
CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY

Title: CONSULTATION FROM ABERDEENSHIRE COUNCIL: BLACKHILLS FARM, CUSHNIE WIND TURBINES

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DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: ERECTION OF 3 WIND TURBINES (99.5 metres to tip) AND ASSOCIATED INFRASTRUCTURE AT BLACKHILLS FARM, CUSHNIE , ALFORD

REFERENCE: Local Authority Ref APP/2012/1695

APPLICANT: GREEN CAT RENEWABLES LTD

DATE CONSULTED: 25 June 2012

RECOMMENDATION: NO OBJECTION

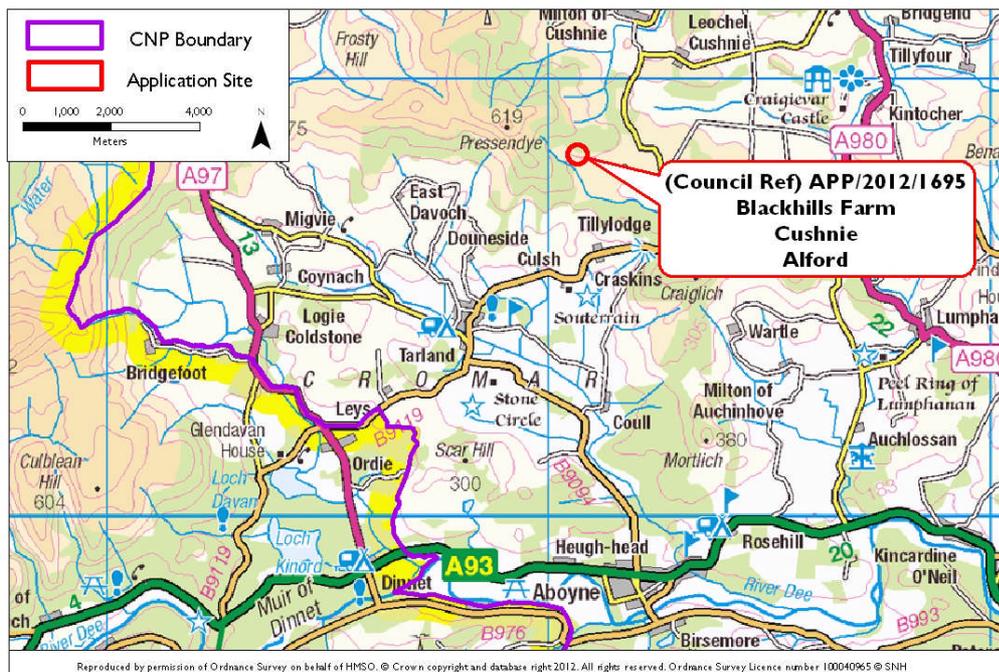


Fig 1.: Location Plan

PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a consultation response to Aberdeenshire Council on a planning application for three wind turbines, situated at Blackhills Farm, to the north east of Tarland some 7.5 kilometres to the east of the Cairngorms National Park boundary, as shown on the location plan above.
2. The Cairngorms National Park Authority (CNPA) has been consulted in relation to any impacts upon the park as the application is accompanied by an Environmental Statement under the terms of the Town and Country Planning (Environmental Impact Assessment) (Scotland) Regulations 2011. The planning issues being considered in relation to this consultation are whether there are any impacts upon the qualities of the park

SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSAL

3. The site is located on rough farmland to the north west of Blackhills Farm near Cushnie. This is an undulating landscape forming part of the lower hills east of the National Park. The application site is bordered by hills - to the north west is Pressendye hill, and to the west is the wooded slopes of Pittenderich, forming a transition between the mountains of the National Park and the farmland of Aberdeenshire to the east. The site is accessed by minor roads leading west from the Cushnie area and serving a number of rural properties.
4. The proposal seeks consent for three 2.3 MW capacity wind turbines measuring 64 metres to hub and 99.5 metres to tip. Associated access tracks and hard standing areas are also proposed.
5. The application is accompanied by an Environmental Assessment as noted earlier, and this includes chapters on ecological and landscape impacts. In this regard the Environmental Statement (ES) makes reference to the Cairngorms National Park. The statement considers that there will be no significant landscape and visual impacts. It also notes, in terms of ecological interests, that the site lies some 10 km to the east of the Muir of Dinnet Special Protection Area (SPA), classified as a result of its population of wintering greylag geese which are not considered to be significantly affected by the proposal.
6. By way of background there have been two previous applications on this site submitted to Aberdeenshire Council, both for three wind turbines. Both were withdrawn due to inaccuracies in the submissions. The most recent (Reference APP/2011/0174) was the subject of consultation with the CNPA when it was decided, following consideration at the Planning Committee, to raise no objections to the proposal. The current submission is largely similar, the main change understood to be that the current submission now ensures that information contained in the plans and the Environmental Statement correspond.

7. The Committee may also recall that an application to erect seven 125 metres high (to tip) wind turbines on the top of Pressendye Hill, to the north of the current site, was refused by Aberdeenshire Council. This refusal was based upon landscape impacts and the impact upon the Cairngorms National Park, with the Park Authority objecting to the application. This decision to refuse was upheld at appeal by the Scottish Government Inquiry Reporters Unit in 2010. (Reference APP/2008/0237) when it was concluded that the proposal would have an unacceptable landscape and visual impact. However, the Reporter did not consider that the impact upon the National Park was sufficient in itself to justify refusal, concluding that the special qualities of the Park (notably the wildness experienced on the high tops, the moorland environment, the experience of the local landscape and rich biodiversity, and the close interplay between landform and cultural overlay of the farmed and lowland landscape) would not be affected to a significant degree.

DEVELOPMENT PLAN CONTEXT

Strategic Policy - Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan 2012-2017

8. The Cairngorms National Park Plan sets out the vision and overarching strategy for managing the Park and provides focus and priorities at a time of limited financial resources. The Plan also provides a strategic context for the Local Development Plan and shows how the four aims of the National Park can be achieved together. It sets out the strategic direction and priorities for the Park.
9. Three long term outcomes for the Park are set out as follows:
 - A sustainable economy supporting thriving businesses and communities;
 - A special place for people and nature with natural and cultural heritage enhanced; and
 - People enjoying the park through outstanding visitor and learning experiences.

These outcomes address the interaction of the three main characteristics of the National Park these being that the Park is an internationally important area for nature conservation; a fragile rural economy, and an internationally known tourism destination. Recognising the relationship of these outcomes is at the heart of the National Park. A series of work programmes to help deliver the outcomes is set out in the Plan.
10. Policy 1.3 states that large scale commercial wind turbines [> 1 turbine, $> 30\text{m}$ in height] are not compatible with the special qualities of the National Park and are not considered to be appropriate within the National Park or where outside the Park they affect its landscape setting.

CONSULTATIONS

11. **The CNPA Landscape Officer** was consulted on the previous application for three turbines here and concluded that the proposed development would have an effect upon the landscape and visual character of a small part of the eastern side of the Park, namely in the area of Muir of Dinnet and on the north facing slopes of the Glen Tanar estate. The effects on the higher east facing slopes of Culblean and Morven were considered to be less, due to the lie of the land relative to the turbines. The Landscape Advisor concluded that the proposal, due to its scale and siting, would not have a significant adverse effect in relation to the special qualities experienced within the Park.

APPRAISAL

12. The proposed wind farm is located on a site which lies approximately 7.5km away from the eastern boundary of the National Park. Based upon the conclusions of the Environmental Statement and the location of the site relative to the Park, there are unlikely to be any significant ecological issues in this case.
13. Consequently the key planning issue for consideration is that of the visual and landscape impact on the setting of the National Park, and views into and out of this part of the Park.
14. The ES suggests that there will be no significant landscape and visual effects upon the National Park. The CNPA Landscape Advisor has previously agreed with this conclusion as noted earlier in paragraph 13. It is therefore considered that the proposal would not have a significant adverse impact the landscape character of the Park nor upon the experience derived from the setting of the Park, both of which contribute to the special qualities of the Park.
15. In addition the Scottish Government Reporter's decision on the Pressendye case, (which had a greater impact upon the Park given its size, scale and prominence) is of relevance, given the Reporter's conclusion that the development had a limited impact upon the Park. Furthermore there has been no particular change in circumstances since the CNPA considered the last application for three turbines at Blackhills and agreed to raise no objection.
16. In these overall circumstances it is considered that the proposed development would not have any significant adverse landscape or visual impacts upon the character or the setting of the National Park. The proposal has been considered with respect to the statutory aims of the National Park and is not considered to conflict with these objectives. Accordingly it is recommended that the CNPA raise no objection to the proposal.

RECOMMENDATION

17. That Members of the Committee support a recommendation of **NO OBJECTION** to the construction of three wind turbines of height 99.5 metres to tip at Blackhills Farm, Cushnie.

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19 July 2012

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