

# **Cairn Duhie Wind Farm: CNPA Landscape Comment**

## **1.0 The Development**

The Cairn Duhie wind farm is a proposal for 20 wind turbines 110m in height. The site is on the Dava Moor north of the National Park. The closest of the proposed turbines is approximately 8km from the Park boundary. As no part of the development as proposed would be constructed within the National Park all effects as described are indirect in nature.

## **2.0 Environmental Statement Methodology and Visual Material**

The analysis and assessment of impacts on the Special Landscape Qualities of the Park is poor with conclusions drawn without adequate consideration of the special landscape qualities relevant to the areas of the Park affected. This should have taken the form of a considered qualitative appraisal as advised in our response to the scoping report.

The photographic visualisations are good with effective use of the single frame approach at both 50mm and 75mm.

## **3.0 The Cairngorms National Park**

### **3.1 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)**

The blade tip and hub ZTVs (figures 7.1 and 7.2) demonstrate that visibility of the proposal from within the CNP will be confined to a limited number of locations on, and immediately inside, the northern boundary (at distances of approximately 11km to 12km from the windfarm), views from the Cromdales (at distances of approximately 19km to 21km) and views further afield on Meal a Bhuachaille and Geal Charn (at approximately 28km) and Cairngorm (at 35km plus). There is also a very small area of tip-only visibility on Craigellachie west of Aviemore. The ridge along the northern edge of the Park effectively shields the lower lying parts of the Park.

### **3.2. Landscape Character Impacts**

The proposed wind farm development is located in the Uplands landscape character area (figure 7.3a). The Strathdearn Hills is the landscape character area that extends along the northern edge of the National Park both within and out with the Park boundary and is sensitive to this type of change. However, there is separation between the Strathdearn Hills character area and the site, and from the perspective of the Park the wind farm will be associated with the transitional upland character areas between the Strathdearn Hills and the wooded hills and farmland to the north. The experience of some parts of the

Strathdearn landscape area will be affected but the scale of change is judged to be small. The ES concludes at 7.166 that overall there would be no significant impact on the Strathdearn Hills landscape character area, and I concur with this assessment.

### **3.3 Visual Impacts**

#### **3.3.1 From the Northern Edge of the Park**

Viewpoint 13 on Carn Allt Laoigh at 11.8km from the wind farm is immediately north of the Park Boundary (by about 20m) and is a view typical of a number of the minor summits along the northern edge of the Park (ES 7.386). These summits are relatively little-visited but the ES has none the less judged that recreational walkers in this location would be susceptible to change in views.

From this viewpoint, and I judge also others along the northern edge of the Park, the wind farm will appear to sit on the moorland edge that slopes away from the Park. The extent of the wind farm and the individual turbines are clearly visible and I concur with the ES assessment that the visual impact on receptors in this location would be significant.

From this and other similar viewpoints, the windfarm sits partially behind the hill of Aitnoch and will generally be seen against a varied backdrop of lower wooded hills and distant farmland. These aspects will serve to reduce the visual prominence and contrast of the turbines, and mean that the wind farm is unlikely, apart from in unusual light conditions, to be a dominant feature in the view. I concur with the ES assessment of the level of significance here as being moderate.

#### **3.3.2 From the Cromdales**

Viewpoint 17 is at Creagan a' Chaise at the southern end of the Cromdale Hills. From here the wind farm would be seen on the moorland to the north west of Berry Burn and Pauls Hill. The scale of change to this view due to Cairn Duhie on its own is assessed to be small and the visual impact minor. I concur with this assessment.

#### **3.3.3 From the A939**

Viewpoint 10 is on the Dava Way adjacent to the A939. It is 7.9km and **2.3km north of the point where the A939 leaves the CNP**. Viewpoint 10 represents views from along the Dava Way, the A939 and hills either side of the Anaboard Burn valley to the edge of the National Park (7.361). No existing wind farms are visible from this location, and at the moment there are no proposed wind farms, other than Cairn Duhie, that would be visible. The turbines will be seen as a compact group across the horizon. Overall the ES assessment of visual impact for this viewpoint (and by implication that small part of the Park that sits some 600m east of this viewpoint) and for the A939 as a route, would be major. I concur with this assessment.

The experience of crossing the boundary of the NP on the A939 is reinforced by the sense of enclosure created by the low wooded hills that form the southern edge to the Dava Moor. There would be no visibility of the wind farm as one crosses the boundary of the Park on the A939, but the ZTV shows possible visibility immediately north of the boundary. Given the predicted major impact at viewpoint 10, I would anticipate that as one moves northwards from the Park Boundary there will be an increasing visual impact to the level of significant adverse impact. However, this is visual impact upon those experiencing the landscape of Dava Moor and not an impact on those experiencing the landscape of the Park.

When heading south towards the National Park one is several kilometres beyond the wind farm site before the hills and mountains of the CNP begin to dominate the view, and so the experience of the landscapes of the Park and its immediate setting from this perspective would be largely unaffected.

## **Cumulative Effects**

### **Cumulative landscape impacts**

The proposed wind farm development is located in the Uplands landscape character area and will echo and be seen as part of a pattern of wind farm development within the upland and moorland landscape character areas that run east/west between the Park and the Moray Firth. This is illustrated in the wireline images in technical appendix 7.4. It is judged that there will not be further significant cumulative impact on these landscape character areas or the Strathdearn hills.

### **Cumulative Visual Impacts**

In combined views from viewpoint 13 the wind farm will sit between the array of wind farms further east (Berry Burn and Pauls Hill and Hill of Glaschyl (recently refused)) and Tom nan Clach. Introducing a new wind farm into this gap will increase its prominence as a feature in the landscape, however it has a similar context to the windfarms to the east and may read as an extension of this array. The closer, skylining Tom nan Clach wind farm will dominate the combined view. and the additional effect of Cairn Duhie is unlikely to be significant. I therefore concur with the view that from this viewpoint Cairn Duhie will not give rise to significant impact in addition to the wind farms already constructed and consented.

ES figures 7.8, 7.11a and 7.29 and technical appendix wireline images indicate that there will also be combined visibility of Cairn Duhie plus Berry Burn, Pauls Hill and Tom nan Clach in views from a few localised high points further east of viewpoint 13 on the Park boundary and from the Cromdales as well as from Meal a Bhuachaille and the Cairngorm. The additional effect of Cairn Duhie in these views is likely to be similar to that described above, apart from in views experienced from a small area of moorland slopes east of the A939 where turbines may appear on the skyline.

**The proposed wind farm would have no significant impact on the landscape character area that encompasses the northern fringe of the NP, and a moderate and significant visual impact in a small number of relatively little-visited locations along the northern boundary of the National Park. At these locations the extent over which a significant visual impact would be experienced is very limited, and I would recommend that this level of visual impact is not unacceptable.**

**Cairn Duhie would broadly reflect the existing pattern of wind farms on the northern side of the Park, and the additional visual impact attributable to Cairn Duhie in views from the Park will not be significant.**

### **3.4 Wildness and other Special Qualities (NPPP policy priority 2.3)**

Visibility of Cairn Duhie from the central massif coincides with areas that contain a number of Munros and Corbetts, and are categorised as being of high wildness character (CNP SPG on Wildness) and an SNH Core Wild Land area. However, the distance of the wind farm away from these areas of high wildness (35km plus) is such that there is unlikely to be a significant impact upon the experience of wildness or other special landscape qualities.

The special landscape qualities of relevance along the northern edge of the Park and in the Cromdale Hills are the medium sense of wildness, the open moorlands and views that take in landscapes both cultural and natural. The addition of the Cairn Duhie wind farm is unlikely to have a significant impact on the experience of these qualities beyond the effect of those wind farms already constructed and consented.

**In my view there would be no significant loss in the quality and extent of wildness that can be experienced in the National Park, nor significant effects on other special landscape qualities experienced within the Park.**

### **3.5 National Park Setting (NPPP policy priority 1.3)**

Contiguity and consistency of landscape character across the park boundary, combined with intervisibility between the Park and its landscape context, are parameters which contribute to the Park's landscape 'setting'.

From the viewpoints assessed, the turbines appear to be on the edge of the high moorland that extends northwards from the Park boundary and in views from the Park would generally be seen in association with the transitional uplands and forested moorland that dip away northwards towards the Moray Firth.

When heading south on the A939 there is intervisibility between the Park and its context, but one is several kilometres beyond the wind farm site before the landscapes of the CNP begin to dominate the view, and so the setting of the Park from outside looking in would not be adversely affected by the wind farm.

When heading north on the A939 there is no intervisibility between the wind farm and the Park, so from this perspective the landscape setting of the Park would also be unaffected. However, there will be a significant adverse visual impact on the Dava moor landscape as experienced from the A939, and this may be associated in memory with the National Park but this is not an issue of the National Park landscape setting *per se*.

It is my conclusion that the juxtaposition of viewer locations, turbine positions and landscape character (landform and land use) here means that the wind farm will not tend to be associated with the immediate landscape setting of the Park, either looking out from the Park or when approaching.

**I conclude that the Cairn Duhie proposal would not have a significant adverse effect on the landscape setting of the NP.**

### **3.6 Integrity of the Designation and the Qualities for which it was designated (SPP draft)**

At para 7.480 the ES concludes “*The proposed wind farm development, when assessed in the LVIA and the cumulative assessment, would have limited impacts upon the Cairngorms National Park designation and would not significantly affect the integrity of the designation, nor the qualities for which it has been designated.*”

I concur with the view that Cairn Duhie wind farm would not significantly affect the integrity of the National Park. Whilst there are a number of locations along the northern edge of the Park from which one would experience a significant visual impact, overall it is my conclusion that this wind farm would not have a significant adverse effect on the Special Landscape Qualities of the National Park to the extent that it would fail to meet SPP or NPPP policy.

However, Cairn Duhie will add to the pattern of wind farms around the Park and it will have a cumulative effect, and though this may be minor and non-significant in EIA terms, it will contribute to the effect that wind farms have on the experience and appreciation of the Park’s landscape. This type of incremental landscape change and the assessment of each new wind farm proposal against a continuously moving baseline is a concern.