

Technical Appendix 5.4 – Appraisal of The Highland Council’s OWESG Criteria

1.1 Introduction

1.1.1 The Highland Council Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG)¹ details The Highland Council (THC) policy and guidance on measures to be considered for the design and assessment of onshore wind farms. In relation to landscape and visual amenity it identifies ten criteria to be used by THC as a framework and focus for assessing proposals. This Appendix provides analysis of the Proposed Development in relation to these criteria in the following table.

Table 1 Appraisal of THC’s OWESG Criteria

Criteria	Measure		Comments / Outcome
(Quoted from THC’s <i>Onshore Wind Energy</i> Supplementary Guidance, pages 18-20)			
Criterion 1: Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape respected.			
<i>Relationship between Settlements / Key locations and wider landscape respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development.</i>	✓	There are no settlements within 6km of the proposed development. The nearest settlement within THC LDP is Lairg approximately 21km to the south, which is located outwith the ZTV. Therefore, there would be no opportunity for settlements to be ‘encircled’ by wind energy development.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/Key Locations or from the majority of its access routes.</i>	✓	The proposed development would not be visually prominent in views from any settlements within the 35km study area and the majority of the approach roads are well screened by landform. The exception to this is views from the A836 (identified as a key route in the OWESG) would be significant affecting approximately 4.9km of the route as it approaches and passes the proposed turbines between the summit of The Crask and Druim Allt na h-Aire. The level of effect, although significant would not be overwhelming.
Criterion 2: Key Gateway locations and routes are respected			
<i>Key Gateway locations and routes are respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes.</i>	✓	The proposed development would not significantly affect any ‘key gateways’ and would not detract from any landscape characteristics which contribute a ‘distinctive transitional experience’ through the landscape.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a</i>	<i>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape</i>	✓	Whilst the A836 is identified as a key route in the OWESG, it is not identified as a key gateway location or route within the 35km study area. There would, however, be localised significant visual effects on short

¹ The Highland Council. (2017). Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance. November 2016 (with addendum, December 2017).

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<i>threshold where:</i>	<i>characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.</i>		<p>stretches of the A836 as stated above. The level of effect, although significant would not be overwhelming.</p> <p>It would not significantly affect or detract from the key views as listed in the OWESG.</p> <p>The proposed development would also not significantly affect or detract from the Special Landscape Qualities of the Assynt - Coigach NSA and Kyle of Tongue NSA, and the Wild Land Qualities of the Ben Klibreck – Armine Forest and Foinaven – Ben Hee Wild Land Areas.</p>
Criterion 3: Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected			
<i>Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks.</i>	✓	The proposed development would not significantly the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.</i>	✓	
Criterion 4: The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected			
<i>The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc).</i>	✓	The proposed development would have no significant effects on the amenity of 'key recreational routes'. There would however be a significant effect on the views from parts of the Sustrans Cycle Route 1 (which overlaps with the A836). Significant visual effects would also affect the views from Ben Klibreck (Munro).
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.</i>	✓	<p>The visual effects although significant would not be 'dominant' and would not affect the key focus or attractions along this cycle route and from the summit of Ben Klibreck. The level of effect, although significant would not be overwhelming.</p> <p>No other routes, attractions or hill summits would be significantly affected by the proposed development.</p>
Criterion 5: The amenity of transport routes is respected			
<i>The amenity of transport routes is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access).</i>	✓	<p>The proposed development would have a localised significant effect on the views from a short stretch along the A836. The level of effect would not be overwhelming, such that the proposed development reflects the landscape character and 'fits' within the proposed landscape setting in terms of its relationship with the existing CRWF. The quality of the wind farm design also limits the potential for adverse effects on the amenity and visual appeal of this route, with the wind farm being capable of being appreciated as an object in the landscape in its own right.</p> <p>No other transport routes would be significantly affected by the proposed development.</p>
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Wind Turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes.</i>	✓	
Criterion 6: The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected			

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<i>The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.</i>	<p><i>The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include:</i></p> <p><i>Turbine height and proportions,</i></p> <p><i>density and spacing of turbines within developments,</i></p> <p><i>density and spacing of developments,</i></p> <p><i>typical relationship of development to the landscape.</i></p> <p><i>previously instituted mitigation measures</i> <i>Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.</i></p>	✓	<p>Given the location of the proposed development adjacent to the existing CRWF, the proposed development would maintain the existing distribution of wind farm groupings within the landscape and reflect the pattern of existing wind development clusters, located mainly to the south of the 35km study area beyond 21km distance.</p> <p>The proposed development would integrate with the existing CRWF and would appear as a logical infill as they are in the same alignment and are broadly within the visual envelope of the existing CRWF. Together, they will appear as one wind farm as a clearly recognisable scheme that 'fits' with the simplicity of the local landscape character, such that the aesthetics and visual composition of the turbines (appearing as a simple and reasonably balanced composition) can be appreciated in their own right where visible.</p> <p>The simple visual composition of the turbines reflects the character of the <i>Sweeping Moorland and Flows, and Rounded Hills LCTs</i>.</p>
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.</i>	✓	
Criterion 7: The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected			
<i>The need for separation between developments and / or clusters is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and / or clusters.</i>	✓	<p>The proposed development would be located adjacent to the existing CRWF and would appear as a cohesive group with the existing turbines.</p> <p>The proposed development maintains an appropriate and effective separation of over 21km from other existing wind farms including Achany, Rosehall and Lairg located to the south of the 35km study area.</p>
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and / or clusters.</i>	✓	
Criterion 8: The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected			
<i>The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance.</i>	✓	<p>The proposed development would be formed of slightly larger turbines than those of the existing CRWF, to which it would be adjacent. This difference in scale perceived from the majority of viewpoints would be negligible however from a small number of viewpoints, the larger turbines may appear to bring turbines slightly closer to the viewer. This may slightly reduce a perceived scale of the landscape in some locations which would contribute to landscape and visual effects. However, the proposed development would not adversely affect the receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance, being located within a suitably large scale landscape and designed to appear</p>
<i>Appearance Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and / or distance in the receptors' perception.</i>	✓	

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			as a simple and balanced wind farm with the existing CRWF.
Criterion 9: Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected			
<i>Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal.</i>	✓	The proposed development would be located adjacent to the existing CRWF and would appear as a cohesive group with the existing turbines. The proposed development maintains an appropriate and effective separation of over 21km from other existing wind farms including Achany, Rosehall and Lairg located to the south of the 35km study area.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.</i>	✓	
Criterion 10: Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected			
<i>Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected.</i>	<i>The extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape.</i>	✓	The proposed development would be located clearly within the <i>Sweeping Moorland and Flows, and Rounded Hills LCTs</i> with the 'simple' turbine layout being more suitable to the underlying landform and simpler landscape character. The LCTs has a strong visual rational for wind farm development, being cohesively located within a windy location. Despite localised significant visual effects, the overall integrity of the landscape character would be maintained.
<i>Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:</i>	<i>Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.</i>	✓	The Site is located in an area with potential for wind farm development, that which is made more suitable by the existing landscape character and landform of the area, which act to reduce the sensitivity of the Site and limit both the visibility and numbers of people close to the site who might otherwise view the proposed turbines.