

**CAIRNGORMS NATIONAL PARK AUTHORITY**

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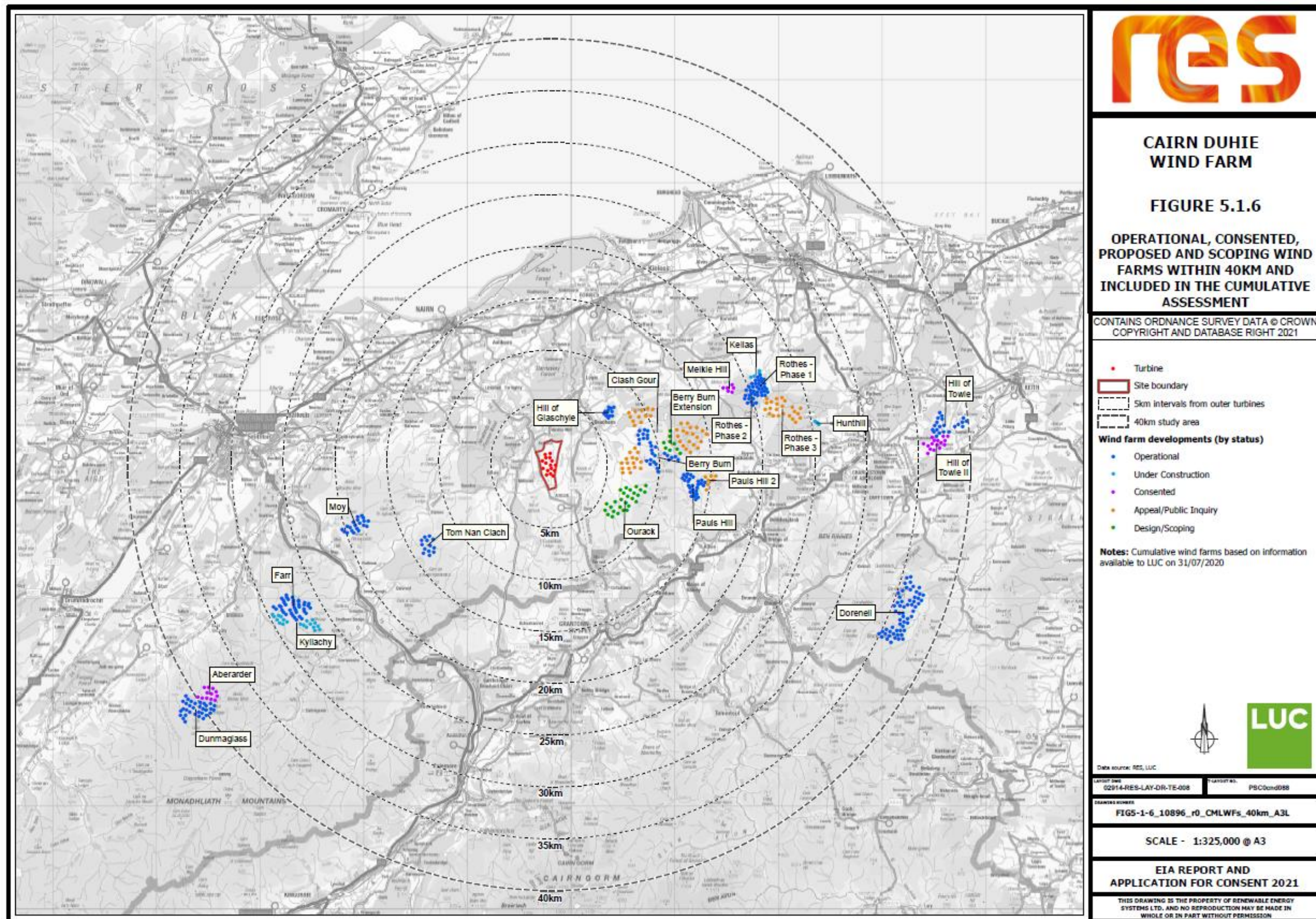
**DEVELOPMENT PROPOSED: Cairn Duhie wind farm**

Consultation from Scottish Government Energy Consents & Deployment Unit

<b>REFERENCE:</b>	2021/0113/PAC (ECU00003225)
<b>APPLICANT:</b>	Renewable Energy Systems (Ltd)
<b>DATE CONSULTED:</b>	25 March 2021
<b>RECOMMENDATION:</b>	No objection
<b>CASE OFFICER:</b>	Nina Caudrey, Planning Officer

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## 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 south west 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 effects on the SLQs caused by proposals outwith the Cairngorms National Park. Their advice has been used to inform this report.

## SITE DESCRIPTION AND PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

4. The principle of a wind farm at this location has already been established through the consent in 2017 of a different wind farm with the same name, which proposed more but smaller turbines (20 turbines at 110 metres to tip).
5. The proposed wind farm would be located on the same site as the consented Cairn Duhie wind farm, approximately 13.5 kilometres (km) north-west of Grantown, as shown in the applicant's ER figure 5.1.6 on page 2 of this report. As also shown in the figure, in the surrounding area there are numerous other existing and consented wind farms, plus several proposed wind farms in the planning system.
6. The proposed development would comprise 16 turbines with a maximum height of 149.9m to the tip of the blade in an upright position, approximately 8.3km of new permanent access tracks, as well as other infrastructure and works (such as substation, underground cabling, borrow pits, etc). It is expected that the proposed wind farm would have an estimated total installed capacity of around 67.2MW, dependent on the turbine specification used.
7. The nearest turbine would be approximately 10 km to the northwest of the closest part of the boundary of the Cairngorms National Park, with the other turbines, tracks and associated infrastructure located further from the National Park boundary.
8. Theoretical visibility of the proposed wind farm from within the National Park is shown by the applicant's ER figure 5.1.2a (**Appendix 1**). When considering the cumulative visual effects, the blue and yellow shown in the applicant's figure x-x (**Appendix 2**) demonstrates that visibility of the proposed wind farm would be limited from within the National Park. Much of where it would be seen from is already influenced by visibility of

a number of other existing and consented wind farms. There are very limited areas (shown in green) within the National Park where it would introduce visibility of a wind farm where currently there is none. It would introduce some visibility on and around the boundary of the National Park in the vicinity of the A939 and Dava Way north of Grantown, at around 10km from the nearest turbine.

9. Visualisations from three viewpoints were provided in the applicant's ER to demonstrate the predicted level of visibility that would be had from within/on the boundary of the National Park:
  - VPI7, Carn Allt Laoigh. 11.8km south west of the closest turbine
  - VPI8 Carn a'Ghille Chearr near the boundary of the National Park, 19.7km south east of the closest turbine
  - VPI9 Creagan a' Chaise in the Cromdale Hills, 21km south east of the closest turbine
10. Two additional wirelines were also provided within Appendix 5.2 of the ER to demonstrate the predicted level of visibility that would be had from within/on the boundary of the National Park:
  - VP 20, A939 near Lynemore, 20km to the closest turbine
  - VP21, hill track near Sgor Gaoithe, north of Huntly's Cave, 8.7km to the closest turbine
11. The visualisations associated with each view point are available to the public by searching the application documents on the ECDU website <https://www.energyconsents.scot/ApplicationDetails.aspx?cr=ECU00003225> for the relevant figures:
  - Volume 2 - Figure 5.2.17 - Viewpoint 17: Carn Allt Laoigh
  - Volume 2 - Figure 5.2.18 - Viewpoint 18: Carn A'Ghille Chearr
  - Volume 2 - Figure 5.2.19 - Viewpoint 19: Creagan A' Chaise
  - Volume 4 - Appendix 5.2 - Cairngorms National Park Special Landscape Qualities Assessment [ pages 10 and 11 for VPs 20 and 21 ]

## **RELEVANT PLANNING HISTORY**

12. In 2017 consent was granted by Scottish Government for a wind farm in the same location with the same name, comprising 20 turbines at up to 110m to tip height.
13. **PRE/2020/0003** in March 2020 CNPA responded to a scoping consultation from ECDU for the current application.

## **PLANNING POLICY CONTEXT**

14. The proposed development is located wholly outwith the National Park, therefore the Cairngorms National Park Local Development Plan policies do not apply. However, an

assessment of the proposal must have regard to Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) and the National Park Partnership Plan (NPPP).

## National Policy

15. **Scottish Planning Policy** (revised December 2020) 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 SPP is a material consideration in planning decisions that carries significant weight.
16. Policy relating specifically to National Parks and development management can be found in paragraphs 84 and 85 of SPP. These re-state the four aims of the National Parks as set out in the National Parks (Scotland) Act 2000, as well as the need to pursue these collectively. SPP highlights that if there is a conflict between the first aim (conserving and enhancing the natural and cultural heritage of the area) and any of the others, then greater weight must be given to the first aim. Planning decisions are expected to reflect this weighting and be consistent with the four aims.
17. Paragraph 85 of SPP also clarifies that the aims and requirements of paragraphs 84 and 85 apply to development outwith a National Park that affects the Park.
18. Paragraph 212 of SPP states that “where development affects a National Park... it should only be permitted where:
  - a) the objectives of the designation and the overall integrity of the area will not be compromised; or
  - b) any significant adverse impacts on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social, environmental or economic benefits of national importance”.

## Strategic Policy

19. The **Cairngorms National Park Partnership Plan** (NPPP) 2017 – 2022 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.
20. 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 1.3 and 3.3.
21. Policy 1.3 seeks to conserve and enhance the SLQs. Policy 3.3 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”.

## **CONSULTATIONS**

### **NatureScot advice**

22. In accordance with the NatureScot/CNPA casework agreement, NatureScot have provided CNPA with advice in relation to the effects on the National Park, of the proposed wind farm both alone and cumulatively with other existing and consented wind farms in the surrounding area.
23. NatureScot do not advise that there would be any effects on the landscape character of the National Park.
24. In relation to the SLQs, NatureScot advise that there would be a significant adverse effect on one SLQ, ‘vastness of space, scale and height’, caused by the proposed wind farm appearing between Tom nan Clach and Hill of Glaschyle wind farms (as shown in the visualisations for VPI9), reducing the open space.
25. However this effect would be limited to a small number of mountain tops, in an area already influenced by a number of existing and consented wind farms.
26. While the proposed wind farm would introduce some visibility on and around the boundary of the National Park in the vicinity of the A939 and Dava Way north of Grantown, at around 10km from the nearest turbine, NatureScot do not advise that this would affect any of the SLQs.
27. Considering the proposed wind farm in combination with other existing and consented wind farms, there would be no change to cumulative effects from adding the proposed wind farm other than that identified in paragraphs 24 and 25.
28. The nature and significance of the effect on the single SLQ described in paragraph 24 and 25 is such that NatureScot advise that the integrity and objectives of the National Park would not be compromised.

## **APPRAISAL**

29. The principle of a wind farm in this location has already been accepted by Scottish Government through their 2017 consent of the previous Cairn Duhie wind farm application.
30. While NatureScot advice is that the proposed wind farm would be seen between the Tom nan Clach and Hill of Glaschyle wind farms, reducing the open space between them, the consented Cairn Duhie wind farm would occur in the same location, so the principle of a wind farm at the location has already been accepted.
31. The policies of the NPPP and SPP set out how proposals outwith the boundary of the National Park should be considered in terms of effects on the National Park.

32. Policy 3.3 of the NPPP sets out a test for considering effects on the landscapes of the National Park, in that large scale wind turbines are inappropriate outside the Park where they 'significantly adversely affect its landscape character or special landscape qualities'. If a proposal fails policy 3.3, it would also be in conflict with policy 1.3, which seeks to conserve and enhance the SLQs.
33. Paragraph 212 of SPP sets out that "development that affects a National Park... should only be permitted 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."
34. In the policy context of the NPPP and SPP, 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.
35. 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 Cairn Duhie 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.
36. Only one SLQ is affected, with the effects being limited and localised and in areas that already have visibility of existing and consented wind farms. 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 3.3a.
37. There is some tension with policy 1.3, as by affecting one 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 1.3.
38. 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 Scottish Planning Policy paragraph 212.
39. For these reasons, it is considered that CNPA should **not** object to the proposed wind farm development.

## RECOMMENDATION

That Members of the Committee confirm that CNPA does not object to the application for the proposed Cairn Duhie wind farm.