

AGENDA ITEM 9

APPENDIX 2

2015/0015/PAC

LANDSCAPE OFFICER ADVICE

Saddle Hill Wind Farm: CNPA Landscape Comment

1.0 The Development

The Saddle Hill wind farm is a proposal for 14 wind turbines (reduced from 22 at the time of scoping) 115m in height. The site is south of the National Park, 10km north of Blairgowrie and east of the existing Drumderg wind farm. The closest of the proposed turbines is approximately 7.5 km 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 L&V effects is consistent with LVIA 3, the impacts on the Special Landscape Qualities of the Park relevant to the potential area of effect are considered.

The photographic visualisations are poor with no use of the single frame approach at either 50mm or 75mm. Though the revised guidance came into force a few weeks after this application was lodged it would have been good practice/helpful to include these materials.

CNPA requested in scoping response that all maps include the CNP boundary. Apart from the maps of designations, no maps include the CNP boundary.

3.0 The Cairngorms National Park

3.1 Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV)

The blade tip and hub ZTVs (figures 8.5a, 8.5b and 8.3) demonstrate that visibility of the proposal from within the CNP will extend to the following areas;

- the slopes and summits of Caenlochan Forest including Glas Maol (at approx. 22km),
- The munro summits of Beinn a Ghlo at approx. 26km.
- The tops and higher south west facing slopes between Glen Prosen and Glen Clova including the hills of Driesh and Mayar,
- and some of the area around loch Brandy and Loch whirral.
- hillsides on west side of Glen Isla

3.2. Landscape Character

The site is on an upland area in the vicinity of the Highland Boundary Fault, in landscape character area Highland Summits and Plateaux which that in broad landscape character terms (SNH LCA level 2 mapping) is a continuation of the character type found within the Park which is called 'The Angus Glens Uplands' (CNP Landscape Character Assessment

2009). The landform steps down from the Park boundary towards Strath More and gradually becomes less topographically varied. The site where the wind farm is situated has a broad simple and large open character with fewer distinct hills. In views from the Park the wind farm appears very much at the edge of the uplands that extend out from the Park.

The LVIA concludes that the local landscape character of the immediate area will be affected significantly (8.8.20) but that the broader character area Highland Summits and Plateaux will not. I concur with this assessment.

3.3 Visual Impacts

All of the assessment viewpoints in the Park are elevated and are representative of the views likely to be gained by walkers and skiers etc. All are assessed as having a high sensitivity to change.

3.3.1 Viewpoint 14 Meall Odhar at 12km, a summit of 686m on the Park boundary west of the A93 at 12km from the wind farm. The views here would be similar to those experienced on Meall Uiane which is 2km to the north and also on the Park Boundary. In this view the 14 turbines of Saddle Hill extend across a broad ridge at a scale that is compatible with the landform character. I concur with the assessment conclusion that the effect is moderate and not significant. Cumulatively the windfarm will appear east of and in front of the consented Tullymurdoch wind farm resulting in overlapping of turbines. The effect of the addition of Saddle Hill to this arrangement of consented and operational wind farms is to introduce complexity and some visual confusion in respect of the relationship with Tullymurdoch.

3.3.2 Viewpoint 17 Driesh at 17.7km, a munro within the NP (a similar view is likely to be experienced from Mayar). The 14 turbines will appear as a group of similar scale to Drumderg(19km) in an open and large scale landscape beyond the higher summits and moorland that extend out from the NP. The magnitude of change within the panoramic views experienced from this location, of Saddle Hill on its own, has been assessed as low to negligible, leading to a moderate to slight and not significant effect. I concur with this assessment. Cumulatively the wind farm will appear as an extension to the consented Tullymurdoch (20km) and Welton of Creuchies (25km) wind farms which overlap. This grouping of 3 windfarms will be separated by a small gap from Drumderg and will read as a single windfarm though with variable relationships to the underlying landform and in contrast to the more compact Drumderg nearby.

3.3.3 Viewpoint 22 Glas Maol (19km) a munro within the Park, representative of views for a number of high points in Caenlochan Forest. From these elevated locations the Saddle Hill windfarm appears on the moorland ridge beyond the prominent hill of Mount Blair. On its own the wind farm appears to fit with the nature and scale of the landform, and the change will be low to negligible leading to a slight and not significant effect. However, cumulatively Saddle Hill wind farm will appear to sit in front of Tullymurdoch (22km) and next to Welton of Creuchies (27km). This grouping of 3 wind farms ranging from 17.7km

distance to 25km distance will as a single windfarm with a variable relationship to the underlying landform and in contrast to the more compact Drumderg nearby.

3.3.4 Viewpoint 23 Loch Brandy (23.3km) within the Park, representative of views that walkers may have in the vicinity of Lochs Brandy or Whirral. From this location Saddle Hill wind farm appears as a compact wind farm with 2 or 3 outliers on and behind a moorland ridge and just below the horizon. In the panoramic views from Loch Brandy the change from Saddle Hill alone will be low to negligible leading to a slight and not significant effect. Cumulatively Saddle Hill in this view will occupy a gap between Tullymurdoch and Drumderg such that Tullymurdoch, Saddle Hill and Drumderg (which from this viewpoint are at similar distances) are likely to read as a single large wind farm.

3.3.5 Viewpoint 26 Beinn A Ghlo (28.3km) from this location Saddle Hill wind farm appears in a simple linear arrangement on a moorland ridge just below the horizon. At this distance and in the context of the broad panoramic views the change arising from Saddle Hill alone will be low to negligible leading to a slight and not significant effect. Cumulatively Saddle Hill in this view will appear as an eastward extension of Tully Murdoch and Drumderg such that Tullymurdoch, Saddle Hill and Drumderg read as a single large wind farm.

3.3.6 Glen Isla- Analysis of the ZTV and the ES viewpoint 10 at Forter (which is not in the NP) suggest that there may be visibility of up to 5 blades tips at two locations on the public road in Glen Isla. These locations which I would judge to be very limited are a) close to Auchavan which is in the NP and 13km from the wind farm, and b) on the public road at about 1.5km outside the NP and 10km from the wind farm. Northward views as one heads up Glen Isla into the Park would be unaffected. Where visible the blades would be seen tipping the horizon on the hills that form the terminus to views to the south. I conclude that the wind farm could have a slight to moderate visual effect on very localised parts of Glen Isla. The degree of effect will in part depend on the amount of screening that trees and woodland within the glen provide, this cannot be ascertained from the bareground ZTVs

3.3.7 A93 Scenic Route - There are no views from the A93 within the NP or from the A93 until one is 10km outside the NP

3.4 Cumulative Effects

The effects of Saddle Hill wind farm on its own are assessed as not significant from all viewpoints in the NP, and I concur with this assessment. However, in actuality the Saddle Hill wind farm will never be seen on its own as Drumderg is operational and Tullymurdoch is consented. So, in this case it is the cumulative effects that most need to be considered and in particular the combined effects of those wind farms that are close and viewed simultaneously. Tullymurdoch and Drumderg are in close proximity. In different views from the Park (from the north, north west and north east) the relative position of these windfarms changes, but they are always seen close together. When Saddle Hill is added it

makes for more complex arrangements in which the three wind farms are seen strung out as one large wind farm, or as overlapping or closely associated groups of turbines. The magnitude of these effects in my view is greater than 'negligible' which is how they are assessed in the ES for all viewpoints in the Park, but for Meall Odhar (low). In the views from the Park the addition of Saddle Hill results in an increase in the apparent scale and visual complexity of wind farms in the landscape leading, in my view, to at least moderate effects on the visual amenity of walkers in some well-visited upland parts in the southern part of the NP.

3.5 National Park Setting (NPPP policy priority 1.3)

Contiguity and consistency of landscape character across the park boundary are parameters which contribute to the Park's landscape 'setting'.

The landform steps down from the Park boundary towards Strath More and gradually becomes less topographically varied and the site where the wind farm is situated has a broad simple and open character with fewer distinct hills. In views from the Park the wind farm appears very much at the edge of the uplands that extend out from the Park. It is my view that the juxtaposition of potential viewer locations, wind farm location, landscape character and distance, means that the Saddle Hill wind farm is beyond, and would not have a significant adverse effect on, the immediate landscape setting of the Park.

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

Whilst Saddle Hill wind farm would be experienced from a number of locations in the southern part of the Park, it could not be said to significantly affect the integrity of the National Park.

There are a number of locations within the southern part of the Park from which one would experience the cumulative visual impact of Saddle Hill in addition to existing and consented wind farms. Whilst this would affect the nature and quality of views out from the Park, overall it is my conclusion that this wind farm would not have a significant adverse effect on the special landscape qualities (8.8.37) for which the Park was designated to the extent that it would fail to meet SPP or NPPP policy.

3.7 Wild Land (SPP) and Wildness (NPPP policy priority 2.3)

All of the assessment viewpoints used within the NP are also within Areas of Wild Land (WLAs 15 and 16). Whilst I broadly concur with the wild land assessment at Appendix 8.5 which concludes that there would be no significant effect on the WLA or wild land

characteristics or special qualities, I am of the view that there is a risk that the cumulative effects on visual amenity affect the arresting and inspiring qualities that walkers experience in this part of the Park when looking out to the south.

3.8 Conclusion

The cumulative visual effect of Saddle Hill in addition to existing and consented wind farms will be noticeable or even marked to some people, as such it will affect the experience and appreciation of the Park's landscape and perhaps also for some people the sense of wildness, but the level of effect is such that the policy tests in respect of the National Park would in my view still be met. This type of incremental change and the assessment of each new wind farm proposal against a continuously moving baseline remains a concern.