ARGYLL AND BUTE COUNCIL **EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE**

DEVELOPMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES **19 April 2012**

ARGYLL AND BUTE LANDSCAPE WIND ENERGY CAPACITY STUDY

1 SUMMARY

1.1 The Council together with Scottish Natural Heritage have commissioned Consultant Landscape Architects to prepare an Argyll and Bute Landscape Wind Energy Capacity Study. The study provides technical information which will be used to help develop the windfarm/wind turbine policies and associated spatial framework in the proposed Local Development Plan (LDP). In addition the study provides new guidance on the siting of smaller scale (up to 50 metre) turbines throughout Argyll and Bute. An executive summary of the study is attached as Appendix A.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That the Council adopts the Argyll and Bute Landscape Wind Energy Capacity Study as a technical background document.

2.2 That the aforementioned study be used to help inform decision making in relation to planning applications submitted for wind energy proposals; and also inform the development of new policy contained in the proposed Local Development Plan including spatial guidance for on shore Wind energy developments.

2.3 That it should be noted that any new policy in relation to wind energy be subject to further Council approval and extensive consultation as part of the Local Development Plan process.

2.4 That approval be given to hold a workshop after the May elections to help introduce the study to a wide range of stakeholders including potential developers, landowners and community representatives.

3 BACKGROUND

3.1 Scottish Planning Policy requires Local Development Plans to include a spatial framework of wind energy developments over 20 megawatts, as well as give consideration as to how developments of less than this will be assessed against development plan policy. The SPP and associated Scottish Government Advice Notes requires consideration to be given to landscape and cumulative impacts as part of this process.

3.2 This study considers the sensitivity of landscape character types on the mainland of Argyll and Bute in relation to wind turbines up to 130m height. The sensitivity of larger islands and National Scenic Areas (NSAs) within Argyll and Bute has also been assessed for wind turbines up to 50m height. The assessment considers key sensitivities related to landscape character, visual amenity and on the value placed on the landscape in the form of scenic designations and other recognised interests. The NSAs are assessed on the basis of their identified Special Qualities. The sensitivity assessment considers potential cumulative issues associated with existing and consented wind farm developments.

3.3 The aim of this study is to identify landscape and visual sensitivities at a Council wide scale for use in the consideration and determination of further proposals for wind farm developments in Argyll and Bute. It is important to stress that this capacity study considers only landscape and visual issues, a range of other environmental and technical issues will also require to be considered in order to draw up a spatial framework and Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) for wind farm development.

3.4 The study has involved adopting a systematic approach to the consideration of landscape, the key tasks of which included:

- Identifying existing, consented and proposed windfarm developments
- Review of existing landscape character studies and definition of landscape character types to be used in the assessement.
- Defining the landscape and visual sensitivity criteria to be used.
- Defining landscape values such as designations and other recognised landscape and visual interests to be used in the study.
- Fieldwork to assess the sensitivities
- Providing guidance on siting of smaller turbines, as well as generic guidance on siting and design of wind energy developments.
- Providing an overview of landscape and visual sensitivities across the region and recommendations on strategic landscape and visual considerations

3.5 The capacity study has principally been based on the landscape characterisation work set out in the Landscape assessment of Argyll and the Firth of Clyde (1996) undertaken by Environmental Resources Management for SNH. Review of this study was undertaken in the field and some revisions were made to landscape character types and their classification for the purposes of this capacity study. Separate sensitivity assessments have been undertaken for the National Scenic Areas (NSAs) lying wholly within Argyll and Bute.

3.6 Five scales of wind turbine developments have been considered; large scale (80 to 130 metres high to blade tip), Medium (between 50 and 80 metres), Small – medium (35 to 50 metres) and Small where blade tip is between 20 and 35 metres high. The sensitivity of the various landscapes, to the different scales of wind turbine developments was scored on a five point scale of High,

High-medium, Medium, Medium-low and Low against landscape, visual amenity and landscape values categories. An overall judgement of sensitivity for each landscape character type/NSA was then reached following consideration of landscape, visual and values ratings.

3.7 It is evident that the existing pattern of larger scale commercial windfarm development in Argyll and Bute is mainly found in the more extensive and less settled upland landscape character types of the 'Upland Forest Moor Mosaic' (6) and the 'Craggy Upland' (7), and to fairly limited sites within the 'Steep Ridgeland and Mountains' (1) character type and the 'Knapdale Upland Forest Moor Mosaic' (6b). The study found that that the uplands within Argyll and Bute were of lowest landscape and visual sensitivity. These areas include the 'Craggy Uplands' (7) and 'Upland Forest Moor Mosaic (6) which offer greatest scope for the large scale developments. Both these landscape character types already feature operational and consented wind farm developments. Cumulative impacts have therefore been identified as a potential constraint in the Kintyre Peninsula, Loch Awe and Loch Fyne areas. However, the study provides guidance on how best to accommodate additional wind energy developments within these areas whilst minimising the potential cumulative impacts, as these areas are generally considered to have the greatest potential to accommodate further onshore wind energy developments.

3.8 The majority of applications for small-medium and small turbines have been within the more settled coastal landscapes and islands of Argyll and Bute. The study found that those turbines between 35 and 50 metres high could be accommodated in limited parts of more settled coastal landscapes and islands. The most acceptable locations for turbines of this size is likely to be on the more extensive hill slopes set back from more sensitive lowland areas as this will limit landscape and visual impacts. These locations will also reduce the potential for cumulative landscape and visual impacts to occur between different sizes and designs of turbines. This will become particularly important as these areas are more likely to be in demand for 'Feed-in Tariff' related development. However, monitoring of potential cumulative effects arising from smaller turbines will need to be kept under constant review. Consideration should also be given to the detailed design of smaller turbines, in order to prevent widely varying designs leading to visual clutter in some landscapes.

3.9 The assessment of landscape capacity of National Scenic Areas to accommodate wind turbine development was limited to small-medium and small scale turbines only in recognition of the protection afforded to them (from larger scale developments in SPP). The study concluded that these nationally recognised landscapes were highly sensitive and had no scope to accommodate the small-medium scale turbines. However it concluded that small turbines below 35m would have less of an effect on some NSAs provided these were sensitively sited.

4 CONCLUSION

4.1 This study represents a major piece of work that has been done in partnership with SNH. Currently there is considerable demand for the siting of wind turbines in Argyll and Bute. In light of this it is recommended that the landscape strategy be adopted as a technical study with regard to on shore wind energy developments and landscape issues to help inform decisions in relation to applications for on shore wind energy applications. Once approved, the study will be able to be used as non statutory planning guidance and also be used to inform future land use policy in the proposed Local Development Plan including a new spatial strategy for wind farms. Any change of policy in light of this guidance will require subsequent council approval and then be consultated on as part of the LDP process. It is also intended to hold a workshop on the 20th of April to help introduce the content of the study to a wide range of stakeholders. The main findings of the study are detailed below.

- **Protection of the most scenic of Argyll and Bute's landscapes** by avoiding designated landscapes and intrusion on Inventory listed designed landscapes.
- **Maintaining the wildland qualities of the mountainous landscapes** by directing wind farm development away from these areas and avoiding developments that could impact on the wider landscape setting and appreciation of these landscapes.
- **Protect the special qualities of the coastal landscapes, islands and wider seascape** which form an essential part of the character of Argyll and Bute, by resisting larger scale developments in the complex coastal landscapes and where they could intrude on views from roads, settlement and recreational areas (including from the sea).
- **Follow the established pattern of larger wind farm development associated with less sensitive upland landscapes** where their more extensive scale can better accommodate, and provide an appropriate wider setting, to large developments.
- **Direct larger typologies away from settled coastal and loch fringes** and limit intrusion on these areas by setting smaller turbines (below 50m) at the transition with the more extensive simpler upland landscapes. Smaller turbines would form more of an incidental feature in these sensitive landscapes while larger turbines would dominate and detract.
- **Ongoing review of cumulative effects** in the Craggy Upland Landscape Typology in the Loch Awe and Loch Fyne areas and the Kintyre Upland Forest Moor Mosaic principally in terms of views from Arran, will be necessary to ascertain when capacity is close to being reached.

5 IMPLICATIONS

Policy: The Landscape Capacity Study will help to inform and provide an evidence base for the development of policy in the forthcoming Local Development Plan and associated Supplementary Planning Guidance.

Financial: None.

Personnel: None.

Community: There is increasing interest in wind energy development across Argyll and Bute, from Developers, Communities and general public, this study will help promote informed decisions, in response to these.

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