

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CONSULTATION RESPONSE TO ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL

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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: FULL PLANNING PERMISSION FOR ERECTION OF 70M HIGH WIND MONITORING MAST, LAND TO THE SOUTH OF SCAR HILL RADIO STATION, CUSHNIE, ALFORD

APPLICANT: CUSHNIE WIND ENERGY LTD. C/O WEST COAST ENERGY, 18G LIBERTON BRAE, EDINBURGH

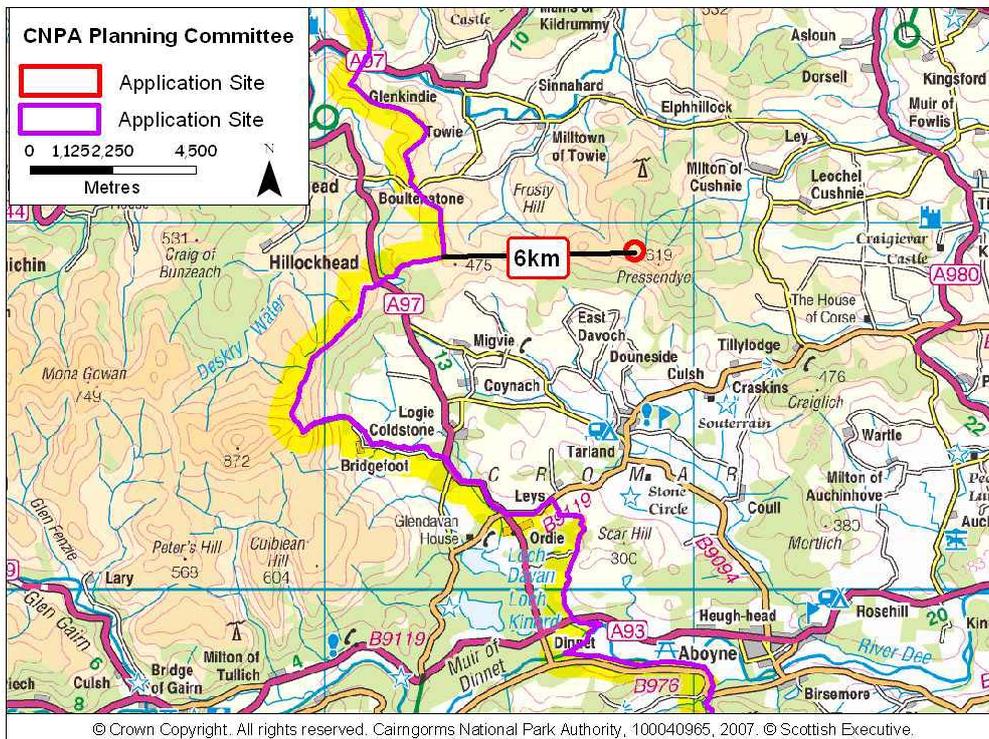


Fig. 1 - Location Plan

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

1. Aberdeenshire Council have requested a consultation response on a proposal for a 70 m high anemometer mast (wind monitoring) on a ridge line site which lies to the west of the summit of the hill known as “Pressendye” which rises above the Aberdeenshire settlement of Tarland on its north side.
2. The site lies approximately 5.5km from the eastern boundary of the Park at a height of 580m above sea level. This level is approximately 40m below the summit of Pressendye. The highest point within the Park in proximity to the site is Morven, the summit of which is 871 and is located approximately 12km away to the west.



Fig. 2 – Site Viewed from A93 at Loch Kinord



Fig. 3 – Site Viewed from Bottom of Morven Looking East

3. Permission is being sought for a period of 5 years. The mast is of standard construction and appearance and is stabilised by a series of restraining cables. It is understood that it is required to monitor wind speeds as a precursor to a potential wind turbine proposal on the site. At this stage, no details of this are confirmed.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

4. There are no specific policies relating to anemometer masts. However they are generally an integral part of windfarm development both prior to and during operation.

Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire Structure Plan 2001-2016

5. **Policy 26 (Four Tier Policy Areas for Minerals, Landfill, Land Raise and Wind Farm Proposals)** provides a four tier policy approach for wind farm developments. Proposals must conform to a sequential exploration of these tiered planning designations. The site lies in an area which is at least Tier 3 (local designations). This is because of its position within an Area of Landscape Significance. In such an area, development will only be permitted following careful consideration of its effect on local designations and subject to individual site and local circumstances. Where harmful effects are likely, it should be demonstrated that no suitable alternatives exist in Tier 4 areas.

6. **Policy 19 (Wildlife, Landscape and Land Resources)** advises that development that would have an adverse effect on, amongst other things, an Area of Landscape Significance, will only be permitted where it can be demonstrated that any damaging impact is considered acceptable overall or there is a public interest which outweighs the conservation interest.

Aberdeenshire Local Plan 2006

7. **Policy Inf7 (Renewable Energy Facilities)** advises that wind energy developments will be approved, in principle, if located, sited and designed in accordance with a range of criteria, and if they follow the four tier sequential approach contained in the Structure Plan.
8. **Policy Env5B (Areas of Landscape Significance)** advises that development within or adjacent to an AoLS will not be permitted where its scale, location or design will detract from the quality or character of the landscape, either in part or as a whole. Within the Cairngorms National Park greater weight will be given to the conservation and enhancement of the natural and cultural heritage of the area if the Park's aims are in conflict.

Cairngorms National Park Plan

9. Strategic objectives for "Conserving and Enhancing the Park", include an aim to ensure development complements and enhances the landscape character of the Park. It states that the potential impacts of public and private roads, masts, utilities, renewable energy developments (in and where relevant beyond the Park), road signs and all other man made artefacts will be assessed to ensure that designs and locations do not detract from the landscape character.

CONSULTATIONS

10. The CNPA Natural Heritage Group has advised that from the north east side of the Park, the proposed mast will be viewed over hills of a similar nature to the Park. From these areas the nature of the mast will be very different from the surrounding landscape. From the more south eastern parts of the Park, it will be viewed over a more varied agricultural landscape and so the complexity of this landscape will distract the eye from the mast. Overall, the distance from the Park and the relatively slight nature of the structure, means that the visual impact will not be particularly high. It is noted that the mast is for a temporary period and it is suggested that this be kept to a minimum. The conclusion is that the application will have a significant landscape and visual impact upon the Park due to the sensitivity of the adjacent area from the introduction of tall man made features. Overall, while the impact is negative it could be acceptable for a limited timescale. On balance therefore there is no landscape objection. In advising this though, and while recognising that it is not a material consideration at

this stage, the CNPA's Natural Heritage group have stated that there would be concerns about the acceptability in landscape terms of a wind farm in this location because of the impact upon the character of the Park.

APPRAISAL

11. Although the site lies outwith the Park boundaries, it is in a prominent position, not only within its local Howe of Cromar landscape, but also when viewed from various locations in the Park. These include from Morven to the west and including its lower eastern slopes and approaches, and from the A93 North Deeside Road at Loch Kinord. It may also be possible to view the site from further afield, at positions along the South Deeside Road between Ballater and Dinnet, at elevated positions in the Glen Tanar area, and including Mount Keen. In addition, there are panoramic views towards the eastern side of the Park and in particular Morven, from the Queens View and Craiglich Hill to the east of Tarland, and where Pressendye and the site form a significant feature.
12. I therefore consider that Pressendye and the site are an integral component of the landscape which forms part of the designated Area of Landscape Significance in the locality and which extends into the eastern side of the National Park. Being within 6km of the boundary, the range of hills enclosing Tarland on its north side, and including the site and Pressendye, are therefore regarded as important landscape features in the setting of this side of the Park. As such, and as stated by the CNPA's Natural Heritage Group, any proposal for a man made structure of this scale and height will be highly visible from areas both within and outwith the Park. As stated by the CNPA's Natural Heritage Group, the mast will have a generally negative impact on the character and setting of the Park.
13. Nevertheless, the mast is proposed for a temporary period only. As with others, the visual and landscape impact is therefore only a temporary rather than permanent one. This said though, 5 years does seem to be a lengthy period time. From other similar proposals, the normal period required for wind monitoring is 12-24 months.

Conclusion

14. **The conclusion is that the proposed anemometer mast will be visible looking from important locations both from and towards the National Park. However, as a temporary expedient, I do not feel the visual and landscape impact on the setting of the Park, is sufficient to raise an objection to the proposal. Nevertheless, it should be suggested to Aberdeenshire Council that, if permission is granted, it is only for a temporary period of a maximum of 24 months. In addition, whilst it does not form part of the considerations at present, I do feel that it is appropriate to raise**

with Aberdeenshire Council at this stage, a degree of concern about the potential significant permanent visual and landscape impact, of any future wind turbine proposal at this site, on the setting of the Park. In this respect, I suggest that we request further consultation on any future proposals.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE AIMS OF THE PARK

Conserve and Enhance the Natural and Cultural Heritage of the Area

15. As stated above, I consider that the proposal will have a visual and landscape impact on the setting of the eastern side of the National Park. This has negative implications for this aim. However, this negative impact will only be short term.

Promote Sustainable Use of Natural Resources

16. At this stage, and being outwith the National Park, the proposal is not directly relevant to this aim, other than being a precursor for a renewable energy scheme.

Promote Understanding and Enjoyment of the Area

17. Again, being outwith the National Park, there is no direct implications for this aim. However, any short term visual and landscape impacts on views from and towards the Park would be considered to be negative in relation to people's enjoyment of the area.

Promote Sustainable Economic and Social Development of the Area

18. The development will not contribute to the social and economic development of the Park.

RECOMMENDATION

19. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation to pass the following comments to Aberdeenshire Council:
 1. The CNPA considers that the siting of the anemometer mast will have a negative landscape and visual impact on the setting of this side of the National Park and the wider Area of Landscape Significance. However, the CNPA considers that the magnitude of the impact will be generally low and the duration of time relatively short. The CNPA therefore raises no objection, in principle, to the siting of the proposed anemometer mast on a temporary basis.
 2. The CNPA suggests that, if approval is granted, it should only be for a reduced temporary period from that applied for. The suggestion is for a maximum period of 24 months.
 3. The CNPA recognises that the potential for a wind turbine development in this location, is not a material consideration. However, the CNPA wishes to raise a general concern at this stage, about the potentially significant visual and landscape impact of such a development, on the setting of the National Park. As such, the CNPA would be grateful, if it could be consulted further on any future wind turbine proposals, at the EIA scoping and application stages.

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25 April 2007
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