by 75%. There is no comprehensive strategy for Scotland to decarbonise towards Net Zero.*

The Scottish Government delayed its draft Climate Change Plan last year despite the 2030 target being only six years away. This has left a significant period without sufficient actions or policies to reach the target; the required acceleration in emissions reduction in Scotland is now beyond what is credible."

2.4.8 The related press release stated that there is a path to Scotland's post-2030 targets, but stronger action is needed to reduce emissions across the economy.

2.4.9 The main report (page 10) states that "*The Scottish Government should build on its high ambition and implement policies that enable the 75% emissions reduction target to be achieved at the earliest date possible*."

2.4.10 Page 18 of the report addresses electricity supply, and it states that there has been some progress in delivering renewable electricity generation in Scotland. Reference is made to the Government's aim to develop 8-11 GW of offshore wind and 20 GW on onshore wind capacity, both by 2030. The report notes that "*The growth in onshore wind capacity has slowed, however, and is slightly off track to deliver its 2030 target, which will require operational capacity to more than double*."

2.4.11 Page 40 states that in terms of onshore wind, Scotland must increase the deployment rate by more than a factor of 4 to an average annual rate of 1.4 GW.

2.4.12 In light of the CCC Report, the Scottish Government stated it remained committed to achieving net zero but would move to a multi-year carbon budget approach to measuring emissions reduction (instead of annual targets) which would bring the Scottish Parliament in line with the Welsh and UK approaches.

The Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2024

2.4.13 The Climate Change (Emission Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act received Royal Assent on 22 November 2024. The Act repealed the annual and interim emissions reduction target framework that was established under the 2009 Act and establishes a carbon budget approach to target setting, with budgets to be set through secondary legislation using the latest advice from the CCC, to replace the concept of statutory annual and interim targets. The Act also makes provision for a new Climate Change Plan to be published that reflects the carbon budgets.

2.4.14 As explained, the Act followed advice from the CCC that Scotland's interim emissions reduction target for 2030 could not be achieved. The Act does not change the existing statutory target of net zero emissions by 2045.

2.5 The Onshore Wind Policy Statement

2.5.1 The Scottish Government published an updated Onshore Wind Policy Statement (OWPS) on 21 December 2022. It replaced the version published in November 2017.

2.5.2 The Ministerial Foreword makes it clear that seeking greater security of supply and lower cost electricity generation are now key drivers alongside the need to deal with the climate emergency. In this regard, the Cabinet Secretary for Net Zero, Energy and Transport states (page 3):

"*that is why we must accelerate our transition towards a net zero society. Scotland already has some of the most ambitious targets in the world to meet net zero but we must go further and faster to protect future generations from the spectre of irreversible climate damage*".

"*Scotland has been a frontrunner in onshore wind and, while other renewable technologies are starting to reach commercial maturity, continued deployment of onshore wind will be key to ensuring our 2030 targets are met*".

2.5.3 The Foreword states that onshore wind has the ability to be deployed quickly, is good value for consumers and is also widely supported by the public. The Minister further states that:

"*This Statement, which is the culmination of an extensive consultative process with industry, our statutory consultees and the public, sets an overall ambition of 20 GW of installed onshore wind capacity in Scotland by 2030."*

2.5.4 The OWPS is structured on the basis of eight chapters which contain a mix of policy guidance and also technical information. Key content of relevance to the Proposed Development is referenced below.

Increasing the Rate of Deployment & Forecast Increase in Electricity Demand

2.5.5 Chapter 1 "Ambitions and Aspirations" (page 5) refers to current deployment of onshore wind in Scotland and states:

"*We must now go further and faster than before. We expect the next decade to see a substantial increase in demand for electricity to support net zero delivery across all sectors, including heat, transport and industrial processes*."

2.5.6 It is explained that National Grid's Future Energy Scenarios[7] project concludes that Scotland's peak demand for electricity will at least double within the next two decades and that this will require a substantial increase in installed capacity across all renewable technologies.

[7] National Grid has set out a range of different, credible ways to decarbonise the energy system with regard to attaining Net Zero for the UK by 2050.

Onshore Wind Target & Development Pipeline

2.5.7 In terms of existing deployment, paragraph 1.1.5 of the OWPS states that as of June 2022 the UK had 14.6 GW of installed onshore wind, with around 8.7 GW of this capacity within Scotland. Reference is made to a figure of 11.3 GW of onshore wind "*currently in the pipeline, spread over 217 potential projects*".

2.5.8 There are more recent figures available in relation to onshore wind deployment. The figures are reviewed regularly by BVG Associates as part of the Onshore Wind Sector Deal arrangements. An update report entitled 'Scotland Onshore Wind Pipeline Analysis 2024-2030' was published by BVG Associates in November 2024 ('the BVG Report').

2.5.9 The report presents a database and pipeline analysis, providing insights into different scenarios under which Scotland could achieve its ambition of 20 GW of onshore wind by 2030. It examines various sensitivities to assumptions on key parameters including matters such as the duration of the planning process for applications, repowering and also project viability. The assumptions in relation to the planning process reflect the aims of the Onshore Wind Sector Deal. If these are not met, then there will be negative consequences for the onshore wind pipeline.

2.5.10 **Table 2.2** below shows the onshore wind pipeline figures as contained in the OWPS alongside the summary of the updated analysis from the BVG Report, allowing a comparison of the various pipeline category figures between those in the OWPS (June 2022) and the BVG Report figures of November 2024. The relative differences between the various categories are also shown.

Table 2.2: Onshore Wind Development Pipeline (OWPS 2022 & BVG Report 2024)

Status of Onshore Wind Projects	OWPS (GW)	BVG Report (April 2024) (GW)	Difference 2022 v 2024 (GW)	Comments
In the Planning / Process	5.53	6.70	+ 1.17	Footnote on page 6 of OWPS applies. Not all projects will receive consent.
Awaiting Construction (i.e. consented)	4.56	6.47	+ 1.91	The figures are subject to some duplication – e.g. where some projects have consent but are also subject say to applications for tip height increases. Not all consented developments will proceed to construction.
Under Construction	1.17	0.97	- 0.2	
Sub Total (less in planning category)	**5.73**	**7.44**	**+ 2.88**	
Operational Onshore Wind in Scotland	**8.70**	**10.02**	**+ 1.32**	A number of projects will reach the end of their operational life. Not all will necessarily be repowered or life extended. A proportion of the operational capacity will have passed its notional design life by 2030 and will be under consideration for decommissioning or repowering.
Total (less in planning category)	14.43	17.46	+ 3.03	

2.5.11 By way of a further update, since November 2024 (and up to June 2025) the Scottish Government has granted 8 Section 36 onshore wind applications with a total approximate installed capacity of some 658 MW.

2.5.12 The footnote to the figures set out on page 6 of the OWPS is pertinent and is as follows:

"*Developments in the planning/consenting process have not yet been considered and given permission to proceed. Some of these projects will receive consent, but some may not, and it is unlikely that all of this noted capacity will be fully realised. A degree of duplication within the planning system must also be considered, where developments which have consent re-apply to adjust the parameters of that consent. This will also reduce the capacity which is deliverable from this overall figure*".

2.5.13 The analysis of the pipeline in the BVG Report is based upon a model which applies several filters which result in projects being removed from the pipeline and these include matters such as:

> Projects which remain in the same development status for too long which is a reasonable indication that they are likely to be dormant and therefore are not likely to proceed;

> Projects with turbine attributes which today would likely put that project at a commercial disadvantage such as relatively low blade tip height, such as 150 m or less; and

- Application of an attrition rate in relation to applications being refused consent.

2.5.14 Although the BVG Report sets out some suggested actions which could increase the likelihood of reaching 20 GW in 2030, these have various limitations. For example, the suggested actions include:

- An action is suggested to reduce the default planning determination duration times to shorter ones; however, this would be very much dependent upon the allocation of additional resources in the planning system and there is no evidence of that happening at the present time; and
- A further action is to assume repowering of all onshore wind developments at the end of their life and assume an uplift on original capacity of 100%. Again, this assumption has its limitations and there is also no evidence that widespread repowering is going to be undertaken on such a basis. However, extensions of operational life is likely to remain an attractive option in many cases.

2.5.15 The BVG Report cautions (page 20) that the ability to deliver 20GW by 2030 is likely to be restricted by current resource constraints. Their analysis predicts that these constraints include that the number of current consent decisions from the ECU (Scottish Government) will need to at least double for at least three of the next five years.

2.5.16 The BVG Report (page 15) also states that *"it remains clear that a significant increase in consent decisions made each year at the ECU level will be required to reach the 20 GW by 2030 target, and that the reduced development times promised by the [Onshore Wind Sector Deal] ….will be essential if Scotland is to achieve the 20 GW operational onshore wind by 2030."*

2.5.17 The BVG Report also highlights that the continued issue of Eskdalemuir (Seismic Array constraint) and the inscription of the Flow Country World Heritage Site is likely to result in a loss of up to 3 GW of operational capacity in 2030 in the deployment scenarios considered.

2.5.18 There are therefore a number of factors which indicate that there is likely to be a significant shortfall in the minimum 20 GW 2030 onshore wind target.

Government commitment to 20GW of Onshore Wind by 2030

2.5.19 Section 1.2 of the OWPS refers to the Deployment Ambition to 2030. Reference is made to the CCC's position as set out in their exploratory scenarios for emissions to 2050 and also as referred to within the Sixth Carbon Budget.

2.5.20 Paragraph 1.2.2 of the OWPS states that: "[the explanatory scenarios] *estimate that, in every scenario, the UK will require a total of 25-30 GW of installed onshore wind capacity by 2050 to meet government targets - which would mean doubling the current UK installed capacity*".

2.5.21 Section 1.3 of the OWPS further refers to the new 20 GW ambition and acknowledges that the Scottish Government's Programme for Government 2022/2023 committed Government to enabling up to 12 GW of onshore wind to be developed. The Programme for Government stated that:

"*It is vital to send a strong signal and set a clear expectation on what we believe onshore wind capacity will contribute in the coming years.*

In line with this commitment, and reflecting the natural life cycles of existing wind farms, this statement sets a new ambition for the deployment of onshore wind in Scotland:

A minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030.

This ambition will help support the rapid decarbonisation of our energy system, and the sectors which depend upon it, as well as aligning with a just transition to net zero whilst other technologies reach maturity".

2.5.22 This statement is followed by reference to the "Legislative Context", in particular the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019 and the related net zero greenhouse gas emissions targets. The OWPS states (paragraph 1.4.1) "*meeting these targets will require decisive and meaningful action across all sectors*".

2.5.23 Paragraph 2.4.2 of the OWPS states that "*onshore wind will play a crucial role in delivering our legally binding climate change targets*".

2.5.24 The Scottish Government has made clear that the 20 GW ambition of installed capacity is a "minimum". In short, there is a substantial shortfall to address in order to attain that figure and projects that are not yet in the planning system are unlikely to provide installed capacity by 2030. This underlines the importance of the benefits that the Proposed Development can deliver – namely near-term delivery of a substantial volume of installed capacity.

2.5.25 This means that the Scottish Government's ambition, as stated in December 2022, is to increase the installed capacity of onshore wind in Scotland by a minimum amount equivalent to about 130% of the entire installed capacity of all current operational onshore wind farms in Scotland in a period of around five years. The Proposed Development and its contribution must be considered in the context of the scale and urgency of the stated Scottish Government policy position.

Delivering the Government's 20 GW Ambition for Onshore Wind

2.5.26 Chapter 2 of the OWPS entitled 'Delivering on our Ambition for Onshore Wind in Scotland' states that the Scottish Government is to form an Onshore Wind Strategic Leadership Group ('SLG') and "*will task this SLG with taking forward the aspirations of this policy statement, and the development of an Onshore Wind Sector Deal*". This reflects the importance of the onshore wind sector.

2.5.27 Section 2.3 refers to a "Vision for Onshore Wind in Scotland" and states that Scottish Renewables, on behalf of the sector in Scotland, has produced a Vision Statement which the Government considers "*to lay the basis of a more detailed sector deal that the SLG will develop*".

2.5.28 The Onshore Wind Sector Deal was finalised and published in September 2023 and is referenced further below.

2.5.29 The **Vision Statement** is contained within Annex 5 of the OWPS (page 66). A summary of the Vision for the onshore wind industry in Scotland is a future where:

- An additional 12 GW of new onshore wind generation is constructed by 2030.
- Onshore wind continues to play a key role in decarbonising the power sector, reducing consumer costs and ensuring security of supply whilst playing a key role in the electrification of heat and transport.
- The selection of wind farm locations and technologies enables the use of the most productive modern turbines and balances the need to respect biodiversity and natural heritage.
- Land use for onshore wind is optimised and combined with other initiatives including reforestation and peatland restoration, as well as providing enhanced access to green space for recreation.
- High skilled and sustainable jobs are created, including long term jobs in the operational phase.
- Material use is optimised, and carbon impact is minimised, through the principles of a circular economy.

- Community benefit and shared ownership provides lasting social and economic benefits; and
- Onshore wind plays a central role in ensuring a just transition for communities and people.

2.5.30 The Vision Statement states (page 67) that:

"*Onshore wind remains vital to meeting this increasing demand, providing fast deployment whilst minimising cost to the consumer. This will be achieved by deploying the most productive modern turbines that are taller than older models, by re-powering existing sites where possible and by maximising the use of our exceptional natural wind resource where environmental effects are acceptable*."

Balancing Environmental Considerations and Benefits

2.5.31 Chapter 3 of the OWPS "Environmental Considerations: Achieving Balance and Maximising Benefits" refers to matters relating to specific environmental topics as follows:

- Shared Land Use;
- Peat and Carbon-Rich Soils;
- Forestry;
- Biodiversity;
- Landscape and Visual Amenity; and
- Noise.

2.5.32 Section 3.3 addresses peat and carbon rich soils. It highlights that approximately 75% of Scotland's peatlands are degraded through drainage, extraction and other actions. It explains that reversing degradation through peatland restoration is central to mitigating and adapting to the linked climate and nature crises.

2.5.33 Paragraph 3.3.6 states: "*The continued deployment of onshore wind and restoration of peatlands and carbon rich soil will both play vital roles in delivering Scotland's emissions reductions targets….. Given the established need for additional onshore wind turbines to tackle climate change and to ensure long term availability of cheap, renewable energy, in some cases it may be necessary to construct onshore wind farms on areas of peat*".

2.5.34 The document goes on to explain that the onshore wind sector has made remarkable advances over the past decade in mitigation and restoration solutions for peatland. It states that the identification of the condition of existing peatland is a vital part of the wind farm design process and bespoke management plans have an important role. It adds that "*by assessing the net carbon impacts of proposed developments on carbon rich soils and peatlands we will ensure that planning and consenting regimes result in the right projects in the right places, with all applications considered on a case-by-case basis within the relevant planning regime*." (paragraph 3.3.13)

2.5.35 Section 3.5 addresses biodiversity and paragraph 3.5.6 states that "*as the rate of onshore wind deployment increases in the coming years, we see a great opportunity for wind energy developments to further contribute significantly to our biodiversity ambition. By proactively managing intact habitats and the species they support, restoring degraded areas and improving connectivity between nature rich areas, onshore wind projects will contribute to our climate change targets and help address the biodiversity crisis*". (paragraph 3.5.6)

2.5.36 Landscape and Visual Amenity is addressed at Section 3.6 with direct cross references to NPF4. Paragraph 3.6.1 states (original emphasis):

"*Meeting our climate targets will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place. Meeting the ambition of a minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 will require taller and more efficient turbines. This will change the landscape.*"

2.5.37 As referenced below, NPF4 policy 11 expressly recognises that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected and the OWPS emphasises that as a result there will be changes in Scotland's landscape.

2.5.38 Paragraph 3.6.2 of the OWPS, in cross-referencing NPF4, makes it clear that outside of National Parks and National Scenic Areas "*the criteria for assessing proposals have been updated, including stronger weight being afforded to the contribution of the development to the climate emergency, as well as community benefits*".

2.5.39 There is therefore express direction of greater weight attaching to the benefits of the development in terms of how it contributes to tackling the climate emergency. The removal of the Spatial Framework for onshore wind farms, as previously required by Scottish Planning Policy (SPP), also gives rise to fewer locational constraints.

2.5.40 Paragraph 3.6.5 makes reference to Landscape Sensitivity Studies and makes it clear that these should not be used in isolation to determine matters of acceptability but can be a useful tool in assessing specific sensitivities within an area. It should be noted that the term is now landscape sensitivity, in comparison with SPP paragraph 162 which encouraged Landscape Capacity Studies. This reflects NatureScot's 2022[8] guidance.

2.5.41 Paragraph 3.6.3 also makes reference to the NPF4 Policy 11 criteria with regard to energy development stating that "*where impacts are localised and/or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable*".

Energy Systems & Regulation

2.5.42 Chapter 8 of the OWPS deals with 'Onshore Wind, Energy Systems and Regulation'. Section 8.2 refers to network planning and delivery and states:

"*Delivering our ambition of 20GW of onshore wind by 2030 will create demands on our electricity infrastructure. New developments will need to connect quickly to Scotland's distribution and transmission networks. Networks must be able to invest quickly and ahead of need in order to ensure swift and efficient connections for onshore wind developments*".

2.5.43 The Proposed Development is expected to contribute to the 2030 target. It should also be noted that NPF4 Policy 11 advises that grid capacity should not constrain renewable energy development, therefore any challenges facing developers in getting connected, including delays, are not matters for the planning decision makers to be concerned with.

OWPS Conclusions

2.5.44 Page 49 of the OWPS sets out overall conclusions and these include *inter alia* the following key points:

- Deployment of onshore wind is "*mission critical for meeting our climate targets*".
- As an affordable and reliable source of electricity generation, "*we must continue to maximise our natural resource and deliver net zero in a way that is fully aligned with, and continues to protect our natural heritage and native flora and fauna*".
- A renewed commitment to this technology will ensure we keep "*leading the way in onshore wind deployment and support within the UK*".

[8] NatureScot, Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance, paragraph 8 (2022).

- The Scottish Government has established "*a clear expectation of delivery with our ambition for a **minimum installed capacity of 20GW** of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 and providing a vehicle for that delivery through the creation of* [the] *Onshore Wind Strategic Leadership Group*" (emphasis added).

2.5.45 It is stated that "*Onshore wind will remain an essential part of our energy mix and climate change mitigation efforts, but we are also in a nature crisis. Onshore wind farms must strike the right balance in how we care for and use our land*…".

2.5.46 The term "mission critical" is strong language and indicates onshore wind is crucial and extremely important to the attainment of the Government's policy and legislative objectives. This is fundamentally different policy language to that contained within National Planning Framework 3 (NPF3) and SPP.

2.6 The Onshore Wind Sector Deal

2.6.1 The Onshore Wind Sector Deal (the 'Sector Deal') for Scotland was finalised in September 2023. It sets out a series of key measures which will support the Scottish Government in reaching its target of 20 GW of onshore wind by 2030. It describes how the Scottish Government and the onshore wind sector will work together to deliver onshore wind farms quickly, sustainably and to the benefit of local communities and with the overall objective of attaining Scotland's net zero target.

2.6.2 The Foreword sets out that:

"*The Government is committed to working with developers and stakeholders, understanding the operational barriers to delivering onshore wind projects and setting out processes to help reduce them. We also commit to speeding up consenting decisions, working with planning authorities and statutory consultees to increase skills and resources, as well as streamlining approaches.*

Jointly, we will work together on ensuring a balance is struck between onshore wind and the impacts on land use and the environment. We will collaborate to enable information to be collected and shared from monitoring and evidence purposes, and we jointly want to capitalise on the unique opportunity for Scotland to become a world leader in decommissioning, re-manufacturing and recycling of onshore wind assets."

2.6.3 It further adds that:

"*The Sector Deal is more than just a document; it is a testament to our determination, a celebration of our potential, and a promise to future generations. Let us work together to usher in an era where innovation, sustainability, and prosperity converge, as we power Scotland's greener future through the boundless energy of onshore wind*."

2.6.4 The matters within the Sector Deal to be actioned by a collaborative approach and also by specific actions from the sector and Government relate to:

- Supply chain, skills and the circular economy;
- Community and benefits;
- Land use and the environment;
- Planning;
- Legislative and regulatory actions; and
- Technical actions.

2.6.5 In terms of land use and the environment, the Sector Deal sets out that NPF4 Policy 1 makes it clear that significant weight needs to be given to the global climate and nature crisis and that "*New onshore wind projects in Scotland will enhance biodiversity and optimise land use and environmental benefits*" (page 11).

2.6.6 It further adds that:

"*Balancing the need for more wind farms with the safeguards defined in NPF4 will be a crucial aspect of achieving the 2030 onshore wind ambition. Scotland will continue to be a world leader in responsible onshore wind development, demonstrating how onshore wind can co-exist with a diversity of species, sensitive habitats, peatland, carbon rich soils and forestry, ensuring positive outcomes for the climate and nature*."

2.6.7 In terms of planning, a key matter is that there is an ambition to reduce the time it takes to determine Section 36 consent applications. The Sector Deal also states (page 13) in relation to planning that:

"*The ambition of 20 GW of installed onshore wind capacity by 2030 will require a significant number of new sites, the repowering and extension of existing sites and the realisation of unbuilt consented sites. Meeting this ambition will require the determination of applications to be made much more quickly than in recent years.*"

2.7 The Draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan

2.7.1 The Scottish Government published a new draft 'Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan' entitled 'Delivering a fair and secure zero carbon energy system for Scotland' on 10 January 2023. The new Strategy is to replace the one previously published in 2017. The consultation period ended in April 2023. As a draft document it can only be afforded limited weight. The draft document is however consistent with the adopted policy set out in NPF4 and the identification of the 2020s as a crucial decade for the large-scale delivery of renewable energy projects supporting urgent transition to net zero.

2.7.2 The Ministerial Foreword states:

"*The imperative is clear: in this decisive decade, we must deliver an energy system that meets the challenge of becoming a net zero nation by 2045, supplies safe and secure energy for all, generate economic opportunities, and builds a just transition…*

The delivery of this draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan will reduce energy costs in the long term and reduce the likelihood of future energy cost crises….

It is also clear that as part of our response to the climate crisis we must reduce our dependence on oil and gas and that Scotland is well positioned to do so in a way that ensures we have sufficient, secure and affordable energy to meet our needs, to support economic growth and to capture sustainable export opportunities….

For all these reasons, this draft Strategy and Plan supports the fastest possible just transition for the oil and gas sector in order to secure a bright future for a revitalised North Sea energy sector focused on renewables."

2.7.3 The Foreword adds that the draft Strategy sets out key ambitions for Scotland's energy future including:

- **More than 20 GW of additional renewable electricity on and offshore by 2030**.
- Accelerated decarbonisation of domestic industry, transport and heat.
- Generation of surplus electricity, enabling export of electricity and renewable hydrogen to support decarbonisation across Europe.
- Energy security through development of our own resources and additional energy storage.

- A just transition by maintaining or increasing employment in Scotland's energy production sector against a decline in North Sea production.

2.7.4 The draft Strategy states (page 7, Executive Summary) that the vision for Scotland's energy system is:

"*…that by 2045 Scotland will have a flourishing, climate friendly energy system that delivers affordable, resilient and clean energy supplies for Scotland's households, communities and business. This will deliver maximum benefit for Scotland, enabling us to achieve a wider climate and environmental ambitions, drive the development of a wellbeing economy and deliver a just transition for our workers, businesses, communities and regions.*

In order to deliver that vision, this Strategy sets out clear policy positions and a route map of actions with a focus out to 2030".

2.7.5 A fundamental part of the Strategy is expanding the energy generation sector. The Executive Summary states (page 8) that Scotland's renewable resources mean that:

"*….we can not only generate enough cheap green electricity to power Scotland's economy, but also export electricity to our neighbours, supporting jobs here in Scotland and the decarbonisation ambitions of our partners.*

We are setting an ambition of more than 20 GW of additional low-cost renewable electricity generation capacity by 2030, including 12 GW of onshore wind….

An additional 20 GW of renewable generation will more than double our existing renewable generation capacity by 2030……"

Recognition of the role of Battery Storage

2.7.6 With regard to the potential of battery storage the draft strategy recognises:

"Batteries can be combined to provide energy storage: In a domestic setting supporting the energy efficiency of individual homes; In communities and neighbourhoods, supporting the energy efficiency of the local low energy network; In strategic locations and through aggregating a large number of fixed and vehicle batteries to support regional energy and grid balancing a high energy network".

2.7.7 Furthermore, it adds:

"Utility scale battery storage offers fast responding, dispatchable power when required. As of September 2021, only 124 MW of the total 864 MW of energy storage was provided by Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) capacity installed in Scotland. However, there is a further 2.1GW that has secured planning permission. Typically, these systems use lithium-ion technology, and only contain energy to dispatch full power continuously for a short number of hours. They also provide a number of ancillary services required to maintain stability within the electricity networks". (Page 130).

2.7.8 The Draft Strategy reiterates the support for energy storage set out in NPF4 (page 130).

2.7.9 The Draft Strategy further recognises the potential contribution BESS can make to achieving Net Zero in summarising the key areas where it is considered that the UK Government needs to take action to support the delivery of the strategy with particular regard to energy system flexibility stating: *"We urge the UK Government to make ancillary markets more accessible for Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) and other low carbon technologies ahead of fossil fuel powered alternatives".*

2.8 Green Industrial Strategy

2.8.1 The Scottish Government published a Green Industrial Strategy ('GIS') in September 2024. The Executive Summary sets out the mission of the GIS, namely:

"*This Green Industrial Strategy's mission is to ensure that Scotland realises the maximum possible economic benefit from the opportunities created by the global transition to net zero*".

2.8.2 The GIS sets out five opportunity areas for Scotland where identified strengths are most likely to lead to growth and the potential to grow Scotland's exports. The sectors relate to Scotland's wind economy, carbon capture and storage, supporting the green economy by way of professional and financial services, growing the hydrogen sector and establishing Scotland as a competitive centre for clean energy intensive industries of the future.

2.8.3 Page 6 sets out that the GIS forms a key part of the Government's broader National Strategy for Economic Transformation. It states that "*It also links explicitly to our Just Transition Plans which describe how the transition to net zero in the most emitting sectors will be achieved in a way that delivers economic, social and community benefits, including fair work, environmental preservation and reduced poverty and inequality*."

2.8.4 The first of the five opportunity areas is in relation to 'maximising Scotland's wind economy'. It states that this:

"*is about making the most of our natural resources, established onshore and offshore wind sectors and first-mover advantage in floating offshore wind to generate clean electricity; participating in global supply chains as well as expanding our domestic supply chain capacity and seizing opportunities across the offshore wind supply chain, from infrastructure to manufacturing; positioning Scotland as a leader in material circularity of wind turbines and components.*"

2.8.5 Actions include, *inter alia*:

- Supporting investment to improve essential infrastructure, expanding supply chains and secure manufacturing opportunities;
- Developing and maintaining a pipeline of investment propositions backed by clear information about the timing and nature of renewable energy opportunities;
- Delivering planning and consenting systems which enable Scotland's net zero development pipeline;
- Exploring the circularity opportunity in onshore wind; and
- Page 13 states clearly that the single goal of the GIS is to help Scotland realise economic growth opportunities from the global transition to net zero.

2.8.6 Onshore wind is referred to in some detail at page 21 where the GIS states:

"*Onshore wind is the biggest single technology in Scotland's current mix of renewable electricity generation, comprising 62% of installed capacity.*

A thriving onshore wind sector is therefore critical to the decarbonisation in Scotland and the UK. As set out in our 2022 Onshore Wind Policy Statement, Government and industry are focused on delivering at least 20 GW of onshore wind by 2030 (doubling current capacity) and recent pipeline analysis shows that we should be on track to deliver this.

This trajectory is underpinned by the Onshore Wind Sector Deal which sets out a set of specific collaborative actions which include commitments by both the Scottish Government and the onshore wind industry to help deliver the 20 GW ambition.

A supportive policy environment and successful industry collaboration via the Onshore Wind Strategic Leadership Group confirms the shared commitment of Government and industry to achieve this successful and responsible growth.

The onshore wind workforce is highly skilled and opportunities in installation, consulting, operations and maintenance are anticipated to rise in response to growth ambitions. Specialised engineering consultancy services such as wind farm design and financial due diligence related to onshore developments are expected to grow and offer additional export potential. There is commercial opportunity in circular supply chains related to the UK wind industry. Scotland's established, and now ageing onshore wind assets may also offer opportunities for innovative solutions in remanufacturing, recycling, and decommissioning end of life assets."

2.8.7 It is clear therefore that to progress the Government's objectives with regard to wind energy there needs to be clear support for new investment and growth in onshore wind development. Realising the economic and social opportunities will only be achieved through the development and consenting of additional wind energy developments. Such deployment will not only be critical towards achieving the net zero target, given the important contribution that wind energy will make in that regard, but will also help deliver the Government's clear green infrastructure mission.

2.9 CCC Report, Scotland's Carbon Budgets, Advice for the Scottish Government

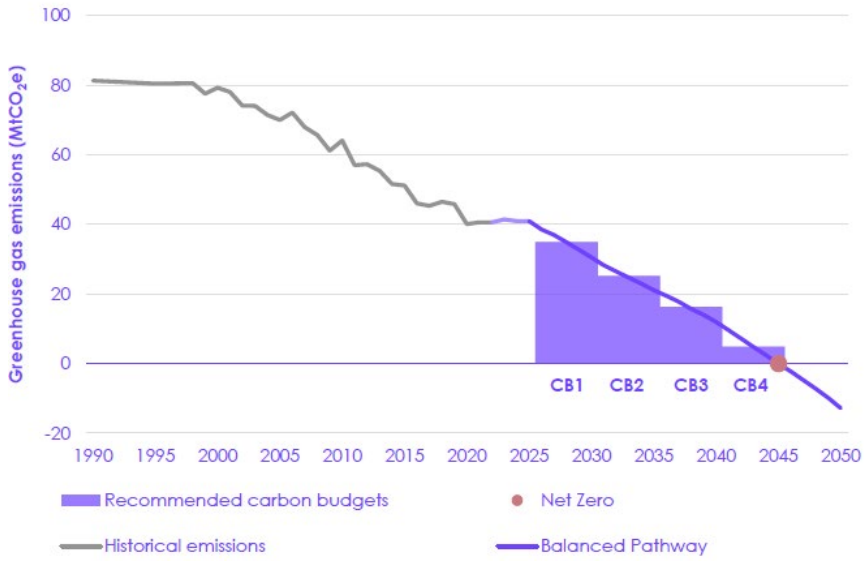
2.9.1 This CCC Report was published in May 2025, and it sets out the CCC's advice on the level of Scotland's four proposed carbon budgets, covering the period 2026 to 2045. It recommends that the Scottish Government sets its carbon budgets, at annual average levels of emissions that are:

- 57% lower than 1990 levels for the First Carbon Budget (2026 to 2030);
- 69% lower than 1990 levels for the Second Carbon Budget (2031 to 2035);
- 80% lower than 1990 levels for the Third Carbon Budget (2036 to 2040); and
- 94% lower than 1990 levels for the Fourth Carbon Budget (2041 to 2045).

2.9.2 The report sets out that the CCC's advice "shows that the proposed carbon budgets are deliverable and Scotland can achieve its 2045 Net Zero target." (page 8)

2.9.3 The recommended carbon budgets are illustrated in **Figure 2.5** below.

Figure 2.5: CCC Recommended Carbon Budgets for Scotland[9]



[9] Source: CCC (May, 2025). The Report states that the 'Balanced pathway' sets the recommended level of Scotland's carbon budgets.

2.9.4 It states that getting to net zero by 2045 will require immediate action, at pace and scale and adds that decisions on the exact pathway and policies are for the Scottish Government.

2.9.5 The Report explains that progress to date has largely come from electricity decarbonisation, reflecting Scotland's abundant renewable resources. It goes on to state (page 9) that:

"Action will increasingly be required in predominantly devolved policy areas to hit the Net Zero 2045 target and the proposed carbon budgets. Now that the framework for climate action has been reset, the Scottish Government has the opportunity to use its powers to match its ambitions with action."

2.9.6 The Report identifies priority actions, which over the period of the first two carbon budgets will be the remaining decarbonisation of electricity generation as well as further electrification of key technologies, particularly the roll-out of EVs and heat pumps.

2.9.7 The Report identifies the sources of future emissions reductions and notes that in the next decade, over the next two carbon budgets, they are predominantly met from electrification of key technologies across the economy and measures to reduce demand for high-carbon activities.

2.9.8 Specifically in relation to electricity and low carbon supply the Executive Summary explains (page 12) that in the Balanced Pathway set out by the CCC:

"the capacity of variable renewables in Scotland (including offshore and onshore wind and solar) more than triples from 15 GW in 2023 to 49 GW by 2035, increasing to 66 GW by 2045. This provides 98% of electricity generation in Scotland in 2035 and caters for increasing demand in Scotland and the rest of Great Britain (GB). Grid storage, use of storable fuels on the GB-wide network, and smart demand flexibility ensure a reliable supply of electricity even in adverse weather years. These technologies need to be accompanied by rapidly expanding the transmission grid, upgrading the distribution network, and speeding up the grid connection process. To deliver clean electricity, the planning process to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland needs to be urgently improved." (emphasis added)

2.9.9 Scotland currently has approximately 17.6 GW[10] of renewables operating capacity, therefore, to achieve the Balanced Pathway figure of 66 GW by 2045 will require an additional 48.4 GW to be deployed.

2.9.10 The Report sets out in more detail the key actions to deliver the Balanced Pathway in electricity supply. At page 94 it refers to the key action for the Scottish Government which is to *"Urgently improve the planning process to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland, such as transmission lines and onshore wind farms."* citing that it can currently take up to four years to approve large electricity infrastructure projects in Scotland.

2.9.11 The Report makes reference to the Scottish Government and the UK Government's commitment to reform the energy consents system in Scotland, including through measures in the Planning and Infrastructure Bill. It states that *"Both governments should ensure that these reforms are now implemented at pace. All bodies involved in the planning and consenting process must also be adequately resourced and skilled."*

[10] Source: Scottish Government (March 2025) Energy Statistics for Scotland – Q4 2024.

2.10 Conclusions on the Renewable Energy Policy & Legislative Framework

2.10.1 It is considered that the Proposed Development is very strongly supported by the climate change and renewable energy policy and legislative framework.

2.10.2 The trajectory, in terms of the scale and pace of action required to reduce emissions, grows ever steeper, and it is essential that rapid progress is made otherwise the legally binding target in Scotland of net zero by 2045 will not be met.

2.10.3 It is clear from the UK Energy White Paper and the forecasts by the CCC that electricity demand is expected to grow substantially (scenarios vary but potentially by a factor of three or four) as carbon intensive sources of energy are displaced by electrification of other industry sectors, particularly heat and transport. This expected substantial increase in electricity demand is also highlighted in the OWPS.

2.10.4 The change from annual Scottish emission reduction targets to a system of carbon budgets has served to show that Scotland is not on track to attain net zero, and it strengthens the case for rapidly approving schemes that can contribute to this goal. The overall target of net zero remains unchanged in the move to carbon budgets.

2.10.5 Decisions through the planning and wider consenting system must be responsive to this position. Decision makers can do this by affording substantial weight to the energy policy objectives articulated above, in the planning balance in a given case.

2.10.6 In terms of the energy policy considerations, it is helpful to reference the recent position of the Scottish Ministers with regard to a Section 36 wind farm decision. Section 36 consent was granted by the Scottish Ministers on 09 May 2025 for the Chrathaich Wind Farm. From paragraph 90 *et seq* of the Decision Letter, the Scottish Ministers in commenting on the acceptability of the development stated:

"*As set out above, the seriousness of climate change, its potential effects and the need to cut carbon dioxide emissions, remain a priority for the Scottish Ministers. Scotland's renewable energy targets and climate change ambitions, energy policies and planning policies are all relevant considerations when weighing up this proposed development. NPF4, Scotland's Energy Strategy and the Onshore Wind Policy Statement ("OWPS") make it clear that renewable energy deployment remains a priority of the Scottish Government. These are all matters which should be afforded significant weight in favour of the Proposed Development".*

The transition to a low carbon economy is an opportunity for Scotland to take advantage of our natural resources to grow low carbon industries and create jobs.

The Scottish Ministers are satisfied that the deployment of this amount of renewable energy the proposed Development could generate is entirely consistent with the Scottish Government's policy on the promotion of renewable energy and its target date for net zero emissions of all greenhouse gases by 2045."

2.10.7 In the most recent renewable energy policy documents referred to, there is a consistent and what might be termed a 'green thread', which ties a number of related policy matters together: namely the urgent challenge and imperative of attaining and sustaining net zero and the need to substantially increase renewable capacity, notably onshore wind.

2.10.8 The draft Energy Strategy for Scotland forms part of the strengthened policy approach alongside NPF4. These documents confirm the Scottish Government's policy objectives and related targets, reaffirming the important role that onshore wind will play in response to the climate crisis which is at the heart of all these policies.

2.10.9 It must follow that the need case for the Proposed Development is to be afforded significant weight in the planning balance. The way that decision makers can do that is by properly recognising the seriousness and importance of energy policy related considerations in the planning balance, and the contribution of the Proposed Development to meeting net zero and low carbon energy targets. It is the cumulative effect of a large number of individual projects which will move Scotland towards where it needs to be in order to attain net zero.

3. The Benefits of the Proposed Development

3.1 The Benefits: Summary

3.1.1 This section summarises the benefits that would arise from the Proposed Development.

Renewable Energy Generation

- With an installed capacity of up to approximately 50.4 MW of onshore wind energy and 23 MW of BESS, the Proposed Development would make a valuable and important contribution to the attainment of the UK and Scottish Government policies of encouraging renewable energy developments; and in turn contribute to the achievement of UK and Scottish Government renewable energy and net zero targets. As explained, there is now a distinct shift in policy emphasis from the displacement of higher carbon electricity generation to extending the use of electricity as the critical energy response to the climate emergency.
- The UK legally binding target of net zero GHG emissions by 2050 and the Scottish Government target of net zero by the earlier date of 2045 are major challenges, as explained in the previous chapter. The Scottish Government has made it clear that onshore wind plays a vital and indeed "*mission critical*" role in the attainment of future targets in relation to helping to combat the crisis of global heating.
- The earlier that steps towards decarbonisation are introduced, the greater their contribution to limiting climate change. The Proposed Development's delivery of renewable energy capacity in the near term will have a disproportionately higher benefit than the same capacity delivered later.
- The Proposed Development would generate enough electricity to power the domestic electricity needs of approximately 58,212 average UK households per annum.

Emissions Savings

- The carbon balance calculations establish that the Proposed Development could result in the saving of approximately 37,288 tCO^2 yr-1 (Grid-mix of electricity) tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent emissions per annum if a grid mix of electricity generation were used as the counterfactual position.
- The carbon assessment indicated that the carbon emissions payback time for the Proposed Development would be approximately 2.4 years when compared against a grid mix electricity generation.

Security of Supply & Battery Storage

- The British Energy Security Strategy has been referenced. It provides an increase to the requirements for both the scale and the urgency of delivery of new low carbon generation capacity, by refocussing the requirement for low-carbon power for reasons of national security of supply and affordability, as well as for decarbonisation.
- With this context, the attractiveness of onshore wind, as a proven technology which will deliver significant benefits to consumers through decarbonisation, security of supply and affordability this decade, becomes clear.

- The Proposed Development, if consented, would provide a valuable contribution to security of supply for the wider region, Scotland and for the wider Great Britain ('GB') area. Consenting the development, would contribute to an adequate and dependable Scottish and GB generation mix, through enabling the generation of more low carbon power from renewable resources, and would enable the Proposed Development to make a significant contribution to Scottish and wider UK energy security and decarbonisation needs.
- BESS will play a vital role in ensuring the full potential capacity of existing and future renewable energy generation is exploited and the successful transition to a net-zero future. BESS imports renewable energy when supply is typically at its highest and in excess of demand, storing it, and then exporting it back to the grid when demand is high, but supply is low (e.g. still, cloudy days).
- Furthermore, the BESS also has the potential to supply the grid with essential energy security functions including:
  - **Voltage support services:** Batteries can supply the network with quickly dischargeable energy during low voltage periods or blackouts; to date these scenarios have typically been managed by reliance on quickly dispatchable fossil fuel energy generators (typically gas peaking plants); and
  - **Grid stabilisation services (inertia):** Inertia is incredibly important for the stable operation of the electricity system; it is a by-product of coal and gas-fired generators, however renewables like wind and solar are not able to provide inertia. As older coal and gas plants come off the system and renewable energy generation becomes the dominant source of energy nationally, we need to find new ways to provide grid stability. BESS are able to provide these stability services.

Socio-Economic Benefits

- The Proposed Development would support jobs during construction and operation, across the Scottish economy. Key benefits as set out in the Giant's Burn Socio-Economics Benefits Report include:
- It is anticipated that Giant's Burn Wind Farm will contribute £39 million in direct GVA through its construction, while supporting up to 482 direct and indirect Person Years of Employment. 58 of these jobs would be in Argyll and Bute and up to 174 in Scotland as a whole. It is explained in the assessment that when taking into consideration, induced and indirect effects, this increases to 316 Person Years Employment ('PYE') in Scotland of which 90 PYE would be in Argyll and Bute.
- Through the promotion of its local supplier register and funding specifically allocated to supporting education, Giant's Burn Wind Farm will be able to support the development of both skills and businesses in the renewable industry.
- During operation it is estimated that £81,195 per MW is spent annually. For the Proposed Development this would equate to an annual total direct GVA of £1.8 million, £0.7 million of which would be spent in the Argyll and Bute area, and an additional £0.3 million in the rest of Scotland. When considering the indirect and induced expenditure this increases the GVA in Argyll and Bute to £1.1 million annually and £0.7 million in the rest of Scotland annually.
- All the above would ensure a **contribution to the maximisation of the local supply chain content** and provide **opportunities for local employment**.

Community Benefit and Shared Ownership

- Should the Proposed Development gain consent, a Community Benefit Fund would be made available to the community. This is offered on the basis of a payment per MW of installed capacity at the Scottish Government recommended rate at the time of commissioning the Proposed Development. At present the recommended rate is £5,000 per MW of installed electricity generating capacity per year (Scottish Government, 2019a), index-linked. It is estimated that, depending on the type of investment selected, the community benefit fund alone would accrue benefits to local groups and organisations of approximately £12.5 million in real terms over the 50-year life of the Proposed Development.
- In line with the Onshore Wind Sector Deal Statkraft is willing to offer Shared Ownership for the Proposed Development, should there be sufficient interest from local groups or organisations. The Applicant would be willing to engage locally in order to bring this forward and Local Energy Scotland can provide independent advice and support to communities interested in the shared ownership opportunities.
- The Applicant met with Cowal Community Energy ('CCE') – a coalition of development trusts in the Cowal peninsula - in February 2025 to discuss community ownership opportunities. CCE is a company with charitable status, whose purpose is to invest in community-owned renewable assets. The Applicant followed up with a letter of intent to CCE, committing to further discuss community ownership of part of the Proposed Development.
- The Proposed Development will also provide a Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics ('STEM') fund for the locally community of £10,000 per annum during the operational period of the Proposed Development.

Biodiversity Enhancement

- Significant biodiversity enhancements are proposed as set out in a draft BES which is contained at **Appendix 6.5** of the EIA Report Volume 4. The details of the proposed measures are set out in the next chapter in the context of NPF4 biodiversity policy.

4. Appraisal against NPF4

4.1 Introduction

4.1.1 NPF4 was approved by resolution of the Scottish Parliament on 11 January 2023 and published on 13 February 2023.

4.1.2 A Chief Planner's Letter was issued on 8 February 2023 entitled 'Transitional Arrangements for National Planning Framework 4'. It contained advice intended to support consistency in decision making ahead of new style Local Development Plans being in place.

Development Management

4.1.3 Section 13 of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 Act amends Section 24 of the 1997 Act regarding the meaning of the statutory 'Development Plan', such that for the purposes of the 1997 Act, the Development Plan for an area is taken as consisting of the provisions of:

- The National Planning Framework; and
- Any Local Development Plan ('LDP').

4.1.4 Therefore, at the time of writing this Planning Statement, the statutory Development Plan applying to the site consists of NPF4 and the Argyll and Bute LDP ('LDP') (2024).

4.1.5 The publication of NPF4 coincided with the coming into force of certain parts of the 2019 Act. A key provision is Section 13 of the 2019 Act which amends Section 24 of the 1997 Act to provide that:

"*In the event of any incompatibility between a provision of the National Planning Framework and a provision of a local development plan, whichever of them is the later in date is to prevail*."

How NPF4 is to be used

4.1.6 Annex A (page 94) of NPF4 explains how it is to be used. It states:

"*The purpose of planning is to manage the development and use of land in the long-term public interest … Scotland in 2045 will be different. We must embrace and deliver radical change so we can tackle and adapt to climate change, restore biodiversity loss, improve health and wellbeing, reduce inequalities, build a wellbeing economy and create great places*."

4.1.7 Annex A states that NPF4 is required by law to set out the Scottish Ministers' policies and proposals for the development and use of land. It adds:

"*It plays a key role in supporting the delivery of Scotland's national outcomes and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals*[11]*. NPF4 includes a long-term spatial strategy to 2045*."

4.1.8 NPF4 contains a Spatial Strategy and Scottish Government development management policies to be applied in all consenting decisions, and it identifies national developments which are aligned to the strategic themes of the Government's Infrastructure Investment Plan[12] ('IIP').

[11] The 17 UN Sustainable Development Goals are set out at page 95 of NPF4 and include *inter alia* 'affordable and clean energy' and 'climate action'.

[12] The Scottish Government's five-year Infrastructure Investment Plan (2021-22 to 2025-26) was published in February 2021. It set out a vision for Scotland's future infrastructure in order to support and enable an inclusive net zero emissions economy.

4.1.9 Annex A adds that NPF4 is required by law to contribute to six outcomes. These relate to meeting housing needs, health and wellbeing, population of rural areas, addressing equality and discrimination and also, of particular relevance to the Proposed Development, "*meeting any targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouses gases, and, securing positive effects for biodiversity*".

4.2 The National Spatial Strategy – Delivery of Sustainable Places

4.2.1 Part 1 of NPF4 sets out the Spatial Strategy for Scotland to 2045 based on six spatial principles which are to influence all plans and decisions. The introductory text to the Spatial Strategy starts by stating (page 3):

"*The world is facing unprecedented challenges. The global climate emergency means that we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and adapt to the future impacts of climate change*."

4.2.2 The principles are stated as playing a key role in delivering the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals and the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework[13].

4.2.3 The Spatial Strategy is aimed at supporting the delivery of:

- 'Sustainable Places': "*where we reduce emissions, restore and better connect biodiversity*";
- 'Liveable Places': "*where we can all live better, healthier lives*"; and
- 'Productive places': "*where we have a greener, fairer and more inclusive wellbeing economy*".

4.2.4 Page 6 of NPF4 addresses the delivery of sustainable places. Reference is made to the consequences of Scotland's changing climate, and it states, *inter alia*:

"*Scotland's Climate Change Plan, backed by legislation, has set our approach to achieving net zero emissions by 2045, and we must make significant progress towards this by 2030…Scotland's Energy Strategy will set a new agenda for the energy sector in anticipation of continuing innovation and investment*."

4.2.5 The National Spatial Strategy in relation to 'sustainable places' is described (page 7 of NPF4) as follows:

"*Scotland's future places will be net zero, nature-positive places that are designed to reduce emissions and adapt to the impacts of climate change, whilst protecting, recovering and restoring our environment.*

Meeting our climate ambition will require a rapid transformation across all sectors of our economy and society. This means ensuring the right development happens in the right place.

Every decision on our future development must contribute to making Scotland a more sustainable place. We will encourage low and zero carbon design and energy efficiency, development that is accessible by sustainable travel, and expansion of renewable energy generation."

4.2.6 Six National Developments ('ND') support the delivery of sustainable places, one being 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure'.

4.2.7 A summary description of this ND is provided at page 7 of NPF4 as follows:

"*Supports electricity generation and associated grid infrastructure throughout Scotland, providing employment and opportunities for community benefit, helping to reduce emissions and improve security of supply*".

[13] The Scottish Government National Performance Framework sets out 'National Outcomes' and measures progress against a range of economic, social and environmental 'National Indicators'.

4.2.8 Page 8 of NPF4 sets out 'Cross-cutting Outcome and Policy Links' with regard to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It states:

"*The global climate emergency and the nature crisis have formed the foundations for the spatial strategy as a whole. The regional priorities share opportunities and challenges for reducing emissions and adapting to the long-term impacts of climate change, in a way which protects and enhances our natural environment*."

4.2.9 A key point in this statement is that the climate emergency and nature crisis are expressly stated as forming the foundations of the National Spatial Strategy; recognising that tackling climate change and the nature crisis is an overriding imperative which is key to the outcomes of almost all policies within NPF4.

4.3 National Developments

Overview

4.3.1 Page 97 of NPF4 sets out that 18 NDs have been identified. These are described as:

"*significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the spatial strategy … National development status does not grant planning permission for the development and all relevant consents are required*".

4.3.2 It adds that:

"*Their designation means that the principle for development does not need to be agreed in later consenting processes, providing more certainty for communities, businesses and investors. … In addition to the statement of need at Annex B, decision makers for applications for consent for national developments should take into account all relevant policies*".

4.3.3 Annex B of NPF4 sets out the various NDs and related Statements of Need. It explains that NDs are significant developments of national importance that will help to deliver the Spatial Strategy. It states (page 99) that:

"*The statements of need set out in this annex are a requirement of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 and describe the development to be considered as a national development for consent handling purposes*".

National Development 3 "Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure"

4.3.4 Page 103 of NPF4 describes National Development 3 ('ND3') and states:

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

A large and rapid 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, which will include energy storage technology and capacity, to provide the vital services, including flexible response, that a zero carbon network will require. Generation is for domestic consumption 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.

The electricity transmission grid will need substantial reinforcement including the addition of new infrastructure to connect and transmit the output from new on and offshore capacity to consumers in Scotland, the rest of the UK and beyond. Delivery of this national development will be informed by market, policy and regulatory developments and decisions."

4.3.5 The location for ND3 is set out as being all of Scotland and in terms of need it is described as:

"*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. …*"

4.3.6 Reference is made to the designation and classes of development which would qualify as ND3, and it states in this regard:

"*A development contributing to 'Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission' in the location described, within one or more of the Classes of Development described below and that is of a scale or type that would otherwise have been classified as 'major' by 'The Town and Country Planning (Hierarchy of Developments) (Scotland) Regulations 2009', is designated a national development:*

(a) ***on and off shore electricity generation, including electricity storage, from renewables exceeding 50 megawatts capacity*** .." (emphasis added)

4.3.7 The Proposed Development would therefore have national development status, and it would make a valuable contribution to the delivery of the National Spatial Strategy.

4.3.8 The National Spatial Strategy requires a "*large and rapid increase*" in electricity generation from renewables and the National Spatial Strategy makes it clear (NPF4, page 6) that "*we must make significant progress*" by 2030.

4.4 National Planning Policy

4.4.1 Part 2 of NPF4 (page 36) addresses national planning policy by topic with reference to three themes formulated with the aim of delivering sustainable, liveable and productive places.

4.4.2 In terms of planning, development management and the application of the national level policies, NPF4 states:

"*The policy sections are for use in the determination of planning applications. The policies should be read as a whole. Planning decisions must be made in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. It is for the decision maker to determine what weight to attach to policies on a case by case basis. Where a policy states that development will be supported, it is in principle, and it is for the decision maker to take into account all other relevant policies*".

4.4.3 In terms of "sustainable places" the most relevant policies to the Proposed Development include the following:

- Policy 1: Tackling the climate and nature crises;
- Policy 3: Biodiversity;
- Policy 4: Natural places;
- Policy 5: Soils;
- Policy 6: Forestry, woodland and trees;
- Policy 7: Historic assets and places; and
- Policy 11: Energy.

4.4.4 In terms of "liveable places", the most relevant polices to the Proposed Development include:

- Policy 22: Flood risk and water management.

4.4.5 These policies are addressed in turn below.

4.4.6 The Chief Planner's Letter of 8 February 2023 provides advice in relation to applying NPF4 policy. It states that the application of planning judgement to the circumstances of an individual situation remains essential for all decision making, informed by principles of proportionality and reasonableness. It states:

"*It is important to bear in mind NPF4 must be read and applied as a whole. The intent of each of the 33 policies is set out in NPF4 and can be used to guide decision making. Conflicts between policies are to be expected. Factors for and against development will be weighed up in the balance of planning judgement.*" (emphasis added)

4.4.7 The Letter adds:

"*It is recognised that it may take some time for planning authorities and stakeholders to get to grips with the NPF4 policies, and in particular the interface with individual LDP policies. As outlined above, in the event of any incompatibility between the provision of NPF and the provision of an LDP, whichever of them is the later in date is to prevail. Provisions that are contradictory or in conflict would be likely to be considered incompatible*".

4.5 NPF4 Policy 1: Tackling the Climate and Nature Crises

Policy 1 & Principles

4.5.1 The intent of Policy 1 is "*to encourage, promote and facilitate development that addresses the global climate emergency and nature crisis*".

4.5.2 Policy 1 directs decision makers that "*when considering all development proposals significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises.*"

4.5.3 This is a radical departure from the usual approach to policy and weight and clearly denotes a step change in planning policy response to climate change. The matter of weight is no longer left entirely to the discretion of the decision maker. Significant weight should therefore be attributed to the Proposed Development given it would be consistent with the intent of Policy 1, would make a positive contribution by helping to attain the outcome of net zero, and would also deliver biodiversity enhancement helping to address the nature crisis.

4.5.4 The Chief Planner's Letter refers to Policy 1. It states:

"*This policy prioritises the climate and nature crises in all decisions. It should be applied together with the other policies in NPF4. It will be for the decision maker to determine whether the significant weight to be applied tips the balance in favour for, or against a proposal on the basis of its positive or negative contribution to the climate and nature crises.*"

4.5.5 This statement from the Chief Planner confirms that the decision maker must apply significant weight to Policy 1, but it is for the decision maker to decide if it is for or against the proposal. The Proposed Development's contribution to the climate emergency and nature crisis is positive and therefore the significant weight in this case is in favour of the proposal.

4.5.6 The term "Tackling" the respective crises in Policy 1 is also important – this means that decision makers should ensure an urgent and positive response to these issues and take positive action. Furthermore, NPF4 (page 8) refers to cross cutting outcomes and states with regard to Policy 1 that the policy gives significant weight "*to the global climate emergency in order to ensure that it is recognised as a priority in all plans and decisions*".

The application of Policy 1

4.5.7 Given the nature of the Proposed Development, it would make a valuable contribution in relation to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas reduction targets. It will directly further the policy intent and outcomes of Policy 1 and should be afforded significant positive weight in terms of tackling the climate and nature crises. The specific emissions and carbon saving benefits are set out below in the context of NPF4 Policy 11 which requires the contribution that a development would make to targets to be taken into account.

4.5.8 The point is made later in this chapter that it is important to recognise the greatest threat to biodiversity is climate change. The principal and essential benefit of the Proposed Development is a valuable contribution of renewable energy, to facilitate the earliest possible decarbonisation of the energy system and the achievement of net zero no later than 2045. The purpose of achieving net zero is also to protect biodiversity and the earlier it can be achieved, the greater the benefits to biodiversity.

4.5.9 Furthermore, as explained below with reference to NPF4 Policy 3, biodiversity enhancement measures are proposed as part of the Proposed Development.

4.6 NPF4 Policy 11: Energy

Policy 11 & Principles

4.6.1 For the consideration of wind energy development, Policy 11 'Energy' (page 53) is the lead policy. Policy 11's intent is set out as:

"*to encourage, promote and facilitate all forms of renewable energy development onshore and offshore. This includes energy generation, storage, new and replacement transmission and distribution infrastructure and emerging low carbon and zero emission technologies including hydrogen and carbon capture utilisation and storage.*"

4.6.2 Policy Outcomes are identified as: "*expansion of renewable, low carbon and zero emission technologies*".

4.6.3 Policy 11 is in the following terms:

"a) Development proposals for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions technologies will be supported. These include:

i. wind farms including repowering, extending, expanding and extending the life of existing wind farms;

ii. enabling works, such as grid transmission and distribution infrastructure;

iii. energy storage, such as battery storage and pumped storage hydro;

iv. small scale renewable energy generation technology;

v. solar arrays;

vi. proposals associated with negative emissions technologies and carbon capture; and

vii. proposals including co-location of these technologies.

b) Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks and National Scenic Areas will not be supported.

c) Development proposals will only be supported where they maximise net economic impact, including local and community socio-economic benefits such as employment, associated business and supply chain opportunities.

d) Development proposals that impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4.

e) In addition, project design and mitigation will demonstrate how the following impacts are addressed:

i. impacts on communities and individual dwellings, including, residential amenity, visual impact, noise and shadow flicker;

ii. significant landscape and visual impacts, recognising that such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. Where impacts are localised and/ or

appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable;

iii. public access, including impact on long distance walking and cycling routes and scenic routes;

iv. impacts on aviation and defence interests including seismological recording;

v. impacts on telecommunications and broadcasting installations, particularly ensuring that transmission links are not compromised;

vi. impacts on road traffic and on adjacent trunk roads, including during construction;

vii. impacts on historic environment;

viii. effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk;

ix. biodiversity including impacts on birds;

x. impacts on trees, woods and forests;

xi. proposals for the decommissioning of developments, including ancillary infrastructure, and site restoration;

xii. the quality of site restoration plans including the measures in place to safeguard or guarantee availability of finances to effectively implement those plans; and

xiii. cumulative impacts.

In considering these impacts, significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

Grid capacity should not constrain renewable energy development. It is for developers to agree connections to the grid with the relevant network operator. In the case of proposals for grid infrastructure, consideration should be given to underground connections where possible.

f) Consents for development proposals may be time-limited. Areas identified for wind farms are, however, expected to be suitable for use in perpetuity".

The application of Policy 11

4.6.4 **Paragraph a) of Policy 11** states a position of express "support" for wind farm development.

4.6.5 The intent and desired outcome of the policy is clear – the expansion of renewable energy, through encouragement, promotion and facilitation, all of which the Proposed Development would help to deliver.

4.6.6 The wording of Policy 11 Paragraph (a)(i) makes it clear that the policy supports new wind farms and paragraph (vii) provides clear support for proposals including co-location of wind farms and energy storage technology.

4.6.7 **Paragraph b) of Policy 11** does not apply in this case.

4.6.8 **Paragraph c) of Policy 11** requires developments to "maximise net economic impact". The socio-economic effects that would arise have been summarised in Chapter 3 above and set out in the Statement of Socio-economic Benefits which accompanies the application and there is considered to be accordance with this aspect of Policy 11.

4.6.9 **Paragraph d) of Policy 11** states that development proposals that impact on international and national designations "*will be assessed in relation to Policy* 4".

4.6.10 Policy 4 also deals with impacts in relation to local landscape designations. Therefore, the matter of the impacts of the Proposed Development in relation to such (international, national and local) designations is examined further below with specific regard to the provisions of NPF4 Policy 4.

4.6.11 **Paragraph e) of Policy 11** states that project design and mitigation *"will demonstrate how"* impacts are addressed. These are listed in the quotation of the policy above and are addressed in turn below.

Impacts on Communities and Individual Dwellings - Residential Visual Amenity

4.6.12 As set out in **Chapter 5** of the EIA Report (Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment – 'LVIA') A detailed Residential Visual Amenity Assessment ('RVAA') was undertaken and is contained in **Technical Appendix 5.4** of the EIA Report.

4.6.13 The RVAA Study Area extends to 2 km and it is considered that potential for significant effects would be limited beyond this distance. It is confirmed in the RVAA that the Residential Visual Amenity Threshold ('RVAT') has not been breached in relation to any residential property.

4.6.14 With regard to settlements, the LVIA states that significant effects on visual receptors would arise as a result of close views of the turbines within Dunoon and Sandbank and areas up to 5 km from the turbines across Holy Loch to the north-east, and within the Firth of Clyde up to 7-8 km from the turbines.

Noise and Shadow Flicker

4.6.15 Noise is addressed in **Chapter 11** of the EIA Report. Operational noise (including cumulative noise from the Proposed Development and other wind farm developments) is assessed with reference to ETSU-R-97 The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms and the Institute of Acoustics document A Good Practice Guide to the Application of ETSU-R-97 for the Assessment and Rating of Wind Turbine Noise. No significant operational noise effects are identified.

4.6.16 The assessment of construction noise took the form of a desk-based study of the potential construction activities associated with the proposed wind turbines, BESS and associated infrastructure. Noise levels were calculated at the nearest receptor locations relative to construction activities and compared with recommended noise limits. It was shown that all construction activities would comply with the daytime nose limit at affected receptors, and potential impacts would not be significant.

4.6.17 The operational assessment included predicted immissions from the proposed turbines. Given the large setback distance of >1.5 km, the operational effects of the BESS were scoped out of the assessment. No cumulative developments were identified, and as such a detailed cumulative assessment was not required.

4.6.18 Noise levels from the operation of the proposed turbines were predicted at the nearest noise assessment locations, as defined by the noise study area, determined by best practice guidance. Background noise surveys were conducted within the study area to gather baseline noise levels and derive ETSU-R-97 noise limits. The results of the study concluded that operational noise levels from the Proposed Development would comply with the derived noise limits in accordance with ETSU-R-97 and national guidance and would not be significant.

4.6.19 **Chapter 14** (Other Issues) of the EIA Report addresses the topic of shadow flicker. a No shadow flicker effects or impacts on any residential receptors are predicted, and therefore no mitigation would be required.

4.6.20 It is explained in the assessment that at all residential properties, it has been demonstrated that predicted shadow flicker from the Proposed Development will be below the threshold of significance of 30 hours of flicker per year. As such, no mitigation for the Proposed Development is proposed.

4.6.21 However, should shadow flicker prove to be problematic in practice, the turbines can be fitted with a shadow stop system that can be programmed to automatically shut down when environmental conditions are conducive to shadow flicker at affected properties. This means that the turbine would be equipped with a light level sensor, which would be used to ensure the turbine shuts down during periods of sufficient light to generate shadow flicker. Shadow flicker impacts can be managed through a standard planning condition.

Landscape and Visual Considerations

4.6.22 Before examining the landscape and visual effects of the Proposed Development, paragraph e(ii) of NPF4 Policy 11 makes it clear and recognises that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. This is a very different starting point compared to the position in the former SPP and there is a very clear steer that significant effects are to be expected, and where localised and/or subject to appropriate design mitigation, they should generally be acceptable. The LVIA (as contained within Chapter 5 of the EIA Report) should be referred to for its detail, but summary points are referenced below.

Design Approach

4.6.23 Landscape and visual considerations have played a key role in the design process and have sought to reduce the effects of the Proposed Development. It is considered that appropriate "design mitigation" has been applied. This is explained, with reference to the design guidance that was identified for the proposal, in Chapter 2 (Site Description and Design Evolution) of the EIA Report.

Landscape Character

4.6.24 Landscape effects are concerned with how the Proposed Development would affect the elements that make up the landscape, the aesthetic and perceptual aspects of the landscape, and its distinctive character.

4.6.25 It is explained in the LVIA that significant effects on the character of landscapes and seascape would arise as follows:

- The host landscape character type 1 Steep Ridgeland and Mountains (major/moderate and adverse);
- The adjacent LCT4 Mountain Glens covering Holy Loch, 1.4 km north-east of the turbines (major and adverse); and
- The adjacent Seascape Character Area 3 Inner Firth of Clyde, which extends east along the Clyde from Holy Loch and Dunoon (major/moderate and adverse).
- These significant effects would arise as a result of the physical presence of the turbines within the Site and close views of the turbines such that they are a key feature of the landscape within the upland area south of Glen Lean, up to 5 km from the turbines, within Dunoon and Sandbank and areas up to 4 km from the turbines across Holy Loch to the north-east, and within the firth up to 6-7 km from the turbines.

4.6.26 Effects on the character of other landscape and seascape receptors would not be significant.

Designated Landscapes

4.6.27 There are designated landscapes within the LVIA study area such as National Scenic Areas ('NSA') National Park and Local Landscape Areas ('LLAs').

4.6.28 The Site is located outwith any landscape designations but has the potential to exert an influence on special landscape qualities (SLQs), mainly in relation to views in and out of the margins of designations.

4.6.29 Landscape designations are addressed in more detail with regard to NPF4 Policy 4 below however in summary the LVIA concludes that there would be no significant effects on designated landscapes.

Visual Effects

4.6.30 It is explained in the LVIA that 24 assessment viewpoints were selected to assess the effect of the Proposed Development on the visual amenity within the LVIA Study Area. These are representative of the key sensitive receptors in the LVIA Study Area.

4.6.31 The detailed viewpoint assessment within the LVIA addresses the viewpoints in respect of their baseline context and the residual effects arising from the operational phase of the Proposed Development.

4.6.32 It is explained in the LVIA that significant visual effects would arise for the following groups of visual receptors:

- Users of Core Paths within 2 km – which run through the forested slopes between the Site and the edge of Sandbank and from where there would be views of the turbines from felled areas (major/moderate and adverse);
- People living in and visiting Sandbank – which lies at the foot of the forested slopes to the east of the Site and would have open views from some streets (major and adverse);
- People living in and visiting Dunoon – which lies at the foot of the forested slopes to the east of the Site and would have open views from some streets and open spaces (major/moderate and Adverse);
- Users of local roads and Core Paths between Sandbank and Loch Eck – from where there would be some open views of the turbines from closer routes including the B836, with visibility decreasing further north due to tree cover (major/moderate and Adverse);
- Ferry passengers on the two routes between Gourock and Dunoon/Sandbank – who would see close views of the turbines on the skyline above Dunoon throughout their journey (major/moderate and adverse);
- People living in and visiting Kilmun – from where there would be open, close views of the turbines across Holy Loch, which is the main outlook from the village (major and adverse);
- People living in and visiting Strone – from where there would be open views of the turbines across Holy Loch, which is the main outlook from the village (major/moderate and adverse); and
- Recreational water users between Gourock, Kilcreggan and Dunoon and within Holy Loch – from where there would be close views of the turbines on the skyline above Dunoon and Sandbank.

4.6.33 The visual effects would be largely localised in spatial extent, with no significant effects beyond a distance of 11/12km.

Cumulative Effects

4.6.34 The cumulative assessment in the LVIA considers the effects on the landscape and visual resource based cumulative scenarios.

4.6.35 It states that other wind farm proposals within 30 km of the Site include Crosbie and Eredine wind farms which are located at a distance of 25 km or more, adjacent to operational and consented wind farms, and Vale of Leven wind farm 29 km to the east. The separation of these proposed wind farms from the Site and pattern of existing and consented development is such that the effects of the Proposed Development in cumulative development scenarios including these wind farms would be the same as described in the main LVIA.

4.6.36 Inverchaolain Wind Farm is at the EIA Scoping stage and located adjacent to the southeast of the Site. Cumulative effects with this potential development would be heavily influenced by the final design of Inverchaolain Wind Farm and have not been considered in detail within the assessment given the very early stage that it is at.

Night-Time Effects

4.6.37 It is explained in the LVIA that the coastal settlements around the Firth of Clyde are well lit and there are bright lights at the various port facilities, including noticeable red lights on the port cranes at Greenock. The area to the west of the Site is more rural and typically dark at night.

4.6.38 No significant effects would arise as a result of views of the three red aviation lights on the turbines. Mostly they would be seen as an addition to views which already include a wide variety of lights. The only areas where this is not the case would be briefly glimpsed views from the B836 as it passes through Glen Lean and the A815 as it passes alongside Loch Eck and around the head of Holy Loch.

Public Access

4.6.39 The LVIA has addressed visual amenity considerations in relation recreation routes with the consideration of viewpoints and visibility. Whilst there would be some visibility of the Proposed Development from some walking and recreational routes, these are not considered to be unacceptable.

Aviation, Radar and Defence Interests

4.6.40 The EIA Report addresses impacts to aviation, radar and defence matters in **Chapter 13** (Aviation) of the EIA Report. The assessment was undertaken in relation to the potential effects of the Proposed Development on existing and planned military and civil aviation activities, including those resulting from impacts to radar.

4.6.41 The assessment considers potential effects on the aviation and air defence activities of the Ministry of Defence ('MOD') as safeguarded by the Defence Infrastructure Organisation. It also considers the possible effects of wind turbines upon the National Air Traffic Services En Route Ltd ('NERL') communications, navigation, and surveillance systems which consist of a network of primary and secondary radars and navigation facilities around the country. Finally, it considers the possible effects on airport radars and any other aviation stakeholder interests.

4.6.42 The conclusions of the assessment are that the only aviation issues that will need to be addressed are those associated with radar visibility of some turbines from Glasgow Airport and the NERL radar at Lowther Hill.

4.6.43 Glasgow Airport has undertaken their own assessment of the potential effect on their Primary Surveillance Radar and the Terma radar and the Applicant is in discussions with them on the radar mitigation scheme to be applied. These parties have also undertaken an assessment of any effects of the Proposed Development on the safeguarding of the Instrument Flight Procedures and have confirmed that none will be affected. Discussions are on-going with NERL for a radar mitigation scheme for Lowther Hill which it is anticipated would be secured by way of a standard planning condition. In addition, it should be noted that the reduced turbine lighting scheme has been approved by the CAA.

Telecommunications & Broadcasting

4.6.44 A telecommunications assessment in relation to the Proposed Development was undertaken and is referenced in **Chapter 14** (Other Considerations) of the EIA Report. Through the impact assessment and subsequent consultation process, no telecommunication links were identified within, or in close proximity to the Site. Hence, no effects on the telecommunications network are anticipated as a result of the Proposed Development.

Impacts on Road Traffic and Trunk Roads

4.6.45 **Chapter 10** of the EIA Report addresses traffic and transport matters.

4.6.46 A review of the theoretical road capacity has been undertaken for the traffic and transport Study Area which shows that with the addition of construction traffic associated with the Proposed Development, there is significant capacity within the road network.

4.6.47 The Site would be accessed from the B836. Regular construction traffic, inclusive of Heavy Goods Vehicles ('HGVs'), would use the B836 to deliver the necessary turbine components to the Site. It is assumed that these components will be delivered to King George V Dock, Glasgow, and use the A82 to Tarbet, join the A815 and head southbound toward Dunoon towards Sandbank (north of Dunoon). Loads will then join the B836 and head westbound for approximately 2 km and join the Site access junction.

4.6.48 The assessment has conservatively assumed that all Proposed Development construction traffic uses all Study Area roads. During the construction phase HGV traffic levels are expected to increase more than 90% on sections of the A815, and 70% on the B836.

4.6.49 It is proposed that a Construction Traffic Management Plan ('CTMP') would be prepared for the Proposed Development. The CTMP would detail the measures required to manage vehicles traveling to and from the Site and would be updated through the planning and construction of the Proposed Development.

4.6.50 With the implementation of appropriate mitigation, the assessment concludes that there would be no significant residual effects in respect of traffic and transport. The residual effects are all assessed to be minor to negligible and would occur during the construction phase only: therefore, they would be temporary in nature.

Historic Environment

4.6.51 **Chapter 9** of the EIA Report addresses the archaeological and historic environment value of the Site and assesses the potential both for direct and setting effects on archaeological features and heritage assets resulting from the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. In summary, although significant adverse effects are predicted in relation to the setting of three Scheduled Monuments, there would not be adverse effects on the integrity of the setting of the assets..

4.6.52 Effects in relation to the historic environment are further examined below in terms of NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places).

Hydrology, the Water Environment and Flood Risk

4.6.53 **Chapter 8** of the EIA Report addresses the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on hydrological and peat interests. An assessment has been undertaken of the potential effects on geology (including soils and peat) and the water environment (hydrology and hydrogeology) during the construction, operation, and decommissioning phases of the Proposed Development.

4.6.54 It is explained that the fieldwork involved a comprehensive programme of peat depth probing, peat condition assessment, and a hydrological walkover survey. Designated sites and environmental receptors which were deemed to have hydrological connectivity within the Site were included within the assessment.

4.6.55 The assessment considered the sensitivity of environmental receptors identified during the baseline study and verified through fieldwork, alongside the embedded mitigation measures integrated into the project design. It was determined that there were five categories of sensitive receptor within the Study Area, these being: surface water features, the Cowal and Lomond groundwater unit, private water supplies ('PWS'), peat, and Ground water Dependent Terrestrial Ecosystems ('GWDTEs').

4.6.56 It is further explained that the final design layout was informed by a range of constraints with an emphasis placed on avoiding areas of deeper peat. Where technically feasible, areas of deep peat have been avoided. An Outline Peat Management Plan ('OPMP') (**Technical Appendix 8.1** of the EIA Report) has been prepared, confirming that soil disturbance is minimised as far as possible and that excavated soils can be effectively reused for on-site restoration.

4.6.57 The assessment concludes that subject to adoption of embedded mitigation, best practice construction techniques, and the additional mitigation, no significant effects are predicted during the construction of the Proposed Development in relation to hydrological interests, peat, or in relation to flood risk.

Biodiversity

4.6.58 **Chapter 6** of the EIA Report addresses potential effects on ecological interests associated with the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development. **Chapter 7** of the EIA Report assesses the potential significant effects on ornithological interests.

Ecology

4.6.59 It is explained in the assessment that in terms of the ecology baseline, desk studies undertaken to inform the assessment which identified several Ancient Woodland Inventory ('AWI') sites within the Site boundary, along the existing access tracks at the Balagowan Site entrance. The AWI stands are comprised of a mosaic of Ancient Woodland (of Semi-Natural Origin) and 'Other' Ancient Woodland (on Roy Maps). In addition to the AWIs, the Holy Loch Local Nature Reserve ('LNR') and Local Nature Conservation Site ('LNCS') is located 1.3 km to the north-east. It is explained that while the Holy Loch is located some distance from the Proposed Development, it is hydrologically connected to the Site via the Little Eachaig River and its unnamed tributaries. Furthermore, while other statutory and non-statutory designated sites were identified within the Study Area, none were considered to have structural or functional connectivity to the Site.

4.6.60 Field surveys identified habitats and vegetation communities typically associated with upland landscapes in the west of Scotland, including those associated with peatland and considered to be of ecological value. However, it is explained that historic and current land uses within the Site have affected the structure and function of these habitats and vegetation communities.

4.6.61 Field surveys also identified that the habitats on the Site had limited potential to support protected and notable species. However, no evidence of protected species was recorded, beyond incidental sightings of amphibians and reptiles. Bat surveys identified relatively low bat activity.

4.6.62 The overall conclusion of the ecological assessment was that no significant residual effects on ecological features are predicted. While no further mitigation is required, measures to ensure legal compliance, as it relates to protected species and protection of the water environment, would be captured in a Construction Environmental Management Plan ('CEMP') and an Outline CEMP is included within Appendix 3.1 of the EIA Report.

4.6.63 Proposed biodiversity enhancement measures within the proposed BES are further described below with regard to NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity).

Ornithology

4.6.64 It is explained in the assessment that based on a combination of field surveys and a desk study, the only identified species of nature conservation importance that required detailed consideration was golden eagle. All other species recorded were scoped out of the assessment due to a lack of potential for significant effects. The identified impact pathways acting on golden eagle were potential disturbance and habitat loss during construction (and decommissioning) and displacement during operation.

4.6.65 It is explained that when best practice measures were considered (primarily ensuring no disturbance to breeding golden eagle during construction via the proposed Bird Protection Plan) no significant effects were identified. Additional enhancement measures were however committed to in the form of:

- The BES which would seek to enhance foraging habitats for golden eagle;
- Annual monitoring of breeding eagles within 6 km of the Proposed Development, including breeding success; and

- Satellite tagging of one or both territory-holding golden eagle.

4.6.66 These measures would be secured by way of appropriately worded planning conditions.

Balancing the Contribution of a Development and Conclusions on Policy 11

4.6.67 Paragraph e (ii) of Policy 11 makes it clear and recognises that in terms of significant landscape and visual impacts, such impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. This is a very clear steer that significant effects are to be expected, and where localised and/or subject to appropriate design mitigation, they should generally be acceptable. The LVIA concludes that the significant landscape and visual impacts would be localised, and that appropriate design mitigation has been adopted.

4.6.68 In addition, the Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable in relation to all of Policy 11's environmental and technical topic criteria.

4.6.69 The second to last paragraph of **Paragraph e) of Policy 11** is expressly clear that in considering any identified impacts of renewable energy developments, significant weight must be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets. The "contributions" are inextricably related to the scale of a proposed development and policy recognises that any identified impacts must be assessed in the context of these contributions.

4.6.70 In terms of contribution to targets, the Proposed Development's contribution has been set out in Chapter 3 above.

4.7 NPF4 Policy 3: Biodiversity

Policy 3 & Principles

4.7.1 Policy 3 has an intent to protect biodiversity, reverse biodiversity loss, deliver positive effects from development and strengthen nature networks. Outcomes of the policy are that biodiversity is enhanced and better connected, including through strengthened nature networks and nature-based solutions.

4.7.2 In summary, there are no significant adverse effects arising in relation to biodiversity matters, nor in relation to nature conservation designations which NPF4 **Policies 3 and 4** (the latter in terms of designations – see below) respectively address.

4.7.3 **Policy 3** requires developments to, wherever feasible, provide nature-based solutions that have been integrated and made best use of and for significant biodiversity enhancements to be provided.

4.7.4 **Paragraph b)** states that:

"*Development proposals for national or major development or for development that requires an Environmental Impact Assessment will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks so they are in a demonstrably better state than without intervention. This will include future management. To inform this, best practice assessment methods should be used. Proposals within these categories will demonstrate how they have met all of the following criteria*."

4.7.5 The policy goes on to reference the need for an understanding of the existing characteristics of a site and states that an assessment of potential negative effects should be undertaken which should be fully mitigated in line with the mitigation hierarchy prior to identifying enhancements.

4.7.6 Paragraph b) iv) of the policy sets out a requirement that "*significant biodiversity enhancements are provided, in addition to any proposed mitigation. This should include nature networks, linking to and strengthening habitat connectivity within and beyond the development, secured*

within a reasonable timescale and with reasonable certainty. Management arrangements for their long-term retention and monitoring should be included, wherever appropriate."

4.7.7 Paragraph d) adds that "*any potential adverse impacts, including cumulative impacts, of development proposals on biodiversity, nature networks and the natural environment will be minimised through careful planning and design. This will take into account the need to reverse biodiversity loss, safeguard the ecosystem services the natural environment provides, and build resilience by enhancing nature networks and maximising the potential for restoration*".

Current Guidance Position

4.7.8 The **letter from the Chief Planner issued on 8 February 2023** refers to the application of Policy 3 where specific supporting guidance / parameters for assessment are not yet available to aid assessments.

4.7.9 NPF4 Policy 3 Biodiversity is specifically recognised as one such policy area where final guidance is not yet available. The Chief Planner's letter states:

"recognising that currently there is no single accepted methodology for calculating and / or measuring biodiversity 'enhancement' – we have commissioned research to explore options for developing a biodiversity metric or other tool, specifically for use in Scotland. There will be some proposals which will not give rise for opportunities to contribute to the enhancement of biodiversity, and it will be for the decision maker to take into account the policies in NPF4 as a whole, together with material considerations in each case". (underlining added)

4.7.10 Therefore, exactly how enhancement is to be measured in the longer-term is to be the subject of further guidance, but a timescale for the production of such guidance is at present unclear.

4.7.11 The Scottish Government published '**Draft Planning Guidance: Biodiversity**' in November 2023. Paragraph 1.1 states that it:

"*Sets out the Scottish Minister's expectations for implementing NPF4 policies which support the cross cutting NPF4 outcome 'improving biodiversity*."

4.7.12 The guidance refers to 'key terms' and with regard to 'enhancement', states at Paragraph 1.10:

"*The terms 'enhance' and 'enhancement' are widely used in NPF4. In order for biodiversity to be 'enhanced' it will need to be demonstrated that it will be in an overall better state than before intervention, and that this will be sustained in the future. Development proposals should clearly set out the type and scale of enhancements they will deliver*".

4.7.13 The guidance addresses development planning and, in terms of development proposals, references 'core principles.' At Paragraph 3.1 the guidance states that these principles can be followed when designing developments so that nature and nature recovery are an integral part of any proposal. Section 3.2 of the guidance states:

"*Applying these principles will not only help to secure biodiversity enhancements, they can also help to deliver wider policy objectives including for green and blue infrastructure, open space, nature based solutions, nature networks and 30 x 30. Development proposals which follow these steps are also much more likely to result in more pleasant and enriching places to live, work and spend time*."

4.7.14 The principles set out are as follows:

- Apply the mitigation hierarchy;
- Consider biodiversity from the outset;
- Provide synergies and connectivity for nature;
- Integrate nature to deliver multiple benefits;
- Prioritise on-site enhancement before off-site delivery;

- Take a place-based and inclusive approach;
- Ensure long term enhancement is secured; and
- Additionality (ensuring that enhancement delivered is additional to any measures which would have been likely to happen in the absence of the development).

4.7.15 These core principles have been applied as appropriate with regard to the Proposed Development.

4.7.16 Page 15 of the draft guidance makes specific reference to determining planning applications and, with regard to the policy context, Paragraph 4.1 makes it clear that NPF4 must be read and applied as a whole. Specific reference to NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity) Part 3 b) is made and at Section 4.6 key points in the guidance include the following:

- It is set out that NPF4 does not specify or require a particular assessment approach or methodology to be used, although the policy makes clear that best practice assessment methods should be utilised; and
- Assessments can be qualitative or quantitative (for example through use of a metric).

4.7.17 Section 4.12 of the guidance states:

"*In the meantime, the absence of a universally adopted Scottish methodology/tool should not be used to frustrate or delay decision making, and a flexible approach will be required. Wherever relevant and applicable, and as indicated above, information and evidence gathered for statutory and other assessment obligations, such as EIA, can be utilised to demonstrate those ways in which the policy tests set out in NPF4 have been met. Equally, where a developer wishes to use an established metric or tool, the planning submission should demonstrate how Scotland's habitats and environmental conditions have been taken into account. Where an established metric or tool has been modified, the changes made and the reasons for this should be clearly set out*".

4.7.18 Section 4.14 of the guidance states that it will be for the decision maker to determine whether the relevant policy criteria have been met, taking into account the circumstances of the particular proposal. The guidance adds:

"*NPF4 does not specify how much enhancement or 'net gain' should be delivered, though biodiversity should clearly be left in a 'demonstrably better state' than without intervention. Rather, the selection and design of enhancements will be a matter of judgement based on the circumstances of the individual case, taking into account a range of considerations*."

4.7.19 The guidance makes reference to the various considerations which are already set out in the NatureScot guidance issued in the Summer of 2023 with regard to NPF4 Policy 3 (as listed above).

4.7.20 The draft guidance also makes reference to off-site delivery of enhancement proposals and states at Paragraph 4.19 that:

"*Where the relevant policy tests cannot be met on site, off-site provision may be considered alongside on site. In these circumstances, off-site delivery should be as close as possible to the development site, with consideration being given firstly to the immediate landscape context and existing ecological value of the site*."

4.7.21 In early 2024 **NatureScot consulted on 'a Biodiversity Metric for Scotland's Planning System'**. The consultation ended on 10 May 2024. The consultation paper outlines work that NatureScot has been commissioned by the Scottish Government to develop; a biodiversity metric for Scotland's planning system, to support delivery of NPF4 policy 3(b).

4.7.22 This consultation paper does not propose solutions or reach conclusions on specific aspects of the Scottish biodiversity metric to be developed, as these are yet to be fully assessed. While work on developing a Scottish biodiversity metric is ongoing, NatureScot highlight the advice set out in the Scottish Government's draft Planning Guidance on Biodiversity, as referenced

above, namely that the absence of a universally adopted Scottish methodology / tool at the present time should not be used to frustrate or delay decision making

4.7.23 The commission's final outputs will include:

> a Scottish biodiversity planning metric tool (to be hosted on the NatureScot website), which is based on current understanding of science and evidence, clear and transparent in its workings, accessible and easy to use by relevant professionals with outputs understandable by decision makers, and which informs siting and design of development as well as evidence-based decision making;

> a user guide supporting the metric (together with any supporting information); and

> recommendations on any requirements for maintaining and updating the metric and supporting information.

The application of Policy 3

4.7.24 Notwithstanding the lack of policy guidance at the present time, in terms of environmental benefit, it can be concluded that there will be permanent biodiversity enhancement delivered through the Applicant's proposed enhancements to the natural habitat, offered as part of the Proposed Development.

4.7.25 The measures detailed within the BES aim to achieve significant biodiversity enhancement at the Site. The BES is contained in **Technical Appendix 6.5** of the EIA Report.

4.7.26 The finalisation of the BES (into an agreed Biodiversity Enhancement Plan ('BEP')) would be completed prior to commencement of development. The BEP would remain in place as agreed, subject to monitoring of effectiveness, for the remaining operational lifetime of the Proposed Development.

4.7.27 The measures will conserve, restore and enhance the habitats within the Site in a manner which would not be possible without intervention. This will allow a variety of interconnected benefits to be realised, including avoidance of greenhouse gas emissions, expansion of carbon sinks, enhancements in upland biodiversity and improvements to water quality, whilst also allowing continued use of the Site for timber production.

4.7.28 The final BEP will include a monitoring and review framework to track and report on the efficacy of management measures, allowing interventions to be guided by emerging evidence and specialist advice, and to ensure net benefits are realised over the lifetime of the Proposed Development.

4.7.29 The proposed measures are described in detail in the BES in relation to:

> Peatland restoration and enhancement;

> Ecological enhancement;

> Enhancement of habitat for bird species.

4.7.30 The BES outlines a multifaceted approach to enhancing biodiversity within the Site and has been designed to tie into the existing Sandbank Forest Long-Term Biodiversity Plan.

4.7.31 The areas dedicated to the proposed forest-to-bog restoration, would not only offset development impacts but importantly would contribute substantially to enhancing peatland habitat quality. It is explained in the BES that this measure will lead to improved carbon sequestration and the recovery of peatland flora.

4.7.32 Strategic riparian and native tree planting will provide benefits for various species typical of the upland setting by increasing food and shelter resources, as well as connectivity for wildlife across the Site. In addition, riparian tree planting will enhance habitats for fish by providing shaded pools, as well as improving resting opportunities for otter. Targeted management of tree encroachment onto areas of blanket bog, in combination with a grazing management regime, will further enhance and maintain habitat quality.

4.7.33 The inter-related effects described in the BES would create a more diverse and interconnected habitat mosaic. This increased structural diversity would benefit a wide range of species including, black grouse, raptors, otters, pine marten, red squirrel and bats. Overall, it is stated in the BES that this multifaceted approach would substantially enhance biodiversity across the Site, as well as increasing the Site's ecosystems' resilience to climate change and other environmental pressures.

4.7.34 Subject to the principles set out in the BES being taken into account when the detailed BEP is drafted and agreed post-consent, the proposals described in this BES offer opportunities for significant, interrelated environmental enhancements on the Site with respect to biodiversity, peat resource and forestry, which will accord with the requirements of NPF4 Policy 3.

4.7.35 An innovative element of the BES is that the Applicant has a partnership with UK charity Buglife – a conservation trust focusing on the protection and enhancement of invertebrates in the UK. Invertebrates are key to healthy ecosystems. From pollination, dispersing seeds, providing food for wildlife, recycling nutrients, and cleaning water, insects and pollinators play a critical role in life and ecosystems. Renewable energy projects can play a pivotal role in halting decline in species. The partnership between the Applicant and Buglife would allow bespoke habitat management measures to be incorporated into the final BEP, helping achieve sustainable populations of invertebrates locally and, in light of NPF4 Policy 3, support in delivering biodiversity enhancement within, and improving habitat connectivity through, the Site.

4.7.36 The enhancement proposals would result in the site, from a biodiversity perspective, being in a "*demonstrably better state*" than without intervention, consistent with the provisions of Policy 3.

4.7.37 It is important to keep in mind that the greatest threat to biodiversity is climate change. The principal and essential benefit of the Proposed Development is a significant contribution of renewable energy generation, to facilitate the earliest possible decarbonisation of the energy system and the achievement of net zero no later than 2045. A fundamental purpose of net zero is to protect biodiversity and the earlier it can be achieved, the greater the benefits will be to biodiversity.

4.8 NPF4 Policy 4: Natural Places

Policy 4 and Principles & Application

4.8.1 The policy has an intent to protect, restore and enhance natural assets making best use of nature-based solutions. Policy outcomes are stated as being natural places are protected and restored, and natural assets are managed in a sustainable way that maintains and grows their essential benefits and services.

4.8.2 **Policy 4, Paragraph a)** of the policy states that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment will not be supported.

4.8.3 **Policy 4 paragraph b)** refers to development proposals which are likely to have a significant effect on a European designated site and sets out in such circumstances the requirement for Appropriate Assessment.

4.8.4 **Policy 4**, **Paragraph c)** deals with national landscape designations and has a similar approach in relation to the former SPP in terms of how a proposal that affects a National Park, or a NSA should be addressed.

4.8.5 As set out in the LVIA, the Site is not subject to any landscape designation. However, there are national landscape designations present within the wider LVIA Study Area.

4.8.6 **Policy 4**, **Paragraph d)** deals with local landscape designations. Policy 4, Paragraph d) is as follows:

"*Development proposals that affect a site designated as …a local landscape area in the LDP will only be supported where:*

- *i Development will not have significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area or the qualities for which it has been identified; or*
- *ii Any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance*".

4.8.7 The policy follows a similar construct to that which deals with national level designations. The first limb of the policy refers to significant effects on the "*integrity*" of the area or "*the qualities for which it has been identified*".

4.8.8 The policy set out in the second limb of NPF4 Policy 4, Paragraph d) provides that development proposals that affect a site designated as a local landscape area will only be supported where any significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance. It must be noted that:

- this policy provision, reflects the wider NPF4 policy that adverse effects (including adverse landscape and visual effects outside of a National Park or NSA) must be balanced against the benefits of a proposed development;
- the second limb is independent of the first ("or") and is to be applied where a decision-maker concludes that a proposed development will have significant adverse effects on the integrity of a local designation;
- NPF4, Policy 4, Paragraph d) includes a balancing mechanism ("*clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits*") and sets out the threshold to be used ("*of at least local importance*").

4.8.9 **Paragraph e)** addresses the precautionary principle.

4.8.10 **Paragraph f)** sets out that "*development proposals that are likely to have an adverse effect on species protected by legislation will only be supported where the proposal meets the relevant statutory tests. If there is reasonable evidence to suggest that a protected species is present on a site or may be affected by a proposed development, steps must be taken to establish its presence. The level of protection required by legislation must be factored into the planning and design of development, and potential impacts must be fully considered prior to the determination of any application*".

4.8.11 **Paragraph g)** of the policy deals with Wild Land Areas ('WLA') and states that:

"*Development proposals in areas identified as wild land in the Nature Scot Wild Land Areas map will only be supported where the proposal:*

i. will support meeting renewable energy targets; or

ii. is for small scale development directly linked to a rural business or croft, or is required to support a fragile community in a rural area.

*All such proposals must be accompanied by a wild land impact assessment which sets out how design, siting, or other mitigation measures have been and will be used to minimise significant impacts on the qualities of the wild land, as well as any management and monitoring arrangements where appropriate. Buffer zones around wild land will not be applied, and effects of development outwith wild land areas will not be a significant consideratio*n."

Application of Policy 4

4.8.12 Designated sites relating to the nature conservation have been assessed above under Policy 11 and no significant effects are predicted.

4.8.13 It should also be noted that the EIA has also fully addressed the relationship of the Proposed Development with international and national designations. Furthermore, studies to identify potentially impacted species (including birds) were undertaken and detailed assessment of relevant species was also undertaken as necessary, as set out in the EIA Report.

4.8.14 In relation to landscape designations, as explained in the context of NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) there would be no significant effects on the SLQs of designated landscapes including the LLTNP or LLAs.

4.8.15 As explained in the LVIA, a detailed assessment of effects on the SLQs of the LLTNP was undertaken and it was concluded that there would be a number of relatively minor and localised effects would arise along the south-west boundary of the LLTNP from Strone to Kilmun and the accessible hillsides above these villages, and extend through the glen at the southern boundary closest to the Site and along Loch Eck as far as Dornoch Point. Considered together, these would give rise to impacts of only a small magnitude on qualities of between high and high/medium sensitivity and the effects would be moderate, adverse and not significant.

4.8.16 Non-significant effects are also identified on the Bute and South Cowal and West Renfrewshire Hills LLAs.

4.8.17 Given the above position, it is considered that the Proposed Development is in accordance with Policy 4.

4.9 NPF4 Policy 5: Soils

Policy 5 and Principles

4.9.1 The policy intent for Policy 5 is to protect carbon rich soils, restore peatlands and minimise disturbance to soils from development. This is very similar to the policy position that was in the former SPP; however, a key difference, as set out in **paragraph c(ii),** is that renewable energy proposals are one of the types of development expressly envisaged to be acceptable in principle on peatlands, reflecting the net benefits in carbon emissions reduction and peatland restoration potential which can be gained.

4.9.2 **Paragraph a)** states that "*development proposals will only be supported if they are designed and constructed:*

i. in accordance with the mitigation hierarchy by first avoiding and then minimising the amount of disturbance to soils on undeveloped land; and
ii. *in a manner that protects soil from damage, including from compaction and erosion, and that minimises soil sealing*."

4.9.3 **Paragraph d)** states: "*Where development on peatland, carbon rich soils or priority peatland habitat is proposed, a detailed site-specific assessment will be required to identify:*

i. the baseline depth, habitat condition, quality and stability of carbon rich soils;
ii. the likely effects of the development on peatland, including on soil disturbance; and
iii. the likely net effects of the development on climate emissions and loss of carbon.

This assessment should inform careful project design and ensure, in accordance with relevant guidance and the mitigation hierarchy, that adverse impacts are first avoided and then minimised through best practice. A Peat Management Plan will be required to demonstrate that this approach has been followed, alongside other appropriate plans required for restoring and/or enhancing the site into a functioning peatland system capable of achieving carbon sequestration."

The application of Policy 5

4.9.4 **Chapter 8** of the EIA Report assesses the potential impacts of the Proposed Development on geology, hydrology and peat. The outline Peat Management Plan ('OPMP') (**Technical Appendix 8.1** in the EIA Report) details proposed mitigations to reduce impacts on peat.

4.9.5 The scope of the assessment has included hydrological field surveys, peat depth surveys, peat landslide hazard risk assessment surveys, watercourse crossings, GWDTEs and PWS assessments.

4.9.6 Overall, the effects from the Proposed Development to the water and soil environment are assessed to be not significant. The Proposed Development has been designed to minimise impacts on peat resource, alongside the need to take into account other environmental effects and technical design constraints, but it has not been possible to avoid peat altogether. Construction techniques to reduce peat excavation, such as the use of floating tracks, are proposed where engineering requirements allow. Areas of unmodified peat, i.e. areas which have avoided the effects of afforestation, have been avoided by design and would remain undisturbed.

4.9.7 Standard good practice measures to be adopted would include the appointment of an ECoW to oversee the implementation of the ecological and hydrological best practice, and the implementation of the Peat Management Plan, including appropriate reuse of peat onsite to reinstate temporary infrastructure and concurrent translocation of peat for the restoration of peatland.

4.9.8 The assessment concludes that the overall significance of effect on soils would be not significant. The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy 5.

4.10 NPF4 Policy 6: Forestry, Woodland and Trees

Policy 6 and Principles

4.10.1 The policy intent is to protect and expand forests, woodland and trees. It states that development proposals that enhance, expand and improve woodland and tree cover will be supported.

4.10.2 **Paragraph b)** states that "*development proposals will not be supported where they will result in*:

"*i. Any loss of ancient woodlands, ancient and veteran trees, or adverse impact on their ecological condition;*

ii. Adverse impacts on native woodlands, hedgerow and individual trees of high biodiversity value, or identified for protection in the Forestry and Woodland Strategy;

iii. Fragmenting or severing woodland habitats, unless appropriate mitigation measures are identified and implemented in line with the mitigation hierarchy;

iv Conflict with Restocking Direction, Remedial Notice or Registered Notice to Comply issued by Scottish Forestry."

4.10.3 **Paragraph c)** states that:

"*Development proposals involving woodland removal will only be supported where they will achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits in accordance with relevant Scottish Government policy on woodland removal. Where woodland is removed, compensatory planting will most likely be expected to be delivered*".

The application of Policy 6

4.10.4 Forestry is addressed in **Chapter 12** of the EIA Report. It is explained in the assessment that the forests within the Site consist of two separate ownerships and management arrangements.

4.10.5 Permanent felling of 3.85 ha is required for the construction and operation of the Proposed Development. A further 21.68 ha would be felled to restore peatland as part of the BES proposals.

4.10.6 Within the permanent woodland, loss of 1.08 ha is within AWI (coniferous plantation). The calculated area to be taken forward for compensatory planting complying with the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal Policy includes a 10:1 multiplier for the disturbance to soils within the AWI.

4.10.7 The Applicant is committed to providing 13.57 ha of appropriate compensatory planting and is seeking locations both within and outwith the Site. The planting design would involve a detailed Planting Plan which would be provided to Scottish Forestry for approval.

4.10.8 A further 7.39 ha is to be felled as good forest management practice in anticipation of windblow which would be considered as temporary felling and which would be replanted in situ. Replanting within the AWI area would be with native broadleaved trees.

4.10.9 The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy 6.

4.11 NPF4 Policy 7: Historic Assets and Places

Policy 7 and Principles

4.11.1 The intent of the policy is to protect and enhance the historic environment, assets and places and to enable positive change. Key parts of the policy include the following:

- **Paragraph a)** states that "*development proposals with a potentially significant impact on historic assets or places will be accompanied by an assessment which is based on an understanding of the cultural significance of the historic asset and/or place. The assessment should identify the likely visual or physical impact of any proposals for change, including cumulative effects and provide a sound basis for managing the impact of change. Proposals should also be informed by national policy and guidance on managing change in the historic environment, and information held within Historic Environment Records*."
- **Paragraph c)** states that "…*development proposals affecting the setting of a Listed building should preserve its character, and its special architectural or historic interest*".
- **Paragraph d)** states that "*development proposals in or affecting Conservation Areas will only be supported where the character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its setting is preserved or enhanced. …*".
- **Paragraph h)** states that "*development proposals affecting Scheduled Monuments will only be supported where:*

  i) direct impact on the Scheduled Monument are avoided;
  ii) significant adverse impacts on the integrity of the setting of the Scheduled Monument are avoided; or
  iii) exceptional circumstances have been demonstrated to justify the impact on a Scheduled Monument and its setting and impact on the monument or its setting have been minimised.

- **Paragraph i)** states that "*development proposals affecting nationally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes will be supported where they protect, preserve or enhance their cultural significance, character and integrity and where proposals will not significantly impact on important views to, from and within the site or its setting*".
- **Paragraph o)** states that "*non designated historic environment assets, places and their setting should be protected and preserved in situ wherever feasible. Where there is potential for non-designated buried archaeological remains to exist below a site, developers will provide an evaluation of the archaeological resource at an early stage so that planning authorities can assess impact. Historic buildings may also have archaeological significance which is not understood and may require assessment.*".

The application of Policy 7

4.11.2 **Chapter 9** of the EIA Report addresses the presence of cultural heritage assets which may be affected by the Proposed Development. The assessment considers the archaeological and cultural heritage value of the Site and assesses the potential for significant effects on archaeological features and heritage assets, both within the Site and in the surrounding area, resulting from the construction, operation and decommissioning of the Proposed Development.

4.11.3 For the assessment, potential effects are characterised as either direct or indirect (physically altering archaeological remains), setting (by causing change within the setting of designated heritage assets) and/or cumulative (caused by the Proposed Development alongside other developments at application stage or consented).

4.11.4 It is explained in the assessment that the Proposed Development has the potential to impact upon hitherto unknown buried archaeological remains. A number of known heritage assets have been recorded in close proximity to the proposed infrastructure associated with the Proposed Development including four non-designated heritage assets (Assets 161, 162, 163 and 164) located within the alignment of the proposed access track.

4.11.5 Direct physical effects have been identified on these heritage assets; however mitigation proposals are set out. Given the proximity of the Proposed Development to other known heritage assets and the potential for hitherto unrecorded buried archaeological remains to survive, mitigation measures designed to avoid, minimise or offset impacts, have also been outlined in the EIA Report. It should be noted that no significant construction effects on known heritage assets are predicted.

4.11.6 This assessment has identified a medium potential for prehistoric, early-historic, medieval and post-medieval remains to survive within the Site, and a low potential for Roman and modern remains to survive within the Site. This assessment has identified that although there is a paucity of activity from any period within the higher grounds of the Site, there is a potential for remains to survive along the access track to the east and north-east facing slopes overlooking Holy Loch.

4.11.7 As such, it a recommendation in the EIA Report is that a watching brief should be undertaken on ground-breaking works within the extent of the access track and east-facing slopes of the Site to allow for the recording of any potential unknown buried remains. These mitigation works would offset any impacts by ensuring that any hitherto unknown remains could be identified, excavated and recorded and thus preserved by record.

4.11.8 It is explained in the assessment that significant operational effects on the settings of the Scheduled Monument Adam's Cave, cairn (Asset 1), the Scheduled Monument Dunoon Castle (Asset 4) and the Dunoon Conservation Area (Asset 24) are predicted.

4.11.9 Effects upon the setting of these heritage assets have been minimised insofar as possible through the design process. Whilst there would be moderate adverse effects, which are considered significant in EIA terms, upon the settings of these heritage assets, it is explained in the assessment that the key characteristics of setting would not be materially adversely affected; and importantly there would be no significant adverse impact upon the integrity of the heritage assets' settings.

4.11.10 In addition, significant cumulative setting effects are predicted upon the Scheduled Monument Dunoon Castle (Asset 4) and Dunoon Conservation Area (Asset 24). The assessment concludes that there would be no significant impact on the integrity of the Castle's setting and the overall character and appearance of the Conservation Area and its setting would be preserved.

4.11.11 The Proposed Development is considered to be in accordance with Policy 7.

4.12 NPF4 Policy 22 – Flood Risk and Water Management

4.12.1 The intent of Policy 22 is to strengthen resilience to flood risk by promoting avoidance as a first principle and reducing the vulnerability of existing and future development to flooding. **Paragraph c)** is the most relevant part of the policy for the Proposed Development, which states that development proposals should not increase the risk of surface water flooding to others, or itself be at risk. In addition, all rain and surface water should be managed through Sustainable Urban Drainage Systems ('SUDs').

Application of Policy 22

4.12.2 As set out above, effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk are an assessment criterion within NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) and are also covered in part by NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils). **Chapter 9** of the EIA Report addresses hydrology matters in detail including flood risk, sustainable drainage and private water supplies. There are no issues arising with regard to these topics subject to appropriate mitigation measures which are proposed. The Proposed Development is therefore considered to be in accordance with Policy 22.

4.13 Conclusions on NPF4 Appraisal

4.13.1 The Proposed Development is considered to be acceptable in relation to all of Policy 11's environmental and technical topic criteria and in relation to all other relevant NPF4 policies.

4.13.2 A key point within Policy 11 (Energy) is that any identified impacts must be weighed against a proposed development's specific contribution to meeting targets – which attracts significant positive weight in this case.

4.13.3 Significant weight is also afforded in relation to Policy 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises). This policy direction fundamentally alters the planning balance compared to the position that was set out in NPF3 and SPP.

4.13.4 The term "tackling" the respective crises in Policy 1 is also important – this means that decision makers should ensure an urgent and positive response to these issues and take positive action.

4.13.5 Significant adverse effects have been predicted only in relation to landscape and visual matters however these are considered to be localised in nature and appropriate design mitigation has been applied from the outset off the proposed development such that those effects which remained are considered acceptable.

4.13.6 Overall, the Proposed Development is considered to be one that would make a valuable contribution to the NPF4 Spatial Strategy and would help deliver a 'sustainable place'. Overall, it is considered that Proposed Development would accord with relevant policies of NPF4, and with NPF4 when read as a whole.

5. Appraisal against the Local Development Plan

5.1 Introduction

5.1.1 The other element of the statutory Development Plan covering the Site comprises the Argyll and Bute Local Development Plan 2 (the 'LDP') (adopted 2024).

5.1.2 The Argyll and Bute Landscape Wind Energy Capacity Study ('LWECS') is non statutory supplementary planning guidance.

5.1.3 The LDP was adopted after NPF4 came into force and it reflects the provisions of NPF4.

5.1.4 Relevant policies from the LDP are referenced below. This chapter does not present a detailed assessment of the Proposed Development as that has been covered in Chapter 4 above against the policy provisions of NPF4. An appraisal of relevant policies and consideration of areas of conflict or contradictions with NPF4 is provided.

5.2 LDP Policies

5.2.1 A summary of relevant LDP policies for the purposes of a comprehensive policy appraisal is set out below in **Table 5.1**.

Table 5.1: Relevant LDP Policies & Comment regarding NPF4

Policy	Policy Summary	Comment re NPF4
Policy 04 Sustainable Development	The policy states that in preparing new development proposals developers should seek to demonstrate a number of sustainable development principles which the planning authority will also use in deciding whether or not to grant planning permission. The principles relate to various matters including making efficient use of vacant and derelict land, maximising use of existing infrastructure, maximising opportunities for sustainable forms of design, avoiding use of locally important good quality agricultural land and conserving and enhancing the natural and built environment and avoiding significant adverse impacts on biodiversity, natural and heritage assets. The policy also requires there to be respect to landscape character of an area and avoiding locations with significant risk of flooding or ground instability. Furthermore, the policy requires avoidance of significant adverse impacts on land, air and the water environment.	No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 05 Design and Place Making	The policy states that to achieve good quality places proposals should endeavour to comply with a number of place making criteria. The criterion of relevance is that any proposed use should be compatible with surrounding land uses.	This policy has limited relevance. Design and place is covered by NPF4 Policy 12 (Design, quality and place).

Policy	Policy Summary	Comment re NPF4
		No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 08 Sustainable Siting	The policy states that a number of considerations will apply when assessing any proposal. The policy principally relates to conventional built development and relates to matters such as integrating development into the landscape, avoiding sloping sites, overshadowing and making best use of solar gain.	This policy has limited relevance. No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 15 Supporting the Protection, Conservation and Enhancement of our Historic Built Environment	The policy states that development proposals will not be acceptable where they fail to protect, preserve, conserve or enhance special characteristics and/or cultural significant of the historic built environment in terms of its location, scale, form, design or proposed use; or Avoid any cumulative effect upon the special characteristics and/or cultural significant of designated built environment sites.	This historic environment is covered by NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 16 Listed Buildings	The policy sets out the development management criteria in relation to development proposals that would affect a listed building, its curtilage or its wider setting.	Listed buildings are covered by NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 19 Scheduled Monuments	The policy states that there will be a presumption against development that does not retain, protect, conserve or enhance a Scheduled Monument and the integrity of its settings. Developments that have an adverse impact on Scheduled Monuments or their settings will not be permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances. New development on sites affecting the settings of Scheduled Monuments must respect their architectural, historic and other special qualities and conform to the national policies and guidance	Scheduled Monuments are covered by NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 20 Gardens and Designed Landscapes	The policy states that proposals affecting nationally important Gardens and Designed Landscapes (GDLs) will be supported where they protect, preserve or enhance their cultural significance, character and integrity and where proposals will not significantly impact upon important views to, from and within the site, or its setting. The policy adds that proposals should protect and preserve in situ regionally and locally important GDLs and their settings, wherever feasible.	GDLs are covered by NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.

Policy	Policy Summary	Comment re NPF4
Policy 21 Sites of Archaeological Importance	The policy states that there is a presumption in favour of retaining, protecting, conserving and enhancing the existing archaeological heritage and any future discoveries found in Argyll and Bute. Where a proposed development would affect a site of archaeological significance then a number of criteria apply.	Archaeological interests are covered by NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 30 The Sustainable Growth of Renewables	The policy states the Council will support renewable energy developments where these are consistent with the principles of sustainable development and it can be adequately demonstrated that there would be no unacceptable for environmental effects whether individual or cumulative on local communities, natural and historic environments, landscape character and visual amenity, and that the proposals would be compatible adjacent land uses. It states that applications for all wind turbine developments will be assessed against a range of criteria – reflecting those within NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy).	Energy developments are covered by NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 55 Flooding	The policy has a presumption against development on functional flood plains except in limited circumstances. The policy sets out detailed development management policy in relation to development proposals that would be at risk of flooding or in a flood risk area.	Flood risk is covered by NPF4 Policy 22 (Flood risk and water management). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 59 Water Quality and the Environment	The policy states that proposals for development that could affect the water environment will be assessed with regard to potential impact on water quality and quantity and ecological status, riperian habitats and wildlife, geomorphic processes and economic activity. The policy adds that the Council actively seek to protect natural watercourse features by preventing or avoiding development on sites where there would be an unavoidably detrimental impact upon a water course. It adds that developments that may have a significant detrimental impact on the water environment will not be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the impacts could be fully mitigated so as to ensure non-deterioration of water body status.	Water management matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 22 (Flood risk and water management). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 61 Sustainable Drainage Systems (SUDS)	The policy states that where appropriate developers should incorporate existing ponds, watercourses or wetlands as positive environment features in	Drainage matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 22 (Flood risk and water management).

Policy	Policy Summary	Comment re NPF4
	development schemes. Development proposals require to manage all rain and surface water through sustainable urban drainage systems which should form part of an integrate with proposed infrastructure.	No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 71 (Development Impact on Local Landscape Area (LLAs)	The policy states that the Council will resist developments in, or affecting, a LLA where its scale, location or design will have a significant adverse impact on the character of the landscape. All proposals in or affecting a LLA must demonstrate that: • Any significant adverse effects on the landscape quality for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, economic or environmental benefits of community wide importance; • The proposal is supported by a LVIA and has taken account of the content of any relevant Argyll and Bute Landscape Capacity Assessment; and • The location, scale, design, materials and landscaping would be of a high standard and would safeguard or enhance the special qualities and character of the Local Landscape Area.	NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural places) deals with local landscape designations. The policy does not state that proposals which result in a significant adverse impact on landscape character will be resisted. Whilst there are some differences in wording between Policy 71 and NPF4 Policy 4 they are not considered to be incompatible. There would not be a significant impact on the integrity of any LLA and in addition, the benefits of the Proposed Development are of national importance.
Policy 73 Development Impact on Habitats, Species and Biodiversity	The policy states that when considering all development proposals, the Council will give full consideration to legislation, policies and conservation objectives. The policy sets out requirements in relation to habitat and species surveys and states that proposals which are likely to have an adverse effect on protected species and habitats will only be permitted where it can be justified in accordance with the relevant protected species legislation.	Habitats, species and biodiversity matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity) and Policy 4 (Natural places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 74 Development Impact on Sites of International Importance	The policy relates to development proposals likely to have a significant adverse effect upon an existing or proposed Special Protection Area, existing or candidate Special Area of Conservation or Ramsar site.	Sites of international importance are covered by NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 75 Development Impact on Sites of Special Scientific	The policy states that development that would affect a SSSI or NNR will only be permitted where certain criteria are satisfied.	SSSIs are covered by NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural places).

Policy	Policy Summary	Comment re NPF4
Interest (SSSIs) and National Nature Reserves		No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 76 Development Impact on Local Nature Conservation Sites (LNCS)	The policy states that development that would have a significant adverse effect on the integrity of a local nature conservation site will not be supported unless a number of conditions can be satisfactorily demonstrated, namely that such adverse effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of community-wide importance arising from the proposal and that the Council was satisfied that mitigation measures have been incorporated to minimise the adverse effects on the interests of the site.	LNCS are covered by NPF4 Policy 4 (Natural places). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 77 Forestry, Woodland and Trees	The policy states that there is a strong presumption in favour of protecting woodland resources. It adds that removal of woodland resources will only be permitted where it would achieve significant and clearly defined additional public benefits. These benefits are to be secured by attaching a planning condition or by requiring a developer to enter into a planning obligation.	Forestry and woodland matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 78 Woodland Removal	The policy states that proposals that would involve the removal of woodland resources will be assessed against the criteria for determining the acceptability of woodland removal as explained in Annex C of the Scottish Government's Control of Woodland Removal policy.	Woodland removal matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 6 (Forestry, woodland and trees). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.
Policy 79 Protection of Soil and Peat Resources	The policy states that the Council will only support development where appropriate measures are taken to maintain soil resources and functions to an extent that is considered relevant and proportionate to the scale of development proposed. Development that would potentially have a significant adverse effect on soil resources and functions or peat structure and function in terms of disturbance, degradation or erosion will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that such adverse effects are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of community-wide importance and a Soil or Peatland Management Plan is submitted that demonstrates how unnecessary disturbance, degradation or erosion of peat and soils will be avoided and how impacts are to be mitigated. Furthermore,	Soil and peat matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.

Policy	Policy Summary	Comment re NPF4
	evidence of the adoption of best practice in the movement of, storage, management, re-use and re-instatement of soils must be submitted along with any planning application.	
Policy 80 Geodiversity	The policy states the Council will consider geodiversity impact when assessing proposals. Development that would have a significant adverse effect on non-designated geological conservation review sites or local geodiversity sites will not be supported unless it can be demonstrated that adverse effects are clearly outweighed by benefits of community-wide importance and that appropriate mitigation measures have been incorporated to minimise adverse effects on the interests of the site.	Geodiversity matters are covered by NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils). No conflict or contradiction with NPF4.

5.2.2 As noted, this Chapter does not present a detailed assessment of the Proposed Development against the provisions of the above LDP policies as that has been covered in Chapter 4 above against the policy provisions of NPF4.

5.2.3 In this case LDP prevails in the event of any incompatibility with NPF4. Whilst Policy 71 is worded differently to NPF4 Policy 4 it is not considered to be contradictory or in conflict such that the policies are incompatible (and were not found to be so by the Reporter in the LDP Examination process or by the Scottish Ministers before the adoption of the LDP).

5.2.4 For the reasons set out in Chapter 4 in the context of the NPF4 policy appraisal, it is considered that as per the findings of the EIA Report, the Proposed Development is considered to accord with the relevant LDP policies.

5.3 Landscape Wind Energy Capacity Study

5.3.1 The Argyll and Bute Landscape Wind Energy Capacity Study (2017) assesses the sensitivity of landscape character types to different sizes of wind turbine development. The aim of the study is to inform strategic planning for wind energy development and to provide high level guidance to be used when considering specific development proposals. The study was originally undertaken in 2012 and was updated in 2017. The Main Study Report provides details of the background and methodology of the study, a description of the baseline landscape character, and summary sensitivity assessments for each landscape character type. The Appendix Report provides detailed sensitivity assessments for each of the landscape character types.

5.4 Conclusions on the LDP

5.4.1 The environmental and topic considerations within the LDP policies are encompassed within the broad remit of NPF4 Policy 11 Paragraph e). Each of the relevant development management considerations have been addressed above (Chapter 4) in the context of NPF4 policies are not repeated.

5.4.2 It is considered that the effects arising from the Proposed Development would be acceptable in terms of the relevant policy topics of the LDP2.

6. Conclusions

6.1 The Climate Crisis & Renewable Energy Policy Framework

6.1.1 The urgent need for onshore wind energy generation has been set out: a large increase in the deployment of this renewable energy technology is supported through a number of policy documents and by Scottish Government commitments – most recently expressed in the OWPS and in NPF4.

6.1.2 Onshore wind energy generation was already viewed and described as "vital" to the attainment of targets in 2017. This imperative has only increased since a 'climate emergency' was declared by the Scottish First Minister in April 2019, in line with the recommendations made by the CCC (2019) 'net zero' publication[14]. Furthermore, the drive to attain net zero emissions is now legally binding at the UK and Scottish Government levels by way of amendments to the 2008 Act, and in Scotland through the provisions of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 and the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019.

6.1.3 Achieving net zero is a legal requirement, and the Scottish Government has recognised, most recently in the OWPS, that a very substantial quantity of onshore wind energy generation is required to meet the onshore wind energy target requirement by 2030 – namely a minimum of 20 GW of operational capacity. Deployment of more onshore wind energy is described as being "*mission critical for meeting our climate targets*" in the OWPS.

6.1.4 The important benefits of the Proposed Development have been set out in the context of the current climate emergency and would help address the issue of tackling climate change, meeting very challenging net zero targets, and would contribute to improving security of supply.

6.2 The Planning Balance

6.2.1 In NPF4 there is a clear recognition that climate change must become a primary guiding principle for all plans and decisions. Significant weight is to be given to the climate emergency and the contribution of individual developments to tackling climate change.

6.2.2 The revised OWPS was published in December 2022. NPF4 came into force on 13 February 2023. Both are up to date statements of Scottish Government policy, directly applicable to determination of this Section 36 application. Both should be afforded very considerable weight in decision-making.

6.2.3 NPF4 and the OWPS are unambiguous as regards the policy imperative to combat climate change, the crucial role of further onshore wind energy generation in doing so, and the scale and urgency of onshore wind energy deployment required. As described in this Planning Statement:

- The global climate emergency and the nature crisis are the foundations for the NPF4 Spatial Strategy as a whole. The twin global climate and nature crises are "*at the heart of our vision for a future Scotland*" so that "*the decisions we make today will be in the long-term interest of our country*"[15]. The policy position, and the priority afforded to combatting the climate emergency, is different to that which was set out in the former NPF3 and SPP;
- NPF4 Policy 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises) directs decision-makers to give significant weight to the global climate emergency in all decisions. This is a radical departure from the usual approach to policy and weight and clearly denotes a step change in planning policy response to climate change. The matter of weight is no longer left entirely to the discretion of the decision maker; and

[14] CCC, Net Zero, The UK's contribution to stopping global warming (May, 2019).
[15] NPF4, page 2.

- Both NPF4 and the OWPS are clear that further onshore wind energy development, of scale and utilising modern, larger turbines, has a crucial role in combatting climate change, transitioning to a net zero Scotland and ensuring security of energy supply. NPF4 Policy 11 (Energy) strongly supports proposals for all forms of renewable, low-carbon and zero emissions energy technologies, including onshore wind farms.

6.2.4 It is important to fully recognise both the scale and urgency of the challenge set out in these documents, and the required response from decision-makers. NPF4 is clear that significant progress must be made by 2030 requiring, as set out in the OWPS, that "*we must now go further and faster than before. We expect the next decade to see a substantial increase in demand for electricity to support net zero delivery across all sectors, including heat, transport and industrial processes*"[16].

6.2.5 Publication of the OWPS followed and cross-refers to NPF4 and, for the first time, sets an onshore wind energy generation target: a Scottish Government ambition for a minimum of 20 GW of installed onshore wind energy capacity by 2030. New policy therefore supports an increase in the installed capacity of onshore wind energy generation in Scotland by a minimum amount equivalent to about 130% of the entire installed capacity of all current operational onshore wind farms in Scotland in a period of around five years. This is also embedded in the Scottish Government's consultative draft Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, together with the commitment to "***place the climate and nature at the centre of our planning system***"[17] (original emphasis) in line with the NPF4.

6.2.6 By any measure, the identified need for delivery of this additional capacity is a massive challenge requiring an urgent and positive response. As noted above, unless projects are in the planning system now, there is a high likelihood that they will not contribute to this ambition before 2030. The 'window' until the key date of 2045 for Net Zero is also getting narrower.

6.2.7 As the Statement of Need for Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure explains[18] "*A large and rapid increase in electricity generation from renewable sources will be essential for Scotland to meet its net zero emissions targets*."

6.2.8 The Statement of Need relates to the attainment of Government renewable energy generation and emission reduction targets. Moreover, it relates to the importance of developing electricity supplies which are not dependent on volatile international markets and are located within the UK's national boundaries. The urgency for an electricity system which is self-reliant and not reliant on fossil fuels is now enormous, in order to protect consumers from high and volatile energy prices.

6.2.9 Other policy support for development of wind farms is found in NPF4 and the OWPS:

- In addition to the cross-cutting NPF4 Policy 1 (Tackling the climate and nature crises), NPF Policy 11 (Energy) directs that in considering the identified impacts of an onshore wind proposal significant weight will be placed on the contribution of the proposal to renewable energy generation targets and on greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.
- The OWPS expressly recognises that meeting the ambition of a minimum installed capacity of 20 GW of onshore wind in Scotland by 2030 will require taller and more efficient turbines and that "*this will change the landscape.*
- NPF4 Policy 11 confirms that significant landscape and visual impacts are to be expected for some forms of renewable energy. NPF4, which forms part of the Development Plan, is clear that where such impacts are localised and / or appropriate design mitigation has been applied, they will generally be considered to be acceptable. Notably, policy recognises that

[16] OWPS 2022, paragraph 1.1.2.
[17] Energy Strategy and Just Transition Plan, page 55.
[18] NPF4, page 103.

significant landscape and visual effects are inevitable and generally acceptable. As explained the significant landscape and visual effects that would arise would be largely localised.

- NPF4 Policy 11 provides in principle support for wind farm development in all locations with the exception of National Parks and NSAs.
- NPF4, Policy 4, Part d) specifically relates to a proposed development that may adversely affect the integrity of a local landscape designation. It provides that development will be supported where significant adverse effects on the integrity of the area are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of at least local importance. As discussed, there would be no adverse impacts on the SLQs or integrity of the LLTNP or any LLA.
- In terms of cultural heritage matters, NPF4 Policy 7 (Historic assets and places) makes it clear that development affecting Scheduled Monuments will be supported if significant effects on the integrity of the setting of a monument are avoided. As discussed, whilst there would be significant effects in relation to the setting of two Scheduled Monuments, however there would not be a significant impact on the integrity of setting of the assets.
- In relation to biodiversity matters, NPF4 Policy 3 (Biodiversity) requires that for national and EIA development, that significant biodiversity enhancements be provided. The Applicant has proposed such measures as set out in the BES.
- In relation to NPF4 Policy 5 (Soils) the policy framework supports development proposals on peatland and carbon rich soil where they relate to the generation of energy from renewable sources. Such development requires to be subject to a site-specific assessment which has been undertaken in this case for the Proposed Development. As explained, the siting and design approach has sought to minimise adverse impacts on peatland and carbon rich soils.

6.2.10 The Applicant has gone to considerable lengths to ensure a satisfactory layout, design and composition for the Proposed Development. In short, appropriate design mitigation has been applied. Potentially significant adverse landscape and visual effects resulting from the Proposed Development have been addressed through an iterative design process (i.e. 'mitigation by design') and a well-considered proposal has been established, which has acceptable effects.

6.2.11 NPF4 and the OWPS require that the decision-maker must identify and weigh the adverse effects of a proposed development. However, increased weight is to be given to the benefits of a development in the planning balance owing to the seriousness and importance of energy policy related considerations and the contribution of the Proposed Development to meeting climate change targets.

6.2.12 It is considered that this approach is very clearly reflected and articulated in NPF4 and the OWPS (subject to Scottish Government policy now expressly stating that significant weight will be given to the global climate and nature crises and a proposed development's contribution towards meeting targets). Moreover, Section 3.6 of the OWPS states that the criteria for assessing proposals (in NPF4) have been updated "*including **stronger weight** being afforded to the contribution of the development to the climate emergency*".

6.2.13 In this case, the Proposed Development is National Development and essential infrastructure which will help to deliver the National Spatial Strategy set out in NPF4. The Proposed Development would make a valuable contribution to help Scotland, and the UK attain net zero, security of supply and related socio-economic objectives. Significant weight should be given to this contribution when weighing the need for the Proposed Development and its limited effects within the planning balance.

6.2.14 The effects of the Proposed Development, including how relevant effects listed in NPF4 Policy 11 Paragraph (e) have been addressed, are detailed in the supporting information to the application. In terms of Policy 11, in considering the identified impacts of the Proposed Development, significant weight must be placed on its nationally important contribution to renewable energy generation and greenhouse gas emissions reduction targets.

6.3 Overall Conclusion

6.3.1 The policy set out in NPF4 and the OWPS requires a rebalancing of the consenting of onshore wind developments in response to the challenges of tackling the climate and nature crises. Having regard to the weight to be ascribed to the important benefits of the Proposed Development, it is considered that the benefits that would result clearly outweigh its adverse effects.

6.3.2 The up-to-date policy set out in NPF4 and the OWPS and the policy being consulted upon in the draft Energy Strategy provide strong and increased support for the grant of consent.

6.3.3 The conclusion is that the Proposed Development would be consistent with all relevant policies of the Development Plan - comprising NPF4 and the LDP - and with the Development Plan when read as a whole.

David Bell Planning Ltd
26 Alva Street
Edinburgh
EH2 4PY

dbplanning.co.uk