



Scottish Natural Heritage Dualchas Nàdair na h-Alba

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Area Planning and Building Standards Manager, Ross and Cromarty
Planning and Building Standards Office
Council Offices
84 High Street
Dingwall
IV15 9QN

FAO Emma Forbes

Our ref: CDM117129
Your ref: 12/031821/FUL

3rd September 2012

Dear Madam

Erection of 50kW wind turbines on 30m tower (16.5m rotor diameter), Land to West of Ledgowan Lodge Hotel, Achnasheen. Achnasheen Terraces Special Site of Scientific interest

Thank you for your email consultation of 31st August 2012 seeking comments on this application.

Summary

There are natural heritage interests of national importance on the site but due to the location, small area required for the turbine and the fact that no new tracks are proposed, the main features of the site will not be affected by the proposal. It is however important that the turbine location and mitigation measures outlined in the Environmental Statement are adhered to if the favourable condition of the site is to be maintained. We would wish to be consulted if there were any deviations from this.

Background

The proposal

The proposal is for a single 50kW wind turbines on 30 metre masts (16.5 metre rotor diameter) at NH155 580, to the west of Ledgowan Hotel on Achnasheen Terraces SSSI. The underground cabling between the turbine and proposed connection point is either across open ground or within the existing track as well as across open ground.

This application is an amendment to application 12/01141/FUL made in April 2012 for 2 turbines and an equipment shed in a similar location which was refused planning permission. Therefore our comments and advice as set out in our letter of 9th May remain the same.

Natural heritage interests

All of the proposed development sits within the boundary of Achnasheen Terraces SSSI. The site is designated for its geological interest and provides one of the best Scottish examples of an

**Scottish Natural Heritage, Anancaun Field Station, Kinlochewe by Achnasheen,
Ross-shire IV22 2PA Tel: 01445 760254 Fax: 01445 760301 Website: www.snh.gov.uk**

**Dualchas Nàdair na h-ALBA, Ceann Loch Iubh, Achadh na Sìne, Siorrachd Rois, IV22 2PA
Fòn 01445 760254 Facs 01445 760301 Website www.snh.gov.uk**

assemblage of landforms (including classic examples of terraces formed by glacial meltwater) deposited in an ice dammed lake during the last glacial period (around 11,000 to 10,000 years ago).

The management objectives of the site are:

1. To maintain accessibility and the visibility of the landforms for the purpose of education and research
2. To maintain the current condition of the landforms by safeguarding against modifications to the land profile by erosion, excavations or deposition of materials or the establishment of tree or scrub cover

The proposed turbine is located on terrace 2 within the SSSI. We agree that a turbine located here, with no need for additional tracks minimises damage to the main features of the site. However we would have concerns if the final location of the turbine was moved near the terrace edge / riser. It is therefore important that any changes in location to that supplied in the application are agreed with the planners in consultation with SNH.

We note that there will be a localised loss of sediments where the turbine is sited however close monitoring of the excavation activity is proposed to ensure no more material is excavated than absolutely necessary. This is welcomed and should ensure that any impacts to the features of the site will be minimised.

Landscape

The proposed development is out with the Wester Ross National Scenic Area and will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the NSA or the qualities for which it has been designated. However there is still potential for a development of this type to impact on the local landscape character and its visual amenity.

The proposal is located on the floor of the glen within a landscape of rolling hills and moorland. Although the turbine will be sited close to existing trees and buildings and will be viewed from most locations against large land forms, the vertical structures will introduce a new and prominent feature within this simple landscape which will impact on views by both residents in Achnasheen and those travelling along the existing corridor of the A832.

Recommendations

Although this proposal does not raise issues of national interest we would offer the following comments and advice in order to further minimise impacts on the natural heritage and ensure the best fit with the landscape. It is for the planning authority to decide, within the context of its own policies, whether conditions are necessary to secure the mitigation suggested below.

Turbine construction

The construction method, form and finish of all of the work will be essential to help the development fit within this location. We are therefore encouraged by the fact that reinstatement of turfs and topsoil is included in the method statements for the tower foundations and power cable trench. The SNH publication 'Constructed tracks in the Scottish Uplands' <http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A308736.pdf> gives guidance on restoration techniques as well as all other elements of track construction. This publication includes details omitted from the method statement in particular the appropriate removal, storage and replacement of materials and we would advise that the method statement should be revised to fully reflect these aspects. The use of grass seed should also be avoided and should not be required if the work is carried out following best practice.

No additional access tracks are proposed in order to construct and maintain the wind turbine and we appreciate the efforts being made to reduce any additional disturbance to the site. However it is recognised that some modifications to the existing track might be required. If such work is required it

should be agreed in advance with the planners in consultation with SNH and should follow best practice according to the SNH publication mentioned previously.

We note the proposal to photograph the excavation of the foundation holes for research purposes. However photography alone is not usually sufficient in this respect and therefore to be of value we recommend that a Quaternary scientist is present to sample as well as photograph the excavations. The sediments are likely to be topset deltaic sediments, but may include debris flows which came off the front of the glacier at the time these terraces were built out into the ice dammed lake. This would provide an unusual opportunity to record the sediments, where normally we have to rely on stream cut sections and if correctly done would be of great benefit. We are happy to discuss this further with the applicant.

Cables proposed connection point

From discussions with the applicant we were under the impression that all cabling would be contained within the existing track and we indicated in response to their previous application that we would prefer this to be the case. However the site layout indicates 2 options for the cabling both of which will require trenching across open ground to a proposed connection point. Whilst this does not require deep excavation we would advise that it is additional disturbance to the designated site which could be avoided through the use of the existing track.

There are no details of the proposed connection point therefore I am assuming that this does not require a building to be constructed on the SSSI. However what is required has not been detailed. To reduce the spread of development on the SSSI as well reducing visual clutter we would advise that any new structures are constructed within the already developed area around the estate buildings, opposite the Lodge. This area also has the additional advantage of screening by trees and no cable trenching would be required on open ground

Access

The first management objective of the SSSI is to maintain accessibility and the visibility of the landforms for the purpose of education and research. The Highland Council Access Officer can advise you on public access to the site during and after construction.

I hope these comments are helpful to you.

Yours faithfully

Nicola Tallach
Operations Officer
South Highland
Wester Ross, Skye and Lochalsh
nicola.tallach@snh.gov.uk