

CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED:

Dell 2 Wind Farm – Consultation from Scottish Government Energy Consents and Deployment Unit

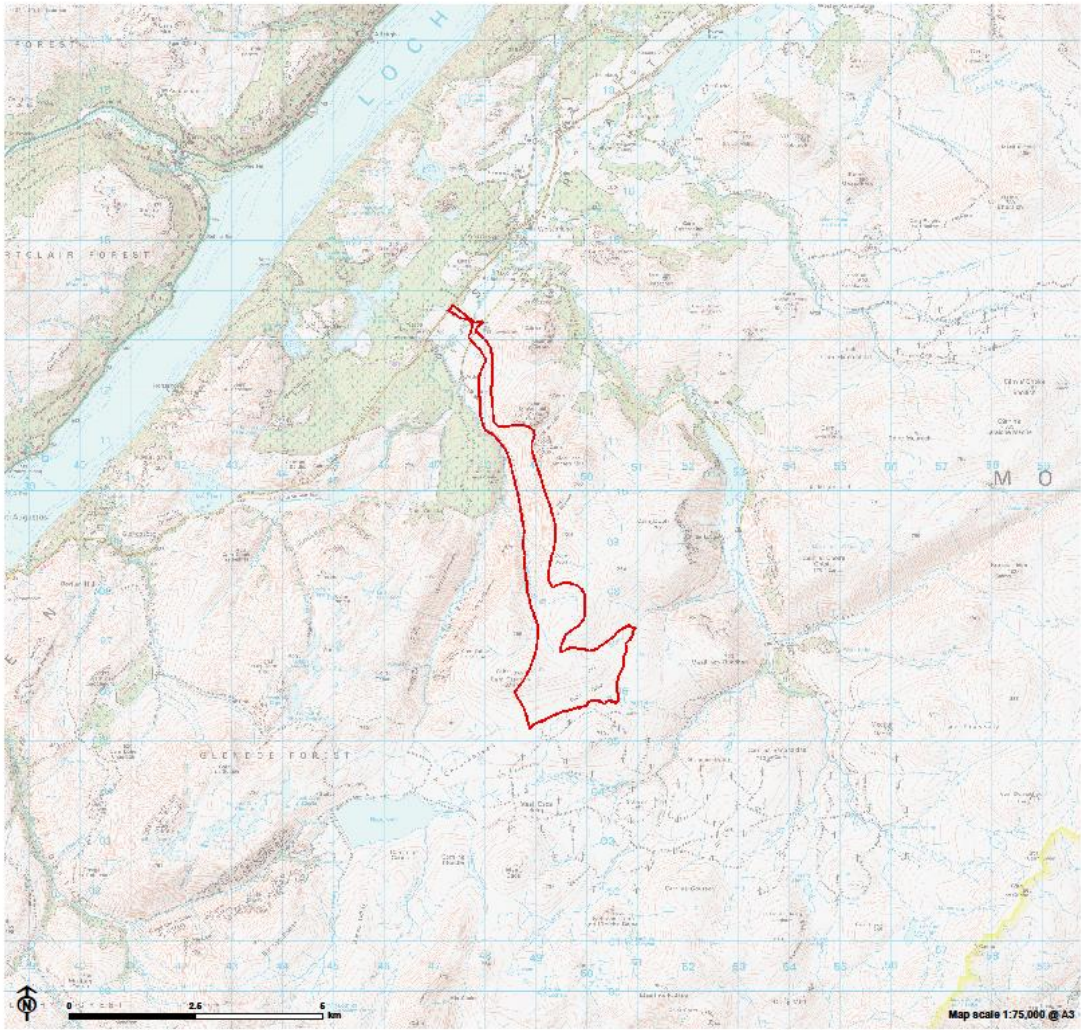
REFERENCE: 2023/0068/PAC (ECU00003440)

APPLICANT: Dell Wind Farm Ltd

DATE CALLED-IN: 11 March 2024

RECOMMENDATION: No Objection

CASE OFFICER: Sarah Fletcher - Planning Officer



Dell 2 Wind Farm EIA Report
for Dell Wind Farm Ltd

Figure 1.1: Site Location

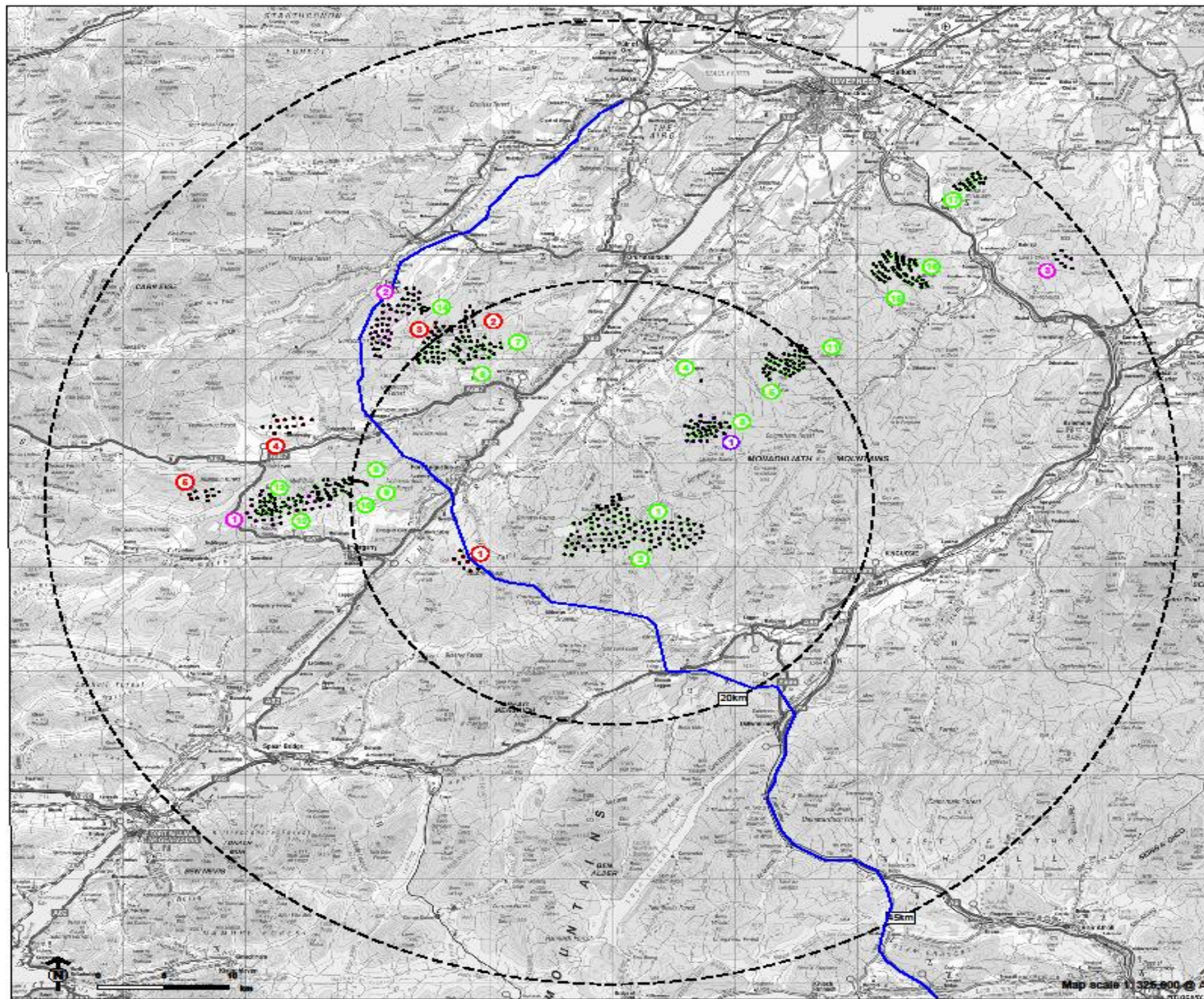
Site boundary





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Figure 4.4a: Cumulative Site Plan (45km)



- Proposed Turbine Locations
- Study Areas
- Built and Consented Sites

1. Stronealag
2. Cloiche
3. Corriegarth
4. Easter Aberchalder
5. Dunmaglass
6. Bhiarsaidh
7. Bhiarsaidh Extension
8. Millennium
9. Millennium Extensions
10. Millennium South
11. Aberarder
12. Beinneun
13. Beinneun Extension
14. Corrimony
15. Glen Kyllachy
16. Farr
17. Moy

- Sites at Planning Application Stage

1. Culschy
2. Loch Liath
3. Chraichain
4. Tomchrasky
5. Bunloinn

- Sites at Appeal

1. Corriegarth Extension

- Sites at Scoping Stage

1. Beinneun II
2. Fasnakyle
3. Bainespick

- Beauly to Denny 400kV Overhead Transmission Line



PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the committee decision and subsequent consultation response to the Scottish Government Energy Consents & Deployment Unit (ECDU) on an application submitted under Section 36 of the Electricity Act 1989 for a proposed wind farm located to the southwest of the Cairngorms National Park. The Scottish Government are the determining Authority for this application as the output is more than 50 MW. The application is accompanied by an Environmental Report (ER), which presents the findings of the applicant's Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA).
2. The planning issues to be considered are confined to the effects of the proposed wind farm on the landscape character and Special Landscape Qualities (SLQs) of the National Park. All other matters, such as ecology, noise, general amenity, etc, are assessed by the decision maker (Scottish Ministers) with advice from statutory consultees.
3. Under the current working agreement on roles in landscape casework between NatureScot and the Park Authority, NatureScot lead on the provision of advice on the potential effects on the SLQs by proposals outwith the Cairngorms National Park. Their brief advice has been used to inform this report.

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4. The Site (wind farm and site access) is located approximately 11km east of Fort Augustus, on the western edge of the Monadhliath Mountains (indicated on the EIA cumulative wind farm Figure 4.4a above). As such the proposal is wholly located within the administrative boundary of The Highland Council and outside the National Park.
5. With respect to the current cumulative context there are numerous other existing and consented wind farms in the surrounding area, plus several at proposed application stage. Immediate to the Dell 2 Wind Farm site boundary, the operational development boundary of Stronelairg Wind Farm sits, the 67 turbines (56 at 135m blade tip height, and 11 at 125m blade tip height) extending south and eastwards away from Dell 2. Corriegarth Wind Farm comprising 23 turbines (120m blade tip height) exists approximately 7.8km north-east of the Dell 2 site.
6. In terms of consented but not yet operational development, Cloiche Wind Farm (37 turbines at 149.9m blade tip height) is located approximately 2.6km to the south-west of Dell 2, and an extension to Corriegarth for 16 turbines (149.9m blade tip height) is currently at appeal and sits approximately 7.3km to the north-east of the site. This cumulative relationship of existing, consented and proposed wind farms to Dell 2 are illustrated on the applicants EIA Report Figure 4.4a above.

7. The proposed development would comprise up to 9 turbines (four turbines up to 190m blade tip and five up to 200m blade tip, both in an upright position). As the overall turbine height is above 150m, the turbines require CAA lighting on 5 of the 9 turbines (typically cardinal point turbines). Associated infrastructure includes approximately 16.1km of onsite access tracks, two borrow pits as well as other infrastructure and works (such as substation, underground cabling, and a permanent anemometer mast etc). The proposed vehicular site access is off the B862, running down the eastern side of Loch Ness (see Figure 4.4a) above). It is expected that the proposed wind farm would have an estimated total installed capacity in the region of 60MW, although no exact figure has been provided by the applicant.
8. The nearest turbine (and part of the development proposal in totality) would be approximately 8.8 km to the northwest of the closest part of the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park.
9. Theoretical visibility of the proposed wind farm from within the National Park is shown by the applicant's EIAR Figure 4.2.3 (**Appendix 1**). When considering the cumulative visual effects, the applicant's Figure 4.5.1 (**Appendix 2**) demonstrates that there would be negligible visibility of the proposed wind farm on its own from within the National Park. The majority of where it would be seen from is already influenced by visibility of a number of other existing and consented wind farms.
10. Visualisations from three viewpoints were provided in the applicant's EIAR to demonstrate the predicted level of visibility that would be had from on the boundary of the National Park:
 - a) VP8 at summit of Geal Charn (Monadhliath), approximately 11km southeast of the closest turbine
 - b) VP10 at the summit of Carn Ban (Monadhliath), approximately 14km east of the closest turbine
 - c) VP18 at the summit of A' Mharconaich, approximately 30km southeast of the closest turbine
11. Committee members should familiarise themselves with the above visualisations online before the meeting. The visualisations associated with each view point are available to the public by searching the application documents on the ECU website: <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00003440>. For the relevant figures within the applicants EIAR Volume 4 Part 1, Chapter 4, Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment:
 - a) VP 8 Figure 4.3.8a-d
 - b) VP10 Figure 4.3.10a-d
 - c) VP 18 Figure 4.3.18a-d

RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY

12. In January 2014 the Applicant submitted a planning application to The Highland Council for a proposed development comprising 14 turbines with a blade tip height of 130.5m (with capacity output of 42MW). Further Environmental Information was submitted in March 2016 to address comments in relation to landscape and visual effects of the access track and lowering turbine tip height to 115.5m on four of the turbines and changed cumulative baseline with Stronelairst being challenged at Judicial Review.
13. NatureScot (in discussion with the National Park Authority) responded to The Highland Council on both the original and subsequent Dell Wind Farm applications, citing that if consent was withdrawn for Stronelairst then their position would be one of objection for the Dell proposal. Consent for Stronelairst was upheld. In this context NatureScot maintained their non-objection as they considered that there would be no significant effects on any national designations such as National Scenic Areas or the Cairngorms National Park.
14. The original Dell Wind Farm application was refused planning permission by The Highland Council in October 2017 in relation to landscape and visual effects of the access track. Planning permission was granted on appeal in August 2019. The extant planning permission (within the same red line boundary) remains valid until August 2024. If the proposed development as currently presented is approved, then it will be constructed as a replacement of the permitted proposal.

PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT

15. The proposed development is located wholly outwith the National Park and therefore the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan policies do not apply. However, an assessment of the proposal must be in accordance with National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) and have regard to the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).

National Policy

16. National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4) published 13th February 2023 sets out national planning policies that reflect Scottish Ministers priorities for the development and use of land, as well as for operation of the planning system. The content of NPF4 forms the national element of the statutory development plan, which also includes the relevant Local Development Plan. Decisions on planning applications (and Section 36 applications) are to be made in accordance with the development plan, and as such NPF4.

17. Policy relating specifically to National Parks and development management can be found in Policy 4: Natural Places and Policy 11: Energy. In general terms Policy 4a cites that development proposals which by virtue of type, location or scale will have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment, will not be supported.
18. NPF 4 Policy, 4c, specifically applies to a National Park and states that “development proposals that will affect a National Park...will only be supported where:
 - a) the objectives of designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or
 - b) any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance”.
19. NPF4 Policy 4c) clarifies that the policy test applies where development proposals may affect a nationally designated landscape, and so can be applied to development proposals outwith the National Park boundary, but potentially affecting it. Of relevance to the generation of wind energy development nationally and therefore to the proposed development:
 - a) NPF4 National Development 3 ‘Strategic Renewable Electricity Generation and Transmission Infrastructure’ confirms that this class of national development supports renewable electricity generation, repowering and expansion of the electricity grid. It incorporates three types of development, including on and offshore electricity generation, including electricity storage, from renewables exceeding 50 megawatts capacity. The Dell 2 Wind Farm proposal falls within a National Development 3.
 - b) NPF4 Policy 11 Energy further clarifies that:
 - c) “Development proposals for wind farms in National Parks...will not be supported: and
 - d) Development proposals that impact on international or national designations will be assessed in relation to Policy 4”.

Strategic Policy

20. The Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP) 2022 – 2027 is required under section 11 of the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000. It is the management plan for the Cairngorms National Park approved by Scottish Ministers. The NPPP sets out how all those with a responsibility for the National Park will coordinate their work to tackle the most important issues. There is a duty for decision makers to have regard to the NPPP, a requirement set out in Section 14 of the Act. As such, the NPPP is a material consideration in planning decisions.

21. The NPPP identifies that the landscapes of the National Park are valued by many and underpin the area's economy. It contains policies to safeguard landscape interests. Of relevance to wind farm development proposals are policies A4 and C2a.
22. Policy A4 seeks to conserve and enhance the SLQs. Policy C2a seeks to support development of a low carbon economy and increase renewable energy generation where this is compatible with conserving the SLQs. In relation to wind farm development, the policy states that "large scale wind turbines are not compatible with the landscape character or special qualities of the National Park. They are inappropriate within the National Park, or where outside the Park they significantly adversely affect its landscape character or special landscape qualities". If a proposal fails policy C2a, it would also be in conflict with policy A4, which seeks to conserve and enhance the SLQs.

CONSULTATIONS

NatureScot advice

23. In accordance with the NatureScot/CNPA casework agreement, NatureScot advised that they are not planning to provide detailed landscape and visual advice for the Dell 2 S36 application.
24. In terms of landscape and visual impacts, NatureScot's formal response to the application will typically state that "We advise that the proposal will not have an adverse effect on the integrity of the Cairngorms National Park or the objectives of the designation. In relation to wider landscape and visual impacts, we consider that the proposed development would not raise issues of national interest, therefore we will not be providing advice on this case. This is not to say that the introduction of the proposed development would not cause some significant landscape or visual effects, rather that we consider it unlikely that potential effects would meet our threshold in respect of our national remit for landscapes." This response signifies that NatureScot does not consider that the proposal contravenes the NPF4 Policy 4 test in terms of levels of significant effects on special landscape qualities or the integrity of the National Park designation.

APPRAISAL

25. The proposal will sit beyond the existing much larger development at Stronelairg. Depending upon the angle of view, the proposal may partially extend spread of turbines in addition to Stronelairg (as illustrated in VP10) or will be viewed wholly beyond Stronelairg (VP8). So, the principle of a wind farm at the location has already been accepted (also reflected in the current consent for Dell Wind Farm at this site). Given the greater distance between the National Park to the Dell 2 proposal (over that of Stronelairg), whilst the turbine heights proposed are

significantly greater, this difference in scale relationship is tempered by the increased distance, such that Dell2 typically reads as an extension to Stronelairg.

26. The larger scale of turbine proposed entails that aviation lighting is required on 5 of the turbines. This could potentially introduce new significant effects on the Dark Skies SLQ. As the lighting will be on cardinal turbines, those closest to the National Park will be lit. The EIAR in the assessment of night-time lighting, incorporates industry standard CAA mitigation which reduces effects of artificial lighting, such that:
- a) Medium intensity steady red (2,000 candela) lights will be introduced on the nacelles of 5 turbines.
 - b) The lights on these turbines to be capable of being dimmed to 10% of peak intensity when visibility exceeds 5km, as measured by sensors on turbine hubs.
 - c) As the minimum distance between the National Park boundary and the nearest lit turbines is approximately 8km, it is considered that this agreed mitigation would substantially mitigate any significant effects on the Dark Skies SLQ.
27. The policies of the NPPP and NPF4 set out how proposals outwith the boundary of the National Park should be considered in terms of effects on the National Park. In the policy context of the NPF4 and NPPP, consideration is required of the effects of the proposed development, on landscape character and the SLQs, both alone and cumulatively with other wind farms in the surrounding area.
28. There are a number of existing and consented wind farms in the area surrounding the proposed wind farm, as shown on page 2 of this report. Adding the proposed Dell 2 wind farm to the baseline would not significantly add to the existing level of effects, either alone or in combination with other existing or consented wind farms. This aspect is well illustrated by the cumulative ZTV in Appendix 2 and presented in the photomontage from Viewpoint 8.
29. Whilst there is some increase in the horizontal extent of turbines from some viewpoints and in the visual density of turbines, this is all set within the context of views to existing wind energy development. The nature and significance of the effects from the proposed wind farm are such that the proposal is therefore considered to comply with National Park Partnership Plan policy C2a.
30. There is some tension with policy A4, as by potentially increasing already significant effects on SLQ, the proposal would not technically conserve or enhance the SLQs of the National Park. However, the area is already affected by existing and consented wind farms, and the location has consent for a wind farm (albeit of a greater number of smaller turbines). The addition of the proposed wind farm would not significantly add to the existing level of effects. Therefore, the proposal is not considered to breach policy A4.
31. When considering the localised and limited nature and significance of the effects, in an area already affected by other wind farm developments, the proposal would

not compromise the integrity or objectives of the National Park. The proposal is therefore also considered to be in accordance with NPF4.

32. For these reasons, it is considered that CNPA should **not** object to the proposed wind farm development.

RECOMMENDATION

<p>That Members of the Committee confirm that CNPA does not object to the application for the proposed Dell 2 Wind Farm wind farm.</p>
