



Rothes III Wind Farm

S36C APPLICATION FOR PROPOSED TIP
HEIGHT INCREASE FOR 3 TURBINES
Landscape and Visual Assessment

July 2024



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1 Introduction

Rothes III Wind Farm was consented by Scottish Ministers in October 2022. The Rothes III Wind Farm application comprised 29 turbines, (3 up to 149.9 m, 8 up to 200 m, and 18 up to 225 m to blade tip height) and associated ancillary infrastructure including tracks and borrow pits (the “Consented Development”).

The Consented Development comprises 28 turbines of the following heights to blade tip:

- 3 turbines at up to 149.9 m;
- 8 turbines at up to 200 m; and
- 17 turbines at up to 225 m.

Fred Olsen Renewables Limited (the “Applicant”) proposes to increase the blade tip height of 3no. turbines from 149.9 m to 200 m (the “Proposal”).

The report begins by summarising the effects set out in the LVIA or subsequently submitted Additional Information (AI) for the 28 turbine Consented Development, referred to hereafter as the “LVIA”. It then addresses whether the proposed change in the dimensions of 3no. turbines (turbines 9,13 and 14) shown on Site Layout Plan Figure 2.1) from 149.9 m to 200 m would bring about any additional effects that were not previously identified and whether there would be new significant effects over and above those of the LVIA or whether there would be an intensification of a significant effect to a degree that may be material following the principles set out at paragraph 33 of the Scottish Government’s Guidance Note for applications for variation of section 36 consents.

The report also identifies any instances where the Scottish Ministers’ conclusions differed from those of the LVIA and in doing so refers to the Report of Inquiry (the “Inquiry Report”), dated 25.02.2022, issued to the Scottish Ministers. The Scottish Ministers accepted and agreed with the findings of the Reporters in relation to landscape and visual effects of the Consented Development and adopted those for the purpose of their own decision (Decision Letter 21 October 2022, page 15).

The report is supported by the following figures:

- Figure 2.1 Site Layout
- Figure 2.2 Comparative Blade Tip ZTV with Viewpoint Locations
- Figure 2.3 Comparative Blade Tip ZTV with Landscape Designations
- Figure 2.4 Comparative Blade Tip ZTV with Landscape Character Areas

- Figure 2.5 Comparative Blade Tip ZTV with Residential Properties Considered in the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment

Comparison wirelines have been prepared for each of the viewpoints which formed part of the application for the Consented Development. These are as follows:

- Figure 2.6 Viewpoint 1 A941, South of Lossiemouth
- Figure 2.7 Viewpoint 2 A96 East of Elgin
- Figure 2.8 Viewpoint 3 B9016, Aultmore
- Figure 2.9 Viewpoint 4 Ben Aigan Wireline
- Figure 2.10 Viewpoint 5 A95, East of Craigellachie
- Figure 2.11 Viewpoint 6 A95 South of Aberlour
- Figure 2.12 Viewpoint 7 Ben Rinnes Wireline
- Figure 2.13 Viewpoint 8 Carn a Ghille Chearr Summit
- Figure 2.14 Viewpoint 9 Dallas Castle Wireline
- Figure 2.15 Viewpoint 10 Minor Road Knockando to Dallas
- Figure 2.16 Viewpoint 11 B9102 West of Archiestown
- Figure 2.17 Viewpoint 12 Old Military Road Baltmore to Cawdor
- Figure 2.18 Viewpoint 13 The Duke of Gordon Monument in Elgin
- Figure 2.19 Viewpoint 14 Carn na Loine
- Figure 2.20 Viewpoint 15 Carn Diamh
- Figure 2.21 Viewpoint 16 Cnap Chaochan Aitinn
- Figure 2.22 Viewpoint 17 Bynack More Wireline
- Figure 2.23 Viewpoint 18 Blacksboat Bridge
- Figure 2.24 Viewpoint 19 B9102 between Blacksboat Bridge and Cardhu

Each figure contains two wirelines: wireline 'A' depicting the Consented Development and wireline 'B' showing the Proposal. The wirelines show the same, 150 m, rotor diameter as the 200 m turbines within the Consented Development, with the additional height derived from an increase to the hub height only.

2 Methodology

A detailed description of the LVIA process and methodology was included in Appendix A8.1 of the EIA Report for the Consented Development. This report follows the same process and methodology and as with the previous LVIA is based on the professional judgement of an experienced landscape architect.

The purpose of this report is to assess the likely significant effects of the Proposal upon landscape and visual receptors over and above those already assessed in the LVIA.

This assessment takes account of the following technical guidance documents:

- Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA), (2013) Landscape Institute and the Institute of Environmental Assessment;
- Landscape Sensitivity Assessment Guidance (Methodology), (2022), NatureScot;
- Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments (March 2021) NatureScot;
- Siting and Design of Wind farms in the Landscape, Version 3 (February 2017) SNH;
- Visual Representation of Wind Farms – Version 2.2 (February 2017), SNH;
- LI Technical Guidance Note 2/19. Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) (March 2019) Landscape Institute;
- LI Advice Note 02/17 Visual representation of development proposals (March 2017) Landscape Institute; and
- LI Technical Guidance Note 02/21 Assessing landscape value outside of national designations.

The following document is updated from that which was referred to within the LVIA or by Reporters of by Scottish Ministers:

- Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study (MWELSS) (May 2023), Carol Anderson Landscape Associates.

The MWELSS provides an update to the 2017 Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study (MWELCS).

Taking into account the current relevant policy and guidance, baseline information, and assessment criteria, an assessment is presented below which describes the effects of the Proposal over and above those of the Consented Development.

3 Updates to Landscape and Visual Baseline

3.1 Landscape Baseline

The landscape baseline of the site and its local context remains concurrent with that of the LVIA which was submitted in relation to the Consented Development. Additional Information (AI) was submitted in 2019 which assessed the likely significant effects of the alternative development, but which also updated the cumulative baseline which related to both the Consented and alternative developments at that time, to include the Clash Gour Wind Farm. Supplementary Information (SI) was submitted in 2020 which provided an assessment of and visual material for an additional viewpoint (Viewpoint 19).

At the time the LVIA for the Consented Development was undertaken, Moray Council was in the process of reviewing local landscape designations. The Council was proposing the replacement of the Spey Valley AGLV with two Special Landscape Areas, the 'Spey Valley SLA' and the 'Ben Rinnes SLA'. These are now adopted and shown at Figure 2.3.

3.2 Visual Baseline

Pegasus are not aware of changes to the visual baseline which would affect the consideration of visual effects arising from the Proposal.

3.3 Cumulative Baseline

In addition to the consent of the Rothes III development, the nearby Clash Gour Wind Farm and Berry Burn Wind Farm Extension were also consented, and which will further strengthen the presence of wind development within parts of the local landscape to the north-west of the site. This assessment does not include a full update to the cumulative position. The principal of the Rothes III development has been found to be acceptable. The degree of change of the Proposal is diminutive in relation to the wider wind development baseline and consideration of the potential effects of the Proposal against the previously identified cumulative effects, is not considered to bring about any additional significant effects over and above those which were assessed for the Consented Development. For this reason, cumulative effects are not considered further other than a consideration of design and appearance of the Proposal when viewed alongside the existing Rothes I and II wind development. For this reason, each of these developments are also included within the comparison wirelines.

It should also be noted that the Reporters accepted (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.6) that turbines at Hunt Hill would not be developed and were therefore not considered as part of the scenario 2 cumulative baseline within the LVIA.

4 Summary of previously identified Landscape and Visual Effects

4.1 Effects on Landscape Character

Of the nine MWELCS LCTs which were identified within the LVIA study area, only that of LCT10 (Upland Moorland with Forestry) and LCT7 (Broad Farmed Valley), were assessed within the LVIA as having the potential to experience a significant effect resulting from the Consented Development.

For LCT10 the landscape effects were identified as significant (major) for parts of the landscape between Dallas to Knockando and the hills to the west of Rothes and significant (moderate) for more distant areas of the LCT. The Reporters also found significant effects (Inquiry Report paragraphs 3.249 to 3.271) and the Scottish Ministers accept and agree with these findings (pg 15 of the Decision Letter 21 October 2022).

For LCT7 the LVIA assessed that there would be a medium to high magnitude of change and a significant (major/moderate) effect for locations within 8 km of the Consented Development. For locations within the LCT beyond this, the effect was assessed as not significant. The Reporters agreed with this assessment (Inquiry Report paragraphs 3.272 to 3.284).

4.2 Effects on Visual Receptors

The LVIA identified there would be significant effects on visual amenity up to a distance of 12 km from the site. Of the 18 original viewpoints agreed with SNH and Moray Council the LVIA identified significant visual effects during operation at six locations, as follows:

- Viewpoint 4: Ben Aigan - Significant (major/moderate);
- Viewpoint 5: A95, East of Craigellachie - Significant (moderate);
- Viewpoint 6: A95, South of Aberlour - Significant (major);
- Viewpoint 7: Ben Rinnes - Significant (moderate);
- Viewpoint 11: B9102, West of Archiestown - Significant (major/moderate); and
- Viewpoint 18: Speyside Way Blacksboat Bridge - Significant (moderate)

In turn, the April 2020 SI provided assessment of a further viewpoint, which had been requested by the Council: 'VP19: B9102 between Blacksboat Bridge and Cardhu'. A Significant (major/moderate) effect was also identified for this viewpoint.

In addition to the above the Reporters concluded significant effects at the following two viewpoints:

- Viewpoint 8: Càrn a' Ghille Cheàrr (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.350);

- Viewpoint 13: Duke of Elgin Monument (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.357).

4.2.1 Effects on Sequential Routes

Five routes within the study area were assessed to have a significant effect, as follows:

- A95 between Cragganmore (Ballindalloch) and Aberlour (moderate);
- B9102 (major/moderate);
- B9010 (major/moderate);
- Moray Core Path SP20 Lower Mannocho Path (moderate); and
- Right of Way GM7 (major).

In addition to the above the Reporters concluded significant effects at the following routes:

- Core paths and promoted paths near Archiestown.

4.2.2 Effects on Residential Visual Amenity

The Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAS) assessed significant effects for the following properties and with which the Reporters agreed (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.398):

- Property 3: Blackhillock (1 property)
- Property 6: Lynes (1 property)
- Property 9: Newlands-Robertstown (4 properties)
- Archiestown E (1 property)

The assessment also noted that no properties face towards the site, with principal views extending across Strath Spey. It was also noted that screening in the form of outbuildings, trees or garden vegetation or wider forestry would further limit the potential visibility of the Consented Development.

The RVAS did not identify any of the above properties as being so affected that they would become *'widely regarded as an unattractive place where to live and/or the development is inescapably dominant or unpleasantly overwhelming'*.

4.3 Effects on Landscape Designations

4.3.1 Effects on the Cairngorms National Park

The LVIA did not identify the potential for significant effects on the Cairngorms National Park (CNP), or its special qualities. No Significant effects on either landscape character or visual amenity were identified as occurring within the CNP.

As described previously, the Reporters concluded a significant effect at Viewpoint 8: Càrn a' Ghille Cheàrr, which lies on the boundary of the CNP. In considering the special qualities of the CNP the Reporters concluded that there would be adverse effects upon the vastness, space, scale and height, the wide panoramas, the landscape of layers, and the attractive and contrasting texture special qualities. The identified that the extent of those effects would be limited, however, that given the sensitivity of the CNP, they found them to be significant (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.293).

4.3.2 Effects on the Spey Valley Special Landscape Area (formerly Area of Great Landscape Value)

The landscape within which the site is located, is one which is sparsely settled. To the south of the site, the more settled landscape of the Spey Valley (Broad Farmed Valley LCT7) lies within the locally designated Spey Valley Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV).

The LVIA set out that there would be significant effects on the Spey Valley Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) by virtue of the significant effects (major/moderate) on landscape character which were identified for areas up to 8 km from the Consented Development within the Broad Farmed Valley LCT, and which lies within the AGLV.

The LVIA set out that there would be significant effects on the Spey Valley Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV) by virtue of the significant effects on visual amenity which were identified for areas up to 8 km from the Consented Development within the AGLV. Significant visual effects which were identified in relation to six of the assessment viewpoints are all located within the AGLV (VP4, VP5, VP6, VP7, VP11 and VP18). In addition, significant visual effects were identified for the A95 between Cragganmore and Aberlour, and the short section of the B9102 within the AGLV to the north of Blacksboat.

The Spey Valley SLA extends along the lower lying landscape of the Spey Valley between the boundary with Highland Council near Bridge of Avon to the south and Fochabers to the north. In proximity to the site, the area of the Spey Valley SLA extends slightly in the area to the north west, compared to the former AGLV, incorporating areas around Upper Knockando and Archiestown.

The Ben Rinnes SLA includes the landscape from Ben Rinnes to Glen Fiddich and Dufftown to the boundary with the CNP. The area around Milltown of Edinville is no longer included in the designated landscape, nor is the south-easternmost portion of the AGLV beyond Glen Fiddich. The Consented Development was considered against the, at that time, proposed SLAs. There was a single significant effect identified within the Ben Rinnes SLA, that at the summit of Ben Rinnes, viewpoint 7 (significant, moderate).

The adjustment to the extent of the AGLV designation (to the SLAs) did not lead to any additional significant visual effects to those which have been identified within the area of the Spey Valley AGLV, beyond that identified for Viewpoint 19, which lies beyond the extent of the former designated AGLV, but within the boundary of the SLA, the boundary of which, at this location, follows the route of the B9102.

The Reporters set out their conclusions in relation to the SLA and its special qualities at paragraphs 3.296-3.313 of their Report. The Reporters agreed with the significant effects assessed within the LVIA (viewpoints 4, 5, 6, 1, 18 and 19) within the SLA, describing the limited visibility around Blacksboat Bridge and prominent on some of the broad stepped shoulders in the Archiestown and Knockando areas (paragraph 3.302). The Reporters describe at paragraph 3.304 that it would not be possible to obtain views of the Consented Development from all the Upper Knockando area but that to the western edge of the SLA the proposal's large scale turbines would diminish the intimacy and sense of containment of that area and dominate the skyline of Càrn na Cailliche from those locations and also from the west of Archiestown (viewpoint 11). Overall, the Reporters agreed with the assessment of the LVIA that significant effects on the SLA would occur up to 8 km from the Consented Development (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.306).

4.4 Effects of Aviation Lighting

The number of lit turbines was originally proposed to be 26, then 25 with the subsequent omission of turbine 15. The final lighting scheme (as approved by the Civil Aviation Authority) for the Consented Development was for 8 turbines to be lit with visible lighting. No significant effects were identified in relation to the proposed lighting for any locations over and above those where a significant effect was identified during the daytime period.

Indeed, the actual perceived effect of the lighting within the wider landscape and especially where the observer becomes more distant from the wind farm, was identified to be likely, in many instances, to be less than the assessed effects. Indeed, the Reporters accepted that the proposed lighting would not be prominent at any of the 19 viewpoints and also did not consider that there would be significant effects from aviation lighting on any settlements or residential property (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.393).

5 Consideration of Landscape and Visual Effects of the Proposed Development

5.1 Introduction

Figure 2.2, Comparative ZTV, shows additional areas of potential visibility which could arise from the increase in blade tip height of the three turbines. As a result of their position within the array and the local topography, which can be seen at Figure 2.1, areas of potential new visibility are generally located to the north west, west and south west. Increases in theoretical visibility tend to be greater at distances beyond 10 km. There is an area of localised additional visibility within 2 km and 5 km to the south west of the array which is noted to extend to the south west of Carn na Calliiche and slightly along an additional section of the minor road between Dallas and Knockando.

In the locations of new theoretical visibility, it is possible for up to a maximum of 50.1 m of the turbine blades of the Proposal to be seen that would not have previously had the potential to see any part of the Consented Development. However, overall, the areas of additional potential visibility are limited and the ZTV does not indicate the extent of the visibility or whether this is a result of the height increase of one turbine or all three turbines. The turbine blades would be a very small, if noticeable, element within the middle-distant or distant views. The viewpoint wirelines provide a comparison between the Consented Development and the Proposal from all 19 of the LVIA viewpoints, the locations of which are shown at Figure 2.2. For example, in relative proximity to the site, representative viewpoints 10 and 11, located on the Dallas to Knockando minor road and the B9102 west of Archiestown, a comparison of Figures 2.15 and 16 A and B shows that the Proposal, whilst appreciable, doesn't bring about a change which appears discordant with the appearance of the wider array, nor that of the existing Rothes I and II turbines, or the undulating landscape upon which they are seen.

Regarding daytime effects a review has been undertaken which assesses the relationship between the Proposal and the nearest residential properties to ensure that none of the effects would increase to such a degree that the previous findings would no longer remain applicable. The comparison ZTV is shown at Figure 2.5 in relation to the residential properties considered in detail within the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment for the Consented Development.

The Proposal is also considered against the now current MWELSS which revised and updated the 2017 Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study (MWELCS). The MWELSS adopts a methodology which is in alignment with the NatureScot Landscape Sensitivity Assessment guidance (2022) and also the 2019 updates which were made to the NatureScot landscape character classifications. The Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study (MWELSS) utilises Assessment Units that are based upon the NatureScot 2019 online landscape character classifications. These are shown at Figure 2.4.

Overall, the change arising from the proposed tip height increase would be small when set within the context of the Consented Development. Landscape and visual effects are considered further under each respective heading below and with assessment tables contained within Appendices 1 to 3. The assessment draws upon the comparison wirelines and considers these for each of the representative viewpoints in order to obtain an understanding of the nature of the change from a variety of locations.

The assessment tables highlight the landscape character areas and viewpoints where significant effects may have been borderline in the LVIA or the conclusions of the Reporters, and whereby the Proposal could bring about a further change which would elevate those previously not significant effects, to become significant or intensify a significant effect further to a material degree. These considerations also inform the conclusions of potential for increases in effect for other receptors (settlements and sequential routes). In addition, the appendices include brief commentary upon the potential appearance of the Proposal from wider receptors where low or negligible effects were assessed in the LVIA to describe whether the overall balance and composition of the turbine layout remains one which corresponds to good design principles and in relation to relevant identified sensitivities within the MWELSS.

Potential effects during construction and decommissioning stages would not be changed from that identified within the LVIA and are therefore not considered further. It is also Pegasus' understanding that the lighting strategy for the development would be unchanged by the Proposal. No change in night-time visual effects would arise. This is therefore not considered further.

5.1 Effects on Landscape Character

The assessment of effects of the Proposal upon landscape character is set out within Appendix 1.

The comparison ZTV at Figure 2.4 shows that additional visibility of the Proposal introduces very limited areas of additional potential visibility across the local and wider landscape.

Although the extent of the landscape across which the Proposal would be visible, remains largely comparable with that within the LVIA, the number of turbines which may be seen would increase by up to three. It is within the lower landscapes to the west of the site where the increased heights of the three turbines would be likely to be more apparent (such as viewpoints 11 and 19). However, it is those locations where the effects in the LVIA have already been assessed to bring about landscape character effects which are significant and with which the Reporters and Moray Council agreed, albeit that there were differences between the Council and the LVIA in relation to landscape sensitivity relating to LCT10. In that instance the Reporters agreed with the assessment of medium sensitivity for LCT10 within the LVIA, including transitional areas at the lower hill fringes bordering LCT7 and the SLA (Inquiry Report, paragraph 3.252).

There will be an overall increase in the visibility of the three turbines at some limited locations. From these limited fringe locations, shown in purple on the ZTV (Figure 2.2) adjoining land previously falling within the ZTV in the LVIA, there would be potential visibility where there was previously none from where up to the upper 50.1 m blades of up to three turbines could be visible. Although there are new potential locations of theoretical visibility which extend to the north west, west and south west and tend to be greater at distances beyond 10 km. In addition, there is an area of localised additional visibility within 2 km and 5 km to the south west of the array which is noted to extend to the south west of Carn na Calliiche and slightly along an additional section of the minor road between Dallas and Knockando. However, these locations are limited, and the changes would be small.

It is considered that the turbine blades would be a very small new, or additional, element within the middle-distant or distant views but that when present within the landscape, which is likely to include other elements or features which may screen, filter or focus views, the potential additions may be even less appreciable, and be a barely perceptible change to the existing characteristics of the landscape.

The Proposal, in the context of the Consented Development and in some instances the existing operational wind development, would either be concurrent with the significant effects previously identified in the LVIA and agreed by the Reporters, or not be so apparent that a change to the previously identified effects would increase. The Proposal would not result in additional significant effects over and above those already identified in the LVIA and agreed by Reporters.

5.2 Effects on Visual Receptors

The assessment of effects of the Proposal upon visual amenity is set out within Appendix 2.

The LVIA for the Consented Development identified there would be significant effects on visual amenity up to a distance of 12 km from the site. Of the nine viewpoint locations where significant visual effects during operation were identified (viewpoints 4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 18 and 19, and 8 and 13 concluded by the Reporters), the Proposal has been reviewed, using the comparison wirelines, to consider the change to the appearance of the array, overall, from all viewpoints. This is set out at Table A2.1.

The previously identified significant effects which were assessed (either within the LVIA or by Reporters) for viewpoints and sequential routes would remain unchanged. There would be no increase in the degree of change within views which would tip these into the next banding, and therefore no increase in any of the identified effects, albeit that these were already considered to be significant.

Table A2.1 describes the potential change to views from the Proposal at representative viewpoints. This assessment concludes that there would be no instances where the Proposal would bring about an increase to the previously assessed magnitude of change within the LVIA. Therefore, the effects of the Originally Proposed Development upon visual amenity would remain unchanged, and no additional significant effects are identified.

5.3 Residential Visual Amenity Assessment

Properties which were considered within the Residential Visual Amenity Assessment (RVAA) are shown at Figure 2.5. This shows that there are no additional properties which fall within areas of additional theoretical visibility resulting from the Proposal.

Table A3.1 provides an assessment of whether the Proposal would result in a change to the previous assessment conclusions which considered whether the identified significant effects could be overwhelming or overbearing at the identified properties.

Table A3.2 considers the potential for a change to the RVAA for properties where the RVAA for the Consented Development assessments did not conclude effects which were significant.

The analysis within Tables A3.1 and A3.2 utilise the wirelines which comprised part of the submission for the Consented Development, and which are included at Appendix 2B.

At paragraph 3.405, the Reporters found that there were 7 residential properties that would experience significant visual effects but that at none would the effect be overwhelming or overbearing to the extent that they could reasonably be considered an unattractive place to live. The Scottish Ministers accepted the findings of the

Reporters and were satisfied that the impacts are acceptable (page 16 of the Decision Letter). In the context of the Consented Development overall, the Proposal, if visible, would not alter the magnitude of change previously identified in relation to the LVIA and with which the Reporters agreed. The effects previously assessed would remain unchanged by the Proposal.

As with the Consented Development it is not considered that the Proposal would have a detrimental impact upon the visual amenity of any of the properties such that they would become an unattractive place to live in the sense that this test has been applied in respect of the Consented Development.

[5.4 Effects on Landscape Designations](#)

[5.4.1 Effects on the Cairngorms National Park](#)

Representative viewpoints which are located within or bordering the CNP include Viewpoints 8, 14, 15, 16 and 17 and in relation to which Reporters concluded a significant effect at viewpoint 8. As described previously, at paragraph 3.293 of the Inquiry Report, after considering each special landscape quality the Reporters stated that *“Consequently we do find the original proposal would adversely affect the special landscape qualities of vastness, space, scale and height, the wide panoramas, the landscape of layers, and the attractive and contrasting texture. The extent of these adverse effects would be limited. Nonetheless, given the sensitivity of the national park as a receptor, we find them to be above the threshold of significance.”* NatureScot and the Reporters found, however, that the Consented Development would not have a significant effect in the CNP (Inquiry Report, para 3.285) and the impacts were found to be acceptable by the Scottish Ministers (Decision Letter, page 16).

A review of the comparison wirelines shows that at distances of around 15 km the change which would occur as a result of the Proposal would be so diminutive there would be no discernible change to those effects identified for the Consented Development.

[5.4.2 Effects on Local Landscape Designations](#)

There are very few additional areas of theoretical visibility across the study area (Figure 2.3).

Significant effects were assessed within the Spey Valley AGLV (now SLA) for the Consented Development by virtue of the significant effects (major/moderate) on landscape character which were identified for areas up to 8 km within the Broad Farmed Valley LCT and for six of the assessment viewpoints located (VP4, VP5, VP6, VP7, VP11, VP18 and VP19 which lie within the AGLV / Spey Valley SLA.

The assessment of the Proposal in relation to landscape character and viewpoints did not conclude any increase to the previously identified effects in the LVIA. As

such, the conclusion on local designations, which was agreed by the Reporters and Scottish Ministers, is also considered to remain unchanged from the LVIA.

5.5 Consideration of the Proposal against general design principles

In addition to the Siting and Design of Wind farms in the Landscape (SNH) the MWELSS this assessment considers below, the sensitivities and guidance within the MWELSS (noting that this document reflects the consented wind development at Rothes III and Clash Gour).

Matters relating to the design of the Consented Development were considered by the Reporters and in particular the visual relationship between the Consented Development and other existing or proposed wind development with which it could be seen, rather than the design or appearance of the array of itself. However, in either respect, Reporters considered the Consented Development to be acceptable, overall, taking into account its design and appearance, and with which the Scottish Ministers agreed.

Key considerations of wind farm design set out within Scottish Natural Heritage Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape Guidance (Version 3a, 2017) and considered by Reporters, were the position and appearance of the Consented Development in relation to the existing, smaller, Rothes I and Rothes II Wind Farms. The conclusions of the Reporters, at paragraph 3.265 of the Inquiry Report, was that in the host LCT (LCT10) the contrast between the rotation speeds of the larger blades *“the contrast would be unlikely to have a very large adverse impact...given the limited opportunities that would be allowed by the developments’ relative positions in the topography and by the landcover of commercial forestry to compare the existing and proposed turbines”*. The Reporters, at paragraph 3.266, go on to describe the contrast in size and layout of the Consented Development as being noticeable (and significant (Inquiry Report, para 3.411, last bullet)) from certain generally elevated locations, with specific reference to viewpoints 13, 4, 7 and 16 but where *“the distance from which such views would be obtained would mitigate the impact to a degree”*.

A second design consideration made in relation to the Consented Development, was in relation to the recommended landscape strategy within the Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study (MWELCS) in relation to the protection of landmark hills and their setting. This is reiterated within the MWELSS (page 52) where it is acknowledged that the containment provided by the hill of Càrn na Cailliche *‘will be breached to some degree by the consented Rothes III wind farm’* and that *‘further development sited on or nearby this hill would significantly increase visual intrusion’*.

In relation to Càrn na Cailliche, four turbines including the three proposed for an increase to their height, are located on the northern and eastern slopes of Càrn na Cailliche which the Reporters did not find to be a *“particularly remarkable or otherwise characterful hill, when seen from the various LVIA viewpoints”* and then go on to describe that they *“do not consider that, as a feature in itself, the hill would*

draw particular attention or therefore require a high degree of protection from development that might detract from its form, in the way that – for instance – Ben Rinnes, Brown Muir or Mill Buie might”. The Reporters acknowledge that Càrn na Cailliche “has a degree of prominence in the locality around Upper Knockando” and that “as the LCT10 guidance [within the MWELCS] suggests, the main role that Càrn na Cailliche plays is as a visual buffer, restricting views from the valley of the Spey to the interior of LCT10” (Inquiry Report, para 3.420). The Reporters concluded at paragraph 3.424, that the Consented Development “would in some respects meet a strategy that treats Càrn na Cailliche as a visual buffer to views into the interior of LCT10, its scale and location would mean that such an effect would be limited to relatively near views” and that the Consented Development “would have a substantial effect upon the hill and its setting insofar as it is to be treated as a feature in itself”.

The Reporters considered the siting and design of the Consented Development more generally, at paragraphs 3.445 to 3.449 of their Inquiry Report. In relation to the composition of turbines, the Reporters concluded that they “*did not agree with any suggestion on the council’s part that for a design comprising so many turbines, the original proposal would cause an unusual or disproportional degree of such effects*”.

The series of wirelines (Figures 2.6 – 2.24) were reviewed illustrating the view towards the development from a number of directions and distances from the site. It is considered that the Proposal would not appear discordant with the wider Rothes III array, nor the existing, operational Rothes I and II wind farms. This review demonstrated that the change in height of the three turbines would not result in any negative change to the overall design of the scheme when considered against the general SNH guidance (whilst bearing in mind the layout of the Proposal is consistent with that which has been consented). Furthermore, the Proposal does not materially change the role which Càrn na Cailliche plays in providing screening of the development and which can be seen by the very limited additional theoretical visibility within the comparison ZTV at Figure 2.2. It is acknowledged that there are some locations where the increase in height of the three turbines would mean that these are potentially more visible than within the Consented Development, however, the change which would occur is not of such a degree that the effects of the Consented Development would be materially increased or intensified. The proposal, therefore, continues to be “*designed sufficiently to reflect the relevant landscape character assessment*”. The conclusions of the Reporters, which were adopted by Scottish Ministers, that the Consented Development is in accord with Moray LDP policy EP3 are considered within the Planning Statement.

6 Conclusions

The potential landscape and visual effects of the Proposal have been considered against those assessed for the Original Consented Development.

Since the LVIA was undertaken the two candidate Special Landscape Areas (SLAs), the 'Spey Valley SLA' and the 'Ben Rinnes SLA' have replaced the Spey Valley AGLV. The LVIA assessed the effects upon the candidate SLAs. In addition, the Moray Wind Energy Landscape Capacity Study (2017), which was current at the time of the LVIA, has been superseded by the Moray Wind Energy Landscape Sensitivity Study (May 2023). The Landscape Sensitivity Study, whilst adopting a different methodology to that of the former capacity study, performs the same function and Pegasus' view is that the Landscape Sensitivity Study would not have altered the conclusions of the LVIA and neither does it alter the effects of the Proposal against the effect of the Consented Development.

The assessment has identified those landscapes and visual receptors where significant effects may have been borderline in the LVIA of the Consented Development or by the Reporters and whereby, the Proposal could bring about a further change which could elevate those previously not significant effects, to become significant. The assessment has also considered the degree to which the Proposal could further increase or intensify an existing significant effect.

There are no instances where the Proposal would alter the effects which were assessed within the LVIA or by the Reporters, the conclusions of which were adopted by Scottish Ministers. Whilst there could be potential for the Proposal to be seen, there are no instances where this would increase the previously assessed magnitude of change. Accordingly, the Proposal would not give rise to any new significant effects and nor would it increase or intensify the previously identified significant effects of the Consented Development to a material degree.

There are occasional locations which may have visibility of the Proposal that would not have previously seen the Consented Development, as shown in purple on the ZTV (Figure 2.2). However, overall, the additional areas of new potential visibility are limited. Where these occur, potential visibility will comprise the upper sections of the turbine blades (up to 50.1 m of up to three turbines) and which would be a very small, if at all noticeable, element within the middle-distant or distant views.

The increased tip height of the three turbines may be visible in addition to other turbines of the Consented Development for some receptors, as shown within the comparison wirelines at Figures 2.6a to 2.24b. However, in the context of the wider array, which includes turbines of the same height and taller, this change would not be at odds with the appearance of the wider array, nor that of the existing Rothes I and II turbines, or the undulating landscape upon which they are seen.

There are no residential properties located in areas where there is new theoretical visibility. A review the relationship with the nearest residential properties concludes

that whilst there may be some properties from where the Proposal could add some additional theoretical visibility of the upper parts of turbines 9, 13 and 14, their position within the array places them behind other turbines and the Proposal would not result in a material change to their appearance within the context of the Consented Development. It is often the case however, that the view towards the site from properties are in any event, indirect, or additional screening exists within the intervening landscape. There would be no change to the judgement of effects that was previously identified in the LVIA or by Reporters and Scottish Ministers.

Pegasus have reviewed the changes which would occur from the Proposal and considered whether the overall balance and composition of the turbine layout remains one which corresponds to good design principles and key sensitivities including the visual relationship with existing wind development and with Càrn na Cailliche hill and the Spey Valley SLA. This review demonstrated that the increase in height of 50.1 m of three of the 28 turbines of the Consented Development would not result in any negative change to the overall design of the scheme. Turbines 9, 13 and 14 will continue to be seen to be behind the horizon in views towards Càrn na Cailliche and Hunt Hill and woodlands within the Spey valley will continue to provide some screening to many views.



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