

highland-wide

LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN

AM PLANA LEASACHAIDH
air feadh na Gàidhealtachd



april
an giblean 2012

22. Sustainable Development and Climate Change Leasachadh Seasmhach agus Atharrachadh Aimsir

22.1 Renewable Energy Developments

- 22.1.1 The Highland area has great potential for renewable energy production and to contribute towards meeting ambitious targets set internationally, nationally and regionally. This is recognised in the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy (2006) and can bring benefits in terms of tackling climate change, increasing energy security and contributing to the local and regional economies of the Highlands. Onshore wind and hydro electric power are already making substantial contributions and are being joined by other technologies such as biomass, energy from waste, landfill gas and the marine renewables including offshore wind, wave and tidal. There is increasing interest in smaller scale developments of renewables, including both community and commercial ventures, and interest by communities in taking a share of large schemes. There is also the opportunity for greater use of micro-generation of renewable energy, to serve individual buildings or small groups.
- 22.1.2 Additional electricity transmission and distribution infrastructure will need to be developed in Highland in order to realise the region's potential contribution to renewable electricity generation, contributing to national requirements and in order to serve local needs. It is a national priority that the electricity network heading both south and east is improved to take advantage of the renewables potential. There will be requirements for both onshore and offshore transmission infrastructure. The vision set out in National Planning Framework for Scotland 2 for a sub-sea electricity network is supported by the Council. Certain grid reinforcement projects have been identified by the Scottish Government in the National Planning Framework 2 as being national developments. Such designation includes overhead transmission lines, underground and sub-sea cable routes and associated converter stations and substations. Identification as such in the Framework is the mechanism for establishing the need for these developments in Scotland's national interest. As developments of national importance, the Scottish Government expects their design to be of a high quality and rigorous consultation and assessment will be required for proposals. National Planning Framework 2 identifies the matters to be addressed when consent for these projects is sought. The national developments for grid reinforcement that are within or potentially linking with Highland include:
- upgrading the existing Beaulieu – Dounreay overhead transmission line;
 - reinforcement of the Beaulieu – Keith overhead transmission line;
 - reinforcement of the sub-sea cable link between Orkney and the Scottish mainland;
 - new sub-sea cable links for the Outer Hebrides and the Shetland Islands.
- 22.1.3 The Highland Renewable Energy Strategy & Planning Guidelines (2006) provides supplementary planning guidance for a wide range of technologies. The Renewable Energy Resource Assessment on which it is based provides valuable information to prospective developers about a wide range of opportunities and constraints which can help to inform their site selection and formulation of proposals. Parts of the non-statutory Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines 2006 document relating to onshore wind energy are not compliant with national policy (notably those relating to a sequential approach). They will be superseded by the forthcoming Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance, which will have

statutory status. That Supplementary Guidance will include a spatial framework for windfarm development in Highland, together with other guidance for developers.

- 22.1.4 As part of more sustainable development of the Highlands our waste will be seen as a potential resource and, as part of a strategy which will see waste reduction and increased recycling, it will provide a source of energy and heat production. The Plan's Waste Management policies provide for this, whilst the Highland Heat Map will assist in identifying opportunities for the consideration of renewable heat through the Sustainable Design policy. In considering proposals for Energy from Waste facilities, the planning authority will have regard to SEPA's "Thermal Treatment of Waste Guidelines" (2009), which is part of the national waste management plan.
- 22.1.5 The relative significance of any particular consideration listed in Policy 67 in the decision-making process may vary with and depend upon the type and scale of scheme proposed, and the appropriate weight to be applied will be determined having regard to the circumstances of the particular proposal and with reference to the development plan as a whole and any material considerations.
- 22.1.6 In respect of "community" renewable energy developments which qualify for consideration under Policy 68, the extent of the relevant "community" will be assessed on a case by case basis, and could vary accordingly. For example, the relevant area may be a community council area, or the area which would benefit from a particular community venture or from the community share in a larger project. With respect to the potential relaxation of amenity requirements provided for by the policy, it is anticipated that this will apply primarily (but not necessarily solely) to local visual and landscape character amenity. In order to apply the relaxation, evidence will be required by the planning authority of a reasonable degree of local support for the proposal and that all potentially affected persons have been given the opportunity to object.

22.1.7 The Highland Council's Position on Renewable Energy Developments and 'Community Benefit'

- 22.1.8 The relative significance of any particular consideration listed in Policy 67 in the decision-making process may vary with and depend upon the type and scale of scheme proposed, and the appropriate weight to be applied will be determined having regard to the circumstances of the particular proposal and with reference to the development plan as a whole and any material considerations.
- 22.1.9 The Council will expect developments to benefit the local community and contribute to the wellbeing of the Highlands, whilst recognising wider national interests. The Council will seek to enter into agreements with developers as appropriate on behalf of local communities for environmental and socio-economic purposes. "Community benefit" arrangements which do not meet the tests set out in Circular 1/2010: Planning Agreements will not be taken into account in the development management process. However, anticipated socio-economic impacts that are related to the nature and scale of the renewable energy development itself will be a material consideration in the assessment or determination of the application. This information may be presented in any Environmental Statement prepared in respect of the development.

Policy 67 Renewable Energy Developments

Renewable energy development proposals should be well related to the source of the primary renewable resources that are needed for their operation. The Council will also consider:

- the contribution of the proposed development towards meeting renewable energy generation targets; and
- any positive or negative effects it is likely to have on the local and national economy;

and will assess proposals against other policies of the development plan, the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy and Planning Guidelines and have regard to any other material considerations, including proposals able to demonstrate significant benefits including by making effective use of existing and proposed infrastructure or facilities.

Subject to balancing with these considerations and taking into account any mitigation measures to be included, the Council will support proposals where it is satisfied that they are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental overall, either individually or cumulatively with other developments (see Glossary), having regard in particular to any significant effects on the following:

- natural, built and cultural heritage features;
- species and habitats;
- visual impact and impact on the landscape character of the surrounding area (the design and location of the proposal should reflect the scale and character of the landscape and seek to minimise landscape and visual impact, subject to any other considerations);
- amenity at sensitive locations, including residential properties, work places and recognised visitor sites (in or outwith a settlement boundary);
- the safety and amenity of any regularly occupied buildings and the grounds that they occupy- having regard to visual intrusion or the likely effect of noise generation and, in the case of wind energy proposals, ice throw in winter conditions, shadow flicker or shadow throw;
- ground water, surface water (including water supply), aquatic ecosystems and fisheries;
- the safe use of airport, defence or emergency service operations, including flight activity, navigation and surveillance systems and associated infrastructure, or on aircraft flight paths or MoD low-flying areas;
- other communications installations or the quality of radio or TV reception;
- the amenity of users of any Core Path or other established public access for walking, cycling or horse riding;
- tourism and recreation interests;
- land and water based traffic and transport interests.

Proposals for the extension of existing renewable energy facilities will be assessed against the same criteria and material considerations as apply to proposals for new facilities.

In all cases, if consent is granted, the Council will approve appropriate conditions (along with a legal agreement/obligation under section 75 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997, as amended, where necessary), relating to the removal of the development and associated equipment and to the restoration of the site, whenever the consent expires, other than in circumstances where fresh consent has been secured to extend the life of the project, or the project ceases to operate for a specific period.

The Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance will replace parts of the Highland Renewable Energy Strategy. It will identify: areas to be afforded protection from windfarms; other areas with constraints; and broad areas of search for windfarms. It will set out criteria for the consideration of proposals. It will ensure that developers are aware of the key constraints to such development and encourage them to take those constraints into account at the outset of the preparation of proposals. It will seek to steer proposals, especially those for larger windfarms, away from the most constrained areas and ideally towards the least constrained areas and areas of particular opportunity. It will also set out criteria which will apply to the consideration of proposals irrespective of size and where they are located, enabling proposals to be considered on their merits. It will seek submission as part of the planning application of key information required for the assessment of proposals and provide certainty for all concerned about how applications will be considered by the Council.

22.3

Policy 68 "Community" Renewable Energy Developments

22.3.1

The Council's initial assessment of renewable energy proposals will apply the same tests of acceptability for a community project as it would to a commercial proposal. However, where a community wishes to develop a small project solely as a community venture, or takes a share in a larger project, then where it is the only community significantly impacted by the proposal the Council will regard this as a material consideration. In such circumstances and subject to the proposals being assessed as acceptable under other relevant policies of the Plan, the Council may grant consent for renewable energy development with greater impacts upon the amenity of that community's area as a place in which people reside or work than would normally be the case.

22.4

Policy 69 Electricity Transmission Infrastructure

22.4.1

Proposals for overground, underground or sub-sea electricity transmission infrastructure (including lines and cables, pylons/ poles and vaults, transformers, switches and other plant) will be considered having regard to their level of strategic significance in transmitting electricity from areas of generation to areas of consumption. Subject to balancing with this consideration, and taking into account any proposed mitigation measures, the Council will support proposals which are assessed as not having an unacceptable significant impact on the environment, including natural, built and cultural heritage features. In locations that are sensitive, mitigation may help to address concerns and should be considered as part of the preparation of proposals. This may include, where appropriate, underground or sub-sea alternatives to overground route proposals. Where new infrastructure provision will result in existing infrastructure becoming redundant, the Council will seek the removal of the redundant infrastructure as a requirement of the development.