

Proposed Wind Energy Project and Associated Ancillary Development at Ascog Farm, Bute

Planning Statement

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1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to explain the planning policy and other technical issues relating to the proposal to erect three wind turbines at Hill of Ascog, Ascog Farm, Bute. The detailed planning application is for the erection of three turbines; a site access road from the existing public highway; crane hardstandings; a control building; and for the appropriate link to the national grid.

Prior to the submission of this planning application detailed consultations were held with Argyll and Bute Council and it was agreed that an Environmental Statement would be required to be submitted in support of the application.

It is intended that the three wind turbines will be located on an elevated ridge of land known as the Hill of Ascog whose slope is orientated approximately north west to south east. The ridge is steepest on its western and north western sides where the land drops down to Loch Ascog. The hill rises to an elevation of approximately 100 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD). The location of the proposed turbines would be to the south of the highest point:

- Turbine 1 – 94 m AOD;
- Turbine 2 – 90 m AOD; and
- Turbine 3 – 76 m AOD.

The proposed site and the surrounding area are comprised of improved grassland, predominantly grazed by cattle and sheep with abundantly managed hedgerow boundaries and irrigation ditches. There are extensive areas of dense and scattered gorse scrub.

The nearest privately owned residential properties to the site are more than 380 m from the closest proposed turbine location. The impacts of the proposals on land use, including agricultural uses of the proposed development site, are considered in detail in the accompanying Environmental Statement (ES).

As stated above the project proposals comprise the construction of three wind turbines with dimensions of 50 m to hub and 74 m to blade tip. A small area of permanent hard standing (20 m by 30 m) would be formed adjacent to the base of each turbine tower to provide a platform for future maintenance and decommissioning equipment.

The development would also consist of ancillary development associated with wind turbines. An access track would be constructed in order to allow the turbine delivery to the site and to allow for maintenance of the wind turbines. A small kiosk next to Turbine No.3 would house the required electrical switchgear. The power from the turbines would be transported via an underground cable to the electrical kiosk. The site would be accessed by vehicle from the minor C-class road which connects Rothesay to Mid Ascog and by means of a new access track to be formed from this road to the site.

It is anticipated that the turbines would be operational by 2015. The wind energy project has a design life of 25 years.

In summary it is noted that:

- Three wind turbines are proposed;
- The proposal accords with the general aims of national, regional and local planning policy;
- The turbine will measure 50 m to the hub and have a total height of 74 m (to top of blade tip);
- Each turbine will have three blades;
- The turbines are estimated to have an installed capacity 2.7 MW. This equates to the consumption of 2,133 homes¹ per annum and in turn offsets around 3,612 tonnes of CO₂²;
- The turbines are located in such a position as to minimise visual impact;
- The construction period will be relatively short, minimising any disruptions;
- The turbines are relatively quiet. The nearest residences are approximately 380 m from the nearest turbine and it is not anticipated that noise will be an issue; and
- Considerable economic/tourism benefits will accrue to the local area through the spin-offs from the development.

¹ 3,880 kWh/house/year. Strathclyde University Figures

² 1,693 kg CO₂/year. Strathclyde University Figures

2 PLANNING CONSIDERATIONS

The application for these turbines falls to be considered against the relevant National Planning Policy as contained in the National Planning Framework (NPF); the Scottish Planning Policies (SPPs); the Planning Advice Notes (PANs); and against the terms of the policies contained in the Argyll and Bute Structure Plan 2002 and the Argyll and Bute Local Plan 2009. Finally, consideration has also to be given to the Argyll and Bute Main Issues Report 2011 and any Supplementary Planning Guidance documents produced by the authority.

It is noted that the proposal complies with the appropriate national policies and guidance. In this respect it is also noted that in September 2010 the First Minister announced that Scotland's renewable energy target for 2020 would be raised from 50% to 80% and more recent statements have increased that target figure to 100%. The Scottish Government considers that significantly higher levels of renewables could be deployed by the year 2020 with little change to the current policy, planning or regulation frameworks in Scotland. Clearly there is political support for developments of this nature.

NPF2: This document states that *'Planning authorities are required to take the Framework into account when preparing development plans and it is a material consideration in the determination of planning applications'*. It continues by stating that *'The Government is committed to establishing Scotland as a leading location for the development of renewable energy technology and an energy exporter over the long term. It is encouraging a mix of renewable energy technologies, with growing contributions from offshore wind, wave, and tidal energy, along with greater use of biomass. The aim of national planning policy is to develop Scotland's renewable energy potential whilst safeguarding the environment and communities.'* Finally, with respect to renewable energy the NPF2 states that *'Small-scale renewable energy projects can make a valuable contribution locally. They can play a vital role in supporting the sustainable development of remote rural and island communities in particular. Cumulatively, they can make a significant contribution to the development of a more decentralised pattern of energy generation. Their local environmental effects will need careful management.'*

It is apparent that the proposed development complies with the aims of national planning policy as contained in NPF2.

Scottish Planning Policy: This policy document was published in February 2010 and provides the prime planning policy guidance for all aspects of development. The publication makes a specific policy reference to planning for rural areas and planning for wind energy. With regard to the former it states that: *'The planning system has a significant role in supporting sustainable economic growth in rural areas. By taking a positive approach to new development, planning authorities can help to create the right conditions for rural businesses and communities to flourish. The aim should be to enable development in all rural areas which supports prosperous and sustainable communities whilst protecting and enhancing environmental quality.'*

Whilst with regard to the latter the policy document states that: *'Planning authorities should support the development of wind farms in locations where the technology can operate efficiently and environmental and cumulative impacts can be satisfactorily addressed.'* It also advises planning authorities that: *'Development plans should provide a clear indication of the potential for development of wind farms of all scales, and should set out the criteria that will be considered in deciding applications for all wind farm developments including extensions. The criteria will vary depending on the scale of development and its relationship to the characteristics of the surrounding area, but are likely to include:*

- *landscape and visual impact,*
- *effects on the natural heritage and historic environment,*
- *contribution of the development to renewable energy generation targets,*
- *effect on the local and national economy and tourism and recreation interests,*
- *benefits and disbenefits for communities,*
- *aviation and telecommunications,*
- *noise and shadow flicker, and*
- *cumulative impact.*

The design and location of any wind farm development should reflect the scale and character of the landscape. The location of turbines should be considered carefully to ensure that the landscape and visual impact is minimised.'

This proposal satisfies the aims and objectives of the SPP and that the submission, in the accompanying ES, addresses all the necessary issues identified in the policy document.

Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland – 2020: The Scottish Government published the 2020 Routemap for Renewable Energy in Scotland in 2011; it is an update and

extension to the Scottish Renewables Action Plan 2009. The Routemap sets out the target to meet an equivalent of 100% demand for electricity from renewable energy by 2020. Targets and implications set out within the document are as follows:

- 100% electricity demand equivalent from renewables by 2020: it is recognised that this is a formidable but achievable goal exploiting Scotland's rich renewable resources and the determination to exploit them for economic and carbon benefits. The Routemap states that this will need to be recognised in the regulatory framework being developed at a UK level;
- 11% heat demand from renewables by 2020: Scotland leads the way in the UK at 2.8% heat demand already being met from renewables;
- At least 30% overall energy demand from renewables by 2020; and
- 500 MW community and locally-owned renewable energy by 2020.

The Routemap states that the Feed-in Tariff and the Renewable Heat Incentive should be used to transform the scale of local ownership, thus allowing communities and rural businesses to take advantage of the significant revenue streams that can accrue from this form of asset ownership. It also states that *'The Government is committed to the continued expansion of portfolio of onshore wind farms to help meet renewables targets, with a robust planning system providing spatial guidance, a clear policy framework and together with a timely and efficient processing of Section 36 Electricity Act and planning applications.'* It is recognised that *'Planning and Consents'* is one of the main challenges and that there is a *'need to continue to streamline systems and work for greater speed and transparency, without sacrificing proper consideration of the impacts on the local environment'*.

It is intended through this development to make a contribution to help meet the renewable targets set by the Scottish Government.

Onshore Wind Turbines: Policy Advice Updates – 2011: This document replaces PAN 45 and provides detailed planning advice to local authorities in respect of planning policy considerations and to developers with respect to the preparation and submission of planning applications. Reference is made to a number of documents in the policy update, including the following:

- Renewables Trends in Scotland 2010;
- Visual assessment of windfarms best practice (2002); and
- Siting and designing windfarms in the landscape (Version 1) (2009).

As appropriate, due cognisance has been paid to these publications in the preparation of the application.

Scottish Historic Environment Policy: The Scottish Historic Environment Policy (SHEP) (December 2011) sets out Scottish Ministers' policies, providing direction for Historic Scotland and a policy framework that informs the work of a wide range of public sector organisations. The SHEP complements and has the same authority of the SPP. The SHEP states that: *'The protection of the historic environment is not about preventing change. Ministers believe that change in this dynamic environment should be managed intelligently and with understanding, to achieve the best outcome for the historic environment and for the people of Scotland. Such decisions often have to recognise economic realities.'* The ES addresses the impact that the proposed development could have on the historic environment and it is concluded that it would be minimal.

Planning Advice Note 1/2011 (Planning and Noise): This planning advice note provides guidance for numerous types of developments and, with respect to wind turbines, states that: *'There are two sources of noise from wind turbines - the mechanical noise from the turbines and the aerodynamic noise from the blades. Mechanical noise is related to engineering design. Aerodynamic noise varies with rotor design and wind speed, and is generally greatest at low speeds. Good acoustical design and siting of turbines is essential to minimise the potential to generate noise. Web based planning advice on renewable technologies for Onshore wind turbines provides advice on 'The Assessment and Rating of Noise from Wind Farms' (ETSU-R-97) published by the former Department of Trade and Industry [DTI] and the findings of the Salford University report into Aerodynamic Modulation of Wind Turbine Noise.'* The detailed ES which accompanies this application contains a noise assessment. Given that the nearest privately owned residential properties lie some 380 m from the closest turbine it is not felt that noise will be an issue should the development proceed. The submission satisfies the aims of the advice contained in this PAN.

Planning Advice Note 2/2011 (Planning and Archaeology): This advice note provides advice to planning authorities and developers on dealing with archaeological remains and does so with a fresh emphasis which is proportionate to the relative value of the remains and of the developments under consideration. It states that: *'In determining planning applications that may impact on archaeological features or their setting, planning authorities may on occasion have to balance the benefits of development against the importance of*

archaeological features. *The weight that should be given to archaeological considerations will depend on a number of factors, including:*

- *The relative rarity of the archaeological feature concerned;*
- *The completeness of the feature/whether it is a particularly good example of its type;*
- *The historical or cultural associations of the feature;*
- *The value given to the feature by the local community;*
- *The potential value of the feature as an in situ educational or research resource; and*
- *The potential value of retaining the feature for tourism or place-making.*

Since this list is not exhaustive, in considering these factors, it will benefit planning authorities to seek professional advice from their archaeological advisor.'

It is stated by the applicants that great care and attention has been taken both on the design and on the siting of the turbine to ensure that the development proposal is unlikely to have significant adverse impact on any archaeological remains on, or in the vicinity of, the site. Once again it is noted that this issue is addressed in detail in the ES.

Planning Advice Note 73 (Rural Diversification): This PAN was published in February 2005 and it recognises the importance of farming in the rural diversification process. It states that: *'In the midst of these changes we should not lose sight of the intrinsic rural character that makes our countryside attractive to live and work in. Traditional sectors like farming and forestry are essential in retaining this rural character but these are changing too. Agricultural diversification has meant farmers concentrating on new areas of agriculture, growing alternative crops, rearing new breeds and turning to organic farming. Farm diversification has involved farming families adapting even further and turning their skills to new businesses secondary to the main farm business. These enterprises may be an extension of the existing farm business but equally the new activity can be unrelated to agriculture. Some have been so successful in these new enterprises that farming is now their secondary activity. Farm diversification is therefore an integral part of wider rural diversification that enables farmers and their families to continue the farming activity while providing jobs and income for others in the community'*.

This development is fully in line with this diversification programme. The power created from the wind turbines will be an energy source for proposed and existing farm uses; this will allow for the diversification of the income stream of the business; this will encourage a greater growth of the business: and this, in turn, will contribute to the sustainable economic growth of

the area as a whole. The proposal is, therefore, in accordance with the aims of the advice note.

Planning Advice Note 58 (Environmental Impact Assessments): From the outset this advice states that: *'Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) is a process which identifies the environmental effects (both negative and positive) of development proposals. It aims to prevent, reduce and offset any adverse impacts'* and that is precisely what the submitted document has sought to achieve. The PAN further advises that: *'The environmental statement is submitted in support of the planning application, but is not part of the application itself. The statement should be objective, and information indicating negative effects should not be omitted. Conclusions should be drawn from the data, rather than tailored to favour the proposal, and a distinction should be made between matters of fact, judgement and opinion.'*

Again it is stressed that the submitted document is an objective appraisal of the proposed development highlighting negative as well positive aspects of the proposed wind turbines. The PAN notes that: *'The ES is the most visible part of the whole EIA process, and ought to be the main source of environmental information available to the planning authority. Evaluation however, involves not only reviewing the information and analyses in the ES, and adding to it if necessary, but also considering representations from consultees and the public, plus the information provided by the council's own specialists, and the expertise of planning officers. The evaluation involves a process of re-interpretation and reconsideration in the light of the representations, to the point where the planning authority has sufficient confidence in the nature of the likely impacts and the necessary mitigation to determine the application and attach any conditions.'* It is suggested that the information provided in the ES will enable the local authority to make a detailed assessment of the proposal and reach a positive decision on the application. The preparation of the ES took into account the advice contained within the PAN and related Government papers.

Planning Advice Note 51 (Planning, Environmental Protection & Regulation – Revised 2006): In so far as the present application is concerned the most relevant part of this PAN relates to noise and nuisance where it states that: *'Noise and Nuisance may therefore be material considerations, both in terms of proposed developments that are likely to cause noise or nuisance and in terms of proposed sensitive developments which may be affected. This does not mean that all planning applications likely to result in noise or nuisance should be refused but it may mean that conditions have to be applied to mitigate any adverse effects. New noise or nuisance sensitive developments have to be carefully considered in*

relation to existing noise or nuisance emitting land uses, for example, social housing adjacent to busy roads or railways, or social housing adjacent to an existing noisy industrial use. In the latter example the local authority should seek to avoid situations where noise complaints from the new occupants would result in an abatement notice being served on the pre existing use. Planning authorities will wish to consult environmental health officers in appropriate cases, even where the issues are considered as part of an Environmental Impact Assessment.'

This PAN is mainly geared to providing advice directed at planning authorities and as it states near the introduction: *'Planning authorities and environmental protection bodies have different powers and functions which can on occasions overlap. It is however a long established policy that the planning system should not be used to secure objectives that are more properly achieved under other legislation. However, there are also cases where the planning system may be the most appropriate mechanism to provide environmental protection or improvement.'* These are issues for the authority to address, however, the applicants have taken on board the advice contained in the PAN where it was felt to be appropriate to the preparation and submission of the application.

Argyll and Bute Structure Plan 2002: The Structure Plan sets out strategic land use policies for the period to 2012. Among seven strategic issues for the Plan are: the need to pursue regeneration strategies for Bute and Cowal focused on Rothesay and Dunoon; and promoting regeneration and economically focused initiatives for the west and islands and peninsular areas of Argyll and Bute. There is a strong emphasis throughout the plan on economic regeneration of the area provided this respects natural and environmental constraints.

The Structure Plan includes policies on renewable energy. Section 4 of the Structure Plan states that: *'Argyll and Bute is richly endowed with renewable wind and hydro energy resources....the use of these renewable energy resources is encouraged by Government policy and by this plan, whether this be for local needs, research purposes or for exporting to the national grid.'* It continues by adding that: *'the most significant opportunities for renewable energy related development occur in the west of Argyll and Bute'*. The wind turbines proposed at Ascog Farm are consistent with the principle aims of Renewable Energy Policies of the Structure Plan. There are a number of policies and objectives in the Structure Plan which are of relevance to this proposal and these are highlighted below.

Objective RE1 (Renewable Energy): This objective seeks to *'increase use and to exploit the potential of renewable energy for the following purposes'* and these purposes includes *'to meet local energy requirements'; 'to achieve local self-sufficiency'; 'to facilitate realisation of national renewable energy policies'; and 'to ensure effective siting of renewable energy development'*. The proposal at Ascog Farm, which seeks to promote and increase the level of renewable energy generation in Argyll and Bute both for local energy requirements and for export, meets these objectives.

STRAT SI1 (Sustainable Development): The policy identifies the overarching objectives and principles of the authority with respect to sustainable development and highlights eleven key *'principles in considering development proposals'*. These include maximising opportunity for community benefit and respecting landscape character. In carrying out the assessment of this development proposal the applicants took full cognisance of these principles and would suggest that there is no conflict with the terms of the policy.

REC SI4 (Renewable Energy Investment): This policy states that: *'It is recommended that Argyll and Bute Council in partnership with interested agencies and with the renewable energy industry and in liaison with the Scottish Executive, pursue renewable energy investment opportunities, particularly wind and wave power potential in the west of Argyll and Bute. This is with a view to revealing further development opportunities of appropriate form and scale which can reinforce local economies and contribute where possible to the national grid.'* In this case the applicants represent the renewable energy industry and they are seeking approval for an investment opportunity for wind turbines at Ascog Farm. It is anticipated that the development will make a contribution to the local economy and will also provide 'overspill' power for the national grid. The proposal does, therefore, comply with the aims of this renewable energy investment policy.

STRAT RE1 (Wind Farm/Wind Turbine Development): The Interim Wind Farm Strategy states that: *'The Council's approach to wind farm development is criteria based. A wind farm is treated as being three or more turbines.'* Policy STRAT RE1 states that: *'Wind farm development is encouraged where it is consistent with STRAT DC7, 8 and 9. Proposals will be supported where there is no significant adverse effect on local communities: natural environment: landscape character and visual amenity: historic environment: and telecommunications, transmitting or receiving systems.'* The development proposal is examined against STRAT DC 7, 8 and 9 later in this paper, but it is worth noting that the detailed assessments initiated as part of the application submission confirm that there would

be no adverse effect on any of the highlighted categories. The proposal complies with this Structure Plan Policy.

STRAT DC7 (Nature Conservation and Development Control): This policy relates to developments in, or affecting, Natura sites; sites of national importance; SSSIs and NNRs; local wildlife sites; and other sites of nature conservation interest. In essence the policy states that in such areas any development will be: *'Assessed carefully to determine acceptability balanced along with national, or local, social or economic benefits.'* The site itself is not located in any such area, and although the applicants have identified five SSSIs within 5km radius of the proposed turbines they would be unaffected by any aspect of the development. Detailed habitat, ecological and wildlife surveys were carried out and in conclusion the ES found that *'no significant impact is expected'*. It is concluded that the proposal complies with this Structure Plan Policy.

STRAT DC8 (Landscape and Development Control): The policy introduction states that landscape character assessment will be a useful tool in the consideration of development proposals in the countryside, whilst the policy itself states that: *'Development which by reason of location, siting, scale, form, design or cumulative impact, damages or undermines the key environmental features of a visually contained or wide landscape or coastscape shall be treated as 'non-sustainable' and is contrary to this policy.'* The issue of Landscape and Visual Assessment is examined in detail in Chapter 7 of the ES that accompanies this application. Obviously the visual impact of such a development will vary, depending on location, distance from the site, topography, etc, and all these issues are considered as part of the Assessment. However, the ES concludes that the turbines will not undermine or damage the key environmental features of the wider landscape or coastscape and, therefore, the proposal is in compliance with this policy.

STRAT DC9 (Historic Environment and Development Control): This policy is aimed at protecting the wealth of archaeology, scheduled monuments, listed buildings and conservation areas in Argyll and Bute. Such an approach is fully supported by the applicants. The policy itself states that: *'Protection, conservation, enhancement and positive management of the historic environment is promoted'* and it continues by adding that development *'that damages the historic environment will be resisted.'* No such features exist within the confines of the site boundary, but as part of the submission an assessment was made of the possible impact on such features in the wider area, including Rothesay Castle, Balmory House, Mount Stuart and Ascog Farm itself. This detailed assessment is found in

Chapter 8 of the ES. It concludes that whilst some adverse effects may arise they are likely to be negligible, or seen through filtered or distant views, and restricted to the operational life of the turbines. It is, therefore, suggested that there will be no conflict with the aims of this policy.

STRAT DC4 (Development in Rural Opportunity Areas): The Structure Plan also sets out the concept of Rural Opportunity Areas which are areas of land generally in the countryside where, in special circumstance, medium or large scale developments may be supported if it will result in at least one of the following outcomes: *‘...economic benefit or a development with a locational need to be in or in the near vicinity of the proposed site.’* The proposals at Ascog Farm fall within such a Rural Opportunity Area and could be considered as medium to large scale development. In this case the development (1) will provide an economic benefit and (2) has a need to be located as shown on the submitted plans. The development will, therefore, comply with the terms of this policy.

The above outlines the relevant policies contained in the Argyll and Bute Structure Plan 2002, in so far as they are relevant to the proposed development. It would appear that there is broad support in this important policy document for the development proposed at Ascog Farm.

The Argyll and Bute Local Plan 2009: This document contains a number of policies which are of direct and indirect relevance to the proposed development. The more relevant policies are highlighted and discussed below.

Policy ENV1 (Impact on the General Environment): The policy states that: *‘In all development control zones, the Council will assess applications for planning permission for their impact on the natural, human and built environment, and will resist development proposals which would not take the following considerations into account’;* it then continues by listing numerous categories of consideration including amenity, special areas of conservation, listed buildings, government policies, etc. Policy LP ENV1 sets out the general basis for consideration of all applications for planning permission. It states that the list of criteria will be used in considering all development proposals, but obviously they will not be equally important in all cases. Through the preparation and submission of the ES the application has sought to address all criteria listed in this policy and other policies contained at national, regional and local level. In this respect it is suggested that the application complies with the terms of the policy.

Policy ENV2 (Development Impact on Biodiversity): This policy states that: *'When considering development proposals the Council will seek to contribute to the delivery of the objectives and targets set by the Local Biodiversity Action Plan (LBAP). Proposals that incorporate existing site interests within the design wherever possible will be encouraged. Where there is evidence to suggest that a habitat or species of local importance exists on a proposed development site, the Council will require the applicant, at his/her own expense, to submit a specialist survey of the site's natural environment.'* Again a reference is made to the ES which accompanies this application and which, after examination of numerous habitats and associated areas of concern, concluded that there would no significant adverse effects on biodiversity arising through the development. In this respect the application complies with the terms of the policy.

Policy ENV3 (Development Impact on European and Ramsar Sites): This policy states that: *'In all Development Control Zones development not directly connected with or necessary to the management of a European site, proposed European site or Ramsar site and which is likely to have a significant effect on the site (either individually or in combination with other plans or projects) will be subject to rigorous examination.'* All the appropriate investigations have been carried out as part of the EIA and the applicants welcome rigorous examination of the document. It concludes that the development will have no significant adverse effect on any of the areas identified in the policy and, in this respect, it is suggested that the application complies with the policy.

Policy ENV5 (Development Impact on Sites of Special Scientific Interest): This policy relates directly to the effect that development proposals will have on SSSIs and states that: *'In all Development Control Zones development which would affect Sites of Special Scientific Interest and National Nature Reserves will only be permitted where it can be adequately demonstrated that either: (A) The proposed development will not compromise the conservation objectives and overall integrity of the site; OR, (B) There is a proven public interest where national, social, economic or safety considerations outweigh the ecological interest of the site and the need for the development cannot be met in other less ecologically damaging locations or by reasonable alternative means.'* The site does fall within an SSSI or a National Nature Reserve and the detailed examinations carried through the EIA/ES process show that the proposed development would not have any adverse impact on any such area within the general locality. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV6 (Development Impact on Habitats and Species): This policy relates directly to the effect that development proposals will have on various habitats and species and states that: *'In considering development proposals, the Council will give full consideration to the legislation, policies and conservation objectives, that may apply to the following:*

- *Habitats and Species listed under Annex I, II & IV of the Habitats Directive;*
- *Species listed under Annex I of the Birds Directive;*
- *Species listed on Schedules 1, 5 and 8 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981; (and as amended by the Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004);*
- *Habitats & Species listed in the UK Biodiversity Action Plan; AND,*
- *Habitats and Species which are widely regarded as locally important as identified in the LBAP.'*

All the relevant issues are addressed in the ES, specifically Chapters 5 (Ecology) and 6 (Ornithology). The appropriate experts have considered the impact of the proposed turbines on the listed habitats and species. The detailed examinations carried through the EIA/ES process show that the proposed development would have no significant impact on any of the identified habitats/species within the general locality. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV8 (Development Impact on Local Nature Conservation Areas): This policy relates directly to the effect that development proposals will have on local nature conservation sites or other sites of nature conservation interest and it states that: *'Development that would have a significant, adverse effect on Local Nature Conservation Sites or other nature conservation interests, including sites, habitats or species at risk as identified in the Local Biodiversity Action Plan will be refused unless the developer proves:*

- *Its public benefits at a local level clearly outweigh the nature conservation value of the site; AND,*
- *There is no suitable or available alternative site for the development.*

Where development is allowed which could affect any of the above sites, including beyond their boundaries, the developer must demonstrate that adequate measures will be taken to conserve and enhance the sites' ecological, geological and geomorphological interest, depending on the designated interest.'

The site is not located within a local nature conservation site or other site of nature conservation interest. All the relevant conservation issues are addressed in the ES,

specifically Chapters 5 (Ecology) and 6 (Ornithology). The appropriate experts have considered the impact of the proposed turbines on the listed habitats and species. The detailed examinations carried through the EIA/ES process show that the proposed development would have no significant impact on any of the identified habitats/species within the general locality. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV9 (Development Impact on National Scenic Areas): The site itself does not fall within a National Scenic Area although it is noted that the Kyles of Bute are identified as such in the Local Plan. In this respect the policy states that: *‘Development in, or adjacent to, National Scenic Areas that would have a significant adverse effect on a National Scenic Area will be refused unless it is demonstrated that:*

The objectives of the designation and overall integrity of the area will not be compromised:

- *(B) Any significant adverse effects on the quality for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social and economic benefits of national importance;*
- *(C) Where acceptable, development must also conform to Appendix A of the Local Plan.*

In all cases the highest standards, in terms of location, siting, landscaping, boundary treatment, materials and detailing will be required within a National Scenic Area.’

The applicants agree that such areas encompass some of the most varied and valuable landscapes and coastscapes in Scotland. These areas are important not only for their physical landforms and for the flora and fauna which they support, but also for the environmental assets that they represent. In this respect a detailed Visual and Landscape Assessment of the proposed development was initiated (see Chapter 7 of the ES) and it concluded that there would be no significant cumulative landscape or visual effects, resulting from the proposed Ascog Wind Energy Project in combination with other existing, consented or application stage wind farms. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV10 (Development Impact on Areas of Panoramic Quality): Similar in intent to Policy ENV9 this policy states that: *‘Development in, or adjacent to, an Area of Panoramic Quality will be resisted where its scale, location or design will have a significant adverse impact on the character of the landscape unless it is demonstrated that:*

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- *Any significant adverse effects on the quality for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social and economic benefits of National or regional importance;*
 - *Where acceptable, development must also conform to Appendix A of the Local Plan.*

In all cases the highest standards, in terms of location, siting, landscaping, boundary treatment and materials, and detailing will be required within Areas of Panoramic Quality.'

The aim of this policy is to provide panoramically important landscapes in Argyll and Bute, with adequate protection against damaging development and the applicants fully support it. These areas are important for the contribution that they can make to the environment and to the tourist industry. In this respect a detailed Visual and Landscape Assessment of the proposed development was initiated (see Chapter 7 of the ES) and it concluded that there would be no significant cumulative landscape or visual effects, resulting from the proposed Ascog Wind Energy Project. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV11 (Development Impact on Historic Gardens and Designed Landscapes):

This policy relates directly to the effect that development proposals will have on historic gardens and designed landscapes. Clearly the site itself does fall within such an area, but, nonetheless, the impact of the proposed development on such assets in the locality was assessed. The policy states that: *'There will be a presumption in favour of retaining, protecting, preserving and enhancing historic gardens and designed landscapes either listed in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes, or which have been identified for inclusion. Where development would affect a heritage asset or its setting the developer will be expected to demonstrate that the impact of the development upon that asset has been assessed and that adequate measures will be taken to preserve and enhance the special interest of the asset. Measures to mitigate against impact are likely to include enhanced physical access, interpretation and the provision of an open space or landscaped buffer zone, as appropriate. In assessing proposals for development in, or adjacent to, gardens or designed landscapes particular attention will be paid to the impact of the proposal on:*

- *The archaeological, historical or botanical interest of the site;*
- *The site's original design concept, overall quality and setting;*
- *Trees and Woodland and the site's contribution to local landscape character within the site including the boundary walls, pathways, garden terraces or water features;*
AND
- *Planned historic views of, or from, the site or buildings within it.'*

These issues are addressed in detail in the ES which concludes that there would be no significant effects on historic gardens and designed landscapes resulting from the proposed Ascog Wind Energy Project. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV12 (Water Quality and Environment): This policy states that: *'In all Development Control Zones proposals for development that could affect the water environment will be assessed with regard to their potential impact on:*

- *Water quality and quantity;*
- *Riparian habitats and wildlife;*
- *Leisure and recreational facilities;*
- *Economic activity;*
- *The resources protected by Policy ENV 1 and other relevant Structure and Local Plan policies.*

Developments that may have a significant detrimental impact on the water environment will not normally be permitted unless it can be demonstrated that the impacts can be fully mitigated so as to ensure non-deterioration of waterbody status as required by the EU Water Framework Directive.'

This matter has been addressed in detail in Chapter 10 of the ES and it should be noted that with regard to the proposed development, there are no surface watercourses within the site. The nearest running water to the site is a small burn which flows from the northern end of Loch Ascog, via a sewage treatment works, to the coast near Montford. This burn is 100m from the northern edge of the development site at its nearest location. The small scale of the permanent changes in land use across the site and the operational practices of the wind energy project are not predicted to result in significant effects on hydrogeological resources either in terms of groundwater recharge or source protection. There would be no direct impacts from the wind energy project development on water resources. No significant indirect effects on water quality of surface or ground waters are predicted provided that sustainable drainage measures are installed during construction and the appropriate mitigation measures are adopted to prevent spillage of potentially polluting materials during construction, operation and decommissioning. There would be no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV13a (Development Impact on Listed Buildings): The aim of this policy is to provide protection to Listed Buildings in accordance with current guidance and legislation. Listed Buildings are a valuable resource that can stimulate enjoyment of the wider environment and they can act as an important medium for education, economic development, recreation and tourism. As such, they must be protected: the applicants endorse this view on the importance of listed buildings. The policy states that: *'Development affecting a listed building or its setting shall preserve the building or its setting, and any features of special architectural or historic interest that it possesses. All developments that affect listed buildings or their settings must be of a high quality and conform to Scottish Historic Environment Policy 2008. Where development would affect a heritage asset or its setting the developer will be expected to satisfactorily demonstrate that the impact of the development upon that asset has been assessed and that measures will be taken to preserve and enhance the special interest of the asset. Measures to mitigate against impact are likely to include enhanced physical access, interpretation and the provision of an open space or landscaped buffer zone, as appropriate.'*

Consultations were initiated with Historic Scotland from the outset and they advised that assessments should be carried out with respect to the impact on Rothesay Castle; Balmory Hall; and Mount Stuart gardens and associated assets. In addition it was also noted that Meikle Ascog is a Category 'B' Listed Building. A detailed assessment of these properties was implemented and this is shown in full in Chapter 8 of the ES. In summary it concludes that views to the turbines from the designated assets to the wind turbines would be distant, restricted or filtered. Some adverse effects are expected to arise, but these would not be significant, and would in any case be restricted to the operational life of the proposed wind energy development (maximum of 25 years). In such circumstances, the proposal does not conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV16 (Development Impact on Scheduled Ancient Monuments): This policy seeks to preserve and protect Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings and states that: *'There will be a presumption in favour of retaining, protecting, preserving and enhancing Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings. Developments that have an adverse impact on Scheduled Ancient Monuments and their settings will not be permitted unless there are exceptional circumstances. Where development would affect adversely a heritage asset or its setting the developer will be expected to satisfactorily demonstrate that the impact of the development upon that asset has been assessed and that measures will be taken to preserve and enhance the special interest of the asset. Measures to mitigate*

against impact are likely to include enhanced physical access, interpretation and the provision of an open space or landscaped buffer zone, as appropriate.'

Early consultations regarding the issue were held with Argyll and Bute Council, Historic Scotland and WoSAS. This subsequently led to appropriate studies being initiated of a wide variety of Scheduled Monuments within the extended study area. This included the prehistoric hill fort at Barone Hill, medieval castles at Rothesay and Toward, St Mary's Chapel at Rothesay and the post-medieval Thom's Cuts, water channels designed to feed the textile industry, one of which is the closest scheduled monument to the site. These matters are examined in detail in Chapter 8 of the ES and it is concluded that after mitigation, no adverse direct effects are considered likely to arise. In such circumstances, the proposal does not conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV17 (Development Impact on Sites of Archaeological Interest): This policy states that: *'There is a presumption in favour of retaining, protecting, preserving and enhancing the existing archaeological heritage and any future discoveries found in Argyll and Bute.'*

The policy provides further advice with respect to consultation; site protection; minimising impact; etc. As with the Ancient Monuments, early consultations regarding the issue were held with Argyll and Bute Council, Historic Scotland and WoSAS. There is no evidence for any past activity within the site other than post-medieval agriculture. There is no evidence for any previously unrecorded archaeological features to be present on the site. The whole issue is examined in detail in Chapter 8 of the ES and it is concluded that after mitigation, no adverse direct effects are considered likely to arise. In such circumstances, the proposal does not conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy ENV19 (Development Setting, Layout and Design): Although mainly concerned with the design and layout of buildings this policy is of some relevance to this proposal and states that: *'The Council will require developers and their agents to produce and execute a high standard of appropriate design in accordance with the design principles set out in Appendix A of this Local Plan, the Council's sustainable design guide and the following criteria...'* The criteria includes development setting; development layout and density; design of developments; design of buildings; and energy efficiency.

It should be noted that the layout of the wind farm turbines was, following early consultation with Historic Scotland, adjusted to achieve a more acceptable solution, with the number of turbines being reduced from four to three. Furthermore, the whole principle of this development is to create efficient energy for use at Ascog Farm and for distribution to the grid. In all circumstances, the development complies with the aims and spirit of this policy.

Policy TRAN1 (Public Access and Rights of Way): The policy states that: *‘(a) Development proposals shall safeguard public rights of way, core paths and important public access routes; (b) Where public rights of way, core paths or public access routes will be prejudiced by a development, including during construction and upon completion, then the developer shall be expected to incorporate appropriate alternative or modified public access provisions; (c) Core path plans and access rights will be material considerations in considering planning applications.’*

There are no core paths or rights of way on any land in the immediate vicinity of the application site. Currently there is no evidence of local recreational activities. However, it would be the applicants’ intention to investigate further diversification programmes at the Farm which could include recreational activities. Should permission be granted, the applicants would look into the possibility of installing a ‘Turbine Trail’ celebrating the production of energy at Ascog throughout the ages. This would be an amenity appealing to walkers, mountain cyclists and horse riders. There is no conflict with the terms of this policy.

Policy REN1 (Wind Farms and Wind Turbines): This policy is directly related to present proposal and states that: *‘Wind farm developments will be supported in forms, scales and sites where the technology can operate efficiently, where servicing and access implications are acceptable, and where the proposed development will not have an unacceptable adverse impact directly, indirectly or cumulatively on the economic, social or physical aspects of sustainable development. (A) For all commercial wind farms, regardless of scale, the issues raised by the following must be satisfactorily addressed:*

- *Communities, settlements and their settings*
- *Areas and interests of nature conservation significance including local biodiversity, ecology, and the water environment*
- *Landscape and townscape character, scenic quality and visual and general amenity*
- *Core paths , rights of way; or other important access routes*
- *Sites of historic or archaeological interest and their settings*
- *Telecommunications, transmitting and receiving systems*

-
- *Important tourist facilities, attractions or routes*
 - *Stability of peat deposits.*

(B)The Windfarm Policy Maps provide further guidance on where wind farm schemes over 20 megawatts may be acceptable. They show for proposals on that scale:

- *Broad Areas of Search within which proposals will be generally supported subject to addressing satisfactorily all other material considerations.*
- *Protected Areas within which proposals will be generally resisted unless it can be demonstrated that the proposed development will not have an unacceptable adverse effect on Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and Ramsar sites; National Scenic Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; and land within the Green Belt; and that all other material considerations have been satisfactorily addressed.*
- *Potentially Constrained Areas where proposals will be neither generally supported nor resisted but considered on their merits taking account of the criteria referred to in (A) above and all other material considerations including any unacceptable adverse effect on Special Protection Areas, Special Areas of Conservation, and Ramsar sites; National Scenic Areas and Sites of Special Scientific Interest; and land within the Green Belt.'*

This policy is, in effect, a summary of the individual policies that have been analysed in detail throughout this Chapter. In this respect there is broad agreement with this policy. The development is not located in any of the listed areas of special protection and the major issues of visual amenity; rights of way; historic setting; peat deposits; telecommunications; etc; have all been examined in detail.

Planning Policy Summary: The proposed development for three turbines at Ascog Farm has been examined and assessed against numerous planning policies and guidance documents. This includes the National Planning Framework, National Planning Policy, National Planning Guidance, Regional Planning Policy and Local Planning Policy. There would appear to be little doubt that the submission complies with the aims of these documents, thus lending strong support to the proposal. It is accepted, however, that other 'material factors' have to be taken into consideration in the processing of a planning application and these often only emerge through the consultation procedure itself. The applicants would wish to be advised of any such factors, as they emerge, whilst the application is under consideration, in order that they might have the opportunity to address

the issue(s). It must be borne in mind, of course, that the main consideration in reaching a recommendation/decision on a planning application relates to its compliance with the development plan.

3 SOCIOECONOMIC EFFECTS

As well as the planning considerations there are other legitimate factors which the authority has to take into account when reaching a decision on the planning application and a number of these key issues are highlighted in the Local Plan. Where appropriate, reference is made to them below.

Local Plan Objective SI 1 (Economic and Social): Through this objective the Council is seeking to: *'a) to improve economic competitiveness and the relatively poor economic performance of Argyll and Bute as a whole. b) to enhance the economic and social prospects of the geographically diverse local communities in Argyll and Bute. c) to promote appropriate responses to the variety of challenging economic, transport-related and planning circumstances facing these local communities. d) to treat the rich natural and historic environment of Argyll and Bute as a not fully realised economic asset which, if safeguarded and enhanced, can stimulate further investment and increased economic activity.'*

With respect to the present proposal it is noted that the development will, through farm diversification, contribute to an improved economic and social performance, especially for this community in Argyll and Bute. Furthermore, it will be maximising the opportunities offered by the natural environment to stimulate further investment and increasing economic activity.

Local Plan Objective SI 2 (Environmental Objective): This objective seeks to *'a) to safeguard the diverse and high quality natural and built heritage resources, including the abundant landward and maritime biodiversity of Argyll and Bute. b) to reinforce the strength of protection given to the European and national statutorily protected nature conservation sites, habitats, species and built heritage sites, with which Argyll and Bute is particularly richly endowed. c) to enhance and invest in the quality of the natural and built environment and to engage development more effectively with this enhancement process. d) to encourage development of a scale, form, design and location appropriate to the character of the landscape and settlements of Argyll and Bute.'*

Given the rich built heritage and abundant natural heritage that exists in Argyll and Bute it is important that all these aspects are examined in some detail. This has been done in the ES and it is noted that there will be no significant long term impact on the natural or built

heritage. Indeed, in many cases the impact of the development will be minimal. The scale, form and design of the turbines are all similar to others that have been granted in Argyll and Bute and other parts of Scotland. Through the pre-submission consultation process it was agreed to reduce the number of turbines from four to three. With this in mind it is suggested that the location should be considered appropriate for this development and that the development is appropriate for the landscape character of the area.

Economy (Introduction Para 4.4): The Local Plan clearly states that: *‘This plan supports renewable energy related development in accordance with national planning guidance and with the Structure Plan. There is a specific policy for commercial wind farms and wind turbines, a policy for domestic and community scaled wind turbine developments and a further policy relating to other forms of renewable energy development.’* This unequivocal statement lends strong support to the submitted application which is in accordance both with National Planning Policy and Guidance, and with the Structure Plan (see above for details). The aims of the Council are to be commended and lend support to the proposal.

Economy (Main Economic Issues of Structure Plan): The Local Plan identifies these as being: *‘a) To encourage the further diversification of the Argyll and Bute economy; b) To ensure that there is sufficient land available to enable new economic development to take place without having a detrimental impact on surrounding uses; c) To ensure that the people of Argyll and Bute have, as far as possible, equal access to the benefits of modern telecommunication technology; d) The need to balance opportunities for new forms of economic development, particularly in the fields of renewable energy and aquaculture with the concerns of local communities and environmental groups; e) To help sustain Argyll and Bute’s traditional industries of forestry, fishing, agriculture and tourism.’*

With respect to the submitted application it is noted that:

- The proposal seeks to assist diversification at Ascog Farm;
- There is more than adequate land available for the development;
- The proposal will not have a detrimental impact on surrounding uses (which include Ascog Farm itself);
- The development seeks to provide a proven renewable resource;
- The positioning of the turbines addresses environmental concerns; and
- Should development be granted the development will prove a benefit to the farming and tourism industries in this part of Argyll and Bute.

The proposal satisfies the aims of this economic policy.

Renewable Energy (Chapter 9): By way of introduction to the policy considerations for wind turbine developments the Council clearly sets out the rationale behind the policies. In this regard it states that: *'Argyll and Bute is well placed to contribute to the targets set for generating electricity from renewable resources by 2020. It is richly endowed with renewable wind and hydro energy; and there may be potential for other forms of generation from renewable sources.'*

It continues by adding that: *'The council is committed to supporting the diverse range of renewable technologies including the development of new and emerging technologies. It has engaged fully with local communities and other stakeholders, including prospective developers, at all stages of the preparation of the local plan. The outcome is a suite of policies framed to assist in guiding development to appropriate locations and to provide clarity on the issues which will be taken into account when specific proposals come to be assessed. The council is likewise committed to the principles of sustainable development and, within that overarching framework, it will seek to maximise the environmental, economic and social benefits which can accrue to the development of renewable energy resources at all scales in appropriate locations. Within the context of strong encouragement for energy generated from renewable sources the council is mindful that it is obliged to meet its international and national statutory obligations to protect designated areas, species and habitats and the historic environment from inappropriate forms of development and ensure that impacts on local communities and other interests are satisfactorily addressed.'*

The Introduction continues by setting out the main renewable issues affecting Argyll and Bute, which it states are as follows: *'a) To increase the proportion of locally produced electricity exported from and consumed within Argyll and Bute b) To meet local energy requirement, energy research aspirations and energy export demands c) Where practicable, to achieve local self sufficiency or local surplus in energy requirements d) To facilitate the achievement of national energy targets without unacceptable detriment to the environment of Argyll and Bute e) To ensure effective siting of renewable developments which seeks to optimise energy production and distribution without unacceptable detriment to the environment of Argyll and Bute f) In addressing these issues to encourage effective partnership working with all stake holders.'*

Finally, the document states that the Council is: *'committed to support wind farm developments in forms, scales and sites where the technology can operate efficiently, where existing and approved grid capacity can be maximised, and where direct, indirect and cumulative environmental impacts can be satisfactorily addressed. These will include impacts on landscapes and the historic environment; ecology (including birds), biodiversity and nature conservation; the water environment, communities; aviation; telecommunications; noise; and shadow flicker.'*

The applicants fully appreciate the Council's clarity in this respect. As has been stated above, and as is shown in the supporting ES, the whole rationale behind the turbines is fully in line with the aims of the Council and all major environmentally related issues have been thoroughly addressed against international, national, regional and local policies as deemed appropriate.

As well as the planning and economic issues (which are identified above) there are additional factors which must be taken into consideration by the authority when assessing the planning application and these are discussed below.

Ascog Farm, near Rothesay on the Isle of Bute, covers approximately 150 acres and has been locally owned by Mr Tear and Ms McVey for four years. The Farm fulfils a key role in the economic activity of the area continuing the trend of family farming on the island where Ms McVey's family have been farming for three generations, since the early part of last century. The family farm has recently relocated to Ascog from Lochend Farm at the southern end of Loch Ascog, where the family held the tenancy of that particular farm since 1955. Ascog Farm is one of the few farms not owned by the Mount Stuart Trust. Family farming has been the mainstay of the rural community on the island for many years but is now in decline. Membership figures from The National Farmers Union (NFU) show that smaller scale family farming has declined by a third in the last twenty years.

Around 110 acres of the land at Ascog Farm is down to permanent pasture, the remaining 40 acres comprising rough grazing. The farm land is grazed all year by a small herd of nine Shorthorn cross cattle (with suckler calves at foot) together with a flock of 50 Texel cross sheep, recently joined by 10 pedigree Shetland sheep. In the summer, Ascog Farm takes on grazing cattle from neighbouring farms and, later in the year, over-wintering hogs from the hill ground in mainland Argyll. The revenue from farming can vary significantly from year to year due to variations in weather conditions, crop quality, market prices and operations costs

such as fertiliser and fuel. This means that diversification into a sustainable and reliable source of income is beneficial for Ascog Farm both to reduce exposure to risk and to allow for the maintenance and development of the farm's resources as responsible custodians of the land.

Population and Employment: The findings of the 2011 Census are not expected until December 2012, but the 2001 Census showed the population of Scotland was 5,062,011: that of Argyll and Bute at 91,306: that of Rothesay 5,017: and that of the application Postcode Area at 173. Like many parts of rural Scotland the area is not heavily populated. According to the same Census the workforce in Argyll and Bute at the 2001 Census was 40,618. A summary of the 2001 Census employment statistics by area is provided in Table 3.1.

Table 3.1: Employment Data (2001 Census)

Sector	Postcode Area 60QD000561 ³	Rothesay	Argyll and Bute Council Area
All persons aged 16-74	121	3551	66506
Agriculture and hunting and forestry	11.11%	2.03%	4.59%
Fishing	0.00%	0.66%	1.82%
Mining and quarrying	0.00%	0.49%	0.71%
Manufacturing	8.64%	10.37%	7.05%
Electricity and gas and water supply	1.23%	0.77%	0.89%
Construction	1.23%	8.83%	7.36%
Wholesale & retail trade and repairs	7.41%	12.78%	11.81%
Hotels and restaurants	7.41%	9.65%	8.19%
Transport and storage and communication	3.70%	9.16%	7.10%
Financial intermediaries	2.47%	1.48%	2.01%
Real estate and renting and business activities	17.28%	10.59%	8.70%
Public administration and defence and social security	2.47%	6.25%	16.75%
Education	6.17%	5.92%	6.33%
Health and social work	16.05%	14.48%	11.99%
Other	14.81%	6.53%	4.70%

The main employment area in the immediate area surrounding the proposed wind energy project is within the manufacturing, health and social work, real estate and other sectors (circa 59.25%). A relatively low level of employment relates to tourism within the area (circa 7.41%), whilst the percentage for agriculture and hunting and forestry (circa 11.1%) is well above the figures for Rothesay and Argyll and Bute as a whole.

Economic Benefits and Tourism: During the construction of the development, money would typically be spent in the locality of the project. The provision of site facilities, concrete foundations and access tracks together with general civil engineering and technical services

³ This is a geographic area consisting of the following postcodes: PA20 9EU, PA20 9LH, PA20 9LJ, PA20 9LL, PA20 9LN, PA20 9LP, PA20 9LR, PA20 9LW, PA20 9LZ, PA20 9NA, PA20 9NX, PA20 9PA, PA20 9PB, PA20 9PD.

could benefit local companies, contractors and their employees. It is possible that local companies will bid for elements of the construction contracts. Additional indirect expenditure in local shops, service stations, hotels and restaurants is also expected. The applicant would utilise, where practicable, local contractors for construction, operation and maintenance work.

Once operational, there would also be a requirement for maintenance engineers to undertake the supervision and maintenance. It is hoped that this will be provided by staff based on the Isle of Bute with specialist technical support as required. When the wind energy project starts to supply electricity into the local electricity network, the landowner directly involved in the project would benefit from income from electricity sales payments and offsetting their own electricity costs, thus presenting a viable diversification opportunity.

When the landowner payments are combined with local authority rates, community benefit payments under the Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES) and other ongoing site maintenance expenses, this project would represent a substantial long term investment in the local economy.

The potential of the site was recognised early on by Community Energy Scotland and the Energy Saving Trust who together are administering the Scottish Government's Community and Renewable Energy Scheme (CARES). Ascog Farm was one of the first farm businesses to apply for and succeed in obtaining CARES funding to help with pre-application costs and if the application for renewable wind energy generation is successful, the developers must give a minimum of £10,000/installed MW/year for 20 years to a properly constituted and independent local body. Ascog Farm's chosen local partner is Fyne Futures, a registered Scottish Charity, which will administer funds for the benefit of those living on Bute. Activities will be co-ordinated through Fyne Futures 'Towards Zero Carbon Bute (TZCB)' project. In a time when public spending is being decreased, this continued income for 20 years will ensure that the charity have a steady stream of income. In addition, given the length of time of the community contributions this will enable the charity to adopt longer term projects that would not be possible without a guaranteed continued income stream.

TZCB help residents and organisations on Bute to reduce their carbon footprints, to minimise energy bills, and to reduce costs from transport. Over half the buildings on the island are pre-1919 stone construction and extremely hard to treat with traditional energy efficiency measures such as cavity and loft insulation. If listed building status and/or conservation area

exists then the barriers to achieving any sort of efficiencies are extremely difficult and, for some, very expensive. TZCB understand the drivers of fuel poverty on the island are poor energy efficiency in homes, rising fuel costs and low incomes:

- Energy efficiency:
 - 38.3% of households in Argyll are in fuel poverty – 11% in extreme fuel poverty;
 - 88.5% of households are non-complaint with Scottish Housing Quality Standards (SHQS) in Argyll; and
 - Circa 60% of households on Bute are pre-1929 stone built;
- Fuel Costs:
 - Electricity and oil are main sources of heating with 95% of Bute's geography is off gas grid – the price of both electricity and oil has been steadily increasing over the years
- Insufficient Income:
 - 14% of the total island population are deemed to be income deprived;⁴

In order to achieve their target of 202.5 tonnes of CO₂ saving, TZCB intend to help residents on Bute:

- Understand how domestic energy contributes to climate change and Bute's carbon footprint;
- Know the problem areas that need action to improve the energy efficiency of a building;
- Understand what actions householders can take to reduce energy use;
- Know what solutions are available to insulate and draught proof hard to treat buildings e.g. grants of up to 90% towards double glazing and insulation for householders;
- Be aware of the grants, loans and services available;
- Be able to install energy efficient technologies suitable to building type and affordability; and
- Benefit from advice and support to help reduce fuel bills and ultimately, carbon emissions.

⁴ TZCB data

The income generated from the Ascog Wind Energy project that will go to TZCB to administer will be used to achieve the aims detailed above.

Farms are considered to be particularly good at recycling extra income into the local economy. Results from the Scottish Income-Output Tables demonstrate that agriculture in general displays a high multiplier effect on the wider economy. The results show that agriculture is within the top 10% of industries generating addition income within other industries, and within the top 25% for generating employment in other industries. An Agricultural Strategy for the Argyll Area (which covers the Isle of Bute) states that *'diversification gives rise to economic effects beyond the farm gate in the form of income and employment'*.

Given a reliable source of income for the farm, there are a number of exciting and diverse opportunities that can be capitalised on and these include:

- Reinstating the farm curling pond as an attraction for tourists and local residents;
- Improving the landscape on the west side of the hill by planting indigenous broadleaved species;
- Cutting a 'Turbine Trail' celebrating the production of energy at Ascog throughout the ages. This would follow the trail of power sources that have existed there from hydro-power in the 18th and 19th Century from Loch Ascog to power mills; to the coalmine on the hill operated on the hill until the 20th Century; to the current proposal using wind. This would be an amenity appealing to walkers, mountain cyclists and horse riders and would also be an educational resource;
- The derelict cottage conveniently located near to, but at a safe distance from the turbine location could be developed as a visitor centre with further information on renewable energy, farm history (incorporating some of the existing artefacts from the farm);
- Extending the pedigree herd of Shetland sheep to include other native rare breeds;
- Improving the small herd of beef cattle, free ranging all year round and helping to manage the rough ground;
- Continuing the improvement in field drainage, pasture land and field boundaries; and
- Improving and renovating the original Georgian farm outbuildings.

These initiatives would be fully assessed at a later date and appropriate planning permission sought if required. The list above is not exhaustive and is solely aimed to provide an

indication of the opportunities that would be possible with a new revenue stream. As a result of these and other initiatives, a number of employment opportunities would arise.

Impact on Tourism: The impact of wind farms on tourism is not clear cut. A number of surveys have been carried out with a variety of conclusions: many surveys finding a positive effect and as many finding a negative one. However, the Scottish Government commissioned a study to determine *'The Economic Impacts of Wind Farms on Scottish Tourism'*. It should be noted that this report focuses on larger scale commercial wind developments than currently proposed, but many points are relevant to smaller scale wind energy projects such as that proposed at Ascog Farm. This Report states that: *'Scottish tourism depends heavily on the country's landscape, with 92% of visitors stating that scenery was important in their choice of Scotland as a holiday destination, the natural environment being important to 89% of visitors (Tourism Attitudes Survey 2005). As part of the general policy to create a more successful country, with increasing sustainable economic growth, the Tourism sector has agreed a target of 50% revenue growth in the ten years to 2015'*.

In total, 380 tourists were surveyed as part of this study at locations that maximised the likelihood that respondents would have seen a wind farm during their visit. The primary aim of the study was to confirm whether the experience had altered the likelihood of a return to an area or to Scotland as a whole. The report concluded that in total, three-quarters (75%) of people felt that wind farms had a positive or neutral impact on the landscape. Wind farms were also compared to other structures such as pylons, and wind farms received the joint lowest number of *'no impact'* responses. In conclusion, the results confirm that a significant minority (20% to 30%) of tourists preferred landscapes without wind farms. However, of these only a small group were so offended that they changed their intentions about revisiting Scotland.

Numerous surveys have been conducted to assess the public perception of wind farms. A report entitled *Public Attitudes to Windfarms* (MORI Scotland, 2003) commissioned by the Scottish Government, surveyed people living close to Scotland's operational wind farms. The survey considered people within 20 km of operational wind farms with nine or more turbines. The survey found that people living within 5 km of the local wind farm hold the most positive views, with 45% saying they think the overall impact has been positive and 6% saying they think it has been negative. More recent research carried out by Ipsos MORI in April 2012 into public attitudes to wind power for Renewable UK/Hill and Knowlton Strategies agrees with these findings. The majority were either strongly in favour (28%) or tend to favour (38%) wind

power in the UK. A further 22% neither favoured nor opposed. A minority of 3% were strongly opposed and 5% tend to oppose. Furthermore 68% thought that development in wind energy as part of the Government Renewables Strategy was value for money.

A poll commissioned by the Sunday Times and carried out by YouGov in December 2011, showed that 56% of public support expansion of wind and only 19% are against. The poll also showed that 60% of public support Government investment in wind energy.

Research commissioned by VisitScotland again backs up findings that wind farms do not affect the choice of eight in ten tourists when visiting Scotland and most people do not feel wind farms spoil the countryside. The case of wind farms enhancing tourism is also shown by 46% of people who would be interested in visiting a wind farm with a tourist centre.

Recent local research on the island showed that the majority of local respondents were in favour of wind energy. In fact 92% were in favour of large scale wind turbines on Bute with 94% in favour of Bute becoming completely powered by renewable energy. This is made more pertinent given that the survey was published in December 2011 just before the storms of 3 January 2012 wiped out the entire electricity supply to the island for 2 days.

The biggest concerns reported in the same survey were climate change and rising energy costs. The benefits that the community would hope to gain from renewable energy projects included local employment, lowering the carbon footprint, reduced energy costs and energy efficiency improvements.

Whilst, the development at Ascog Farm is not of the scale considered in the studies highlighted above, the outcome of these surveys do suggest that there is strong support for onshore wind development in Scotland, both from local residents and tourists. Studies mentioned above highlight that every development is unique and wind farms can even offer a positive experience for tourism. The additional tourism and heritage opportunities envisaged at Ascog Farm such as the turbine trail, the curling pond, the 'energy through the ages' visitor centre - all set against the back drop of a traditional family farm - has the potential of making this project a very enjoyable experience for tourists and locals alike.

These benefits are in addition to the commitment to the TZCB community fund which is geared towards tackling fuel poverty; creating new jobs and developing skills in a significant energy sector; continuing the family tradition of farming; offsetting the carbon footprint of the

island; and contributing to the local and national targets on climate change. This requires the Ascog Wind Energy Project to be considered on its own merit in terms, but in a comprehensive manner, bearing in mind how the local island economy and the community will benefit as a whole.

Significant Residual Effects: The economic impacts from this development are considered to be positive. The development represents a significant investment opportunity for the area which will impact indirectly on the demand for local services during the construction phases and provide ongoing community payments during the operational phase. It will also reduce the carbon footprint of the farm as well as the area as a whole, while securing their long term sustainability through additional investment. No adverse impacts are predicted on local recreation and tourist interests. In addition, the activities listed above will serve to enhance local recreation and tourism opportunities. With regard to domestic properties, there is no robust evidence to suggest that the development will have a negative impact on property values in the area. Every effort has been made to maximise the distance from houses and, therefore, negate any adverse impacts on these properties from factors such as noise and shadow flicker.

It is considered that the overriding socioeconomic impacts are positive as are the potential benefits for local tourism. The development represents a strong example of farm diversification and will generate a significant additional source of revenue, which will not only support the ongoing farm business, but will also have positive direct and indirect effects on other local business and the wider community.

4 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this report, and the detailed ES, is to provide documentary evidence to assist planning officers to consider and balance the merits of the proposed development against possible negative impacts associated with the construction and long-term operation of the wind turbines.

It is suggested that the development of the Ascog Farm Wind Energy Project satisfies the guidance given in the appropriate planning policies and there is a net positive impact upon the community at large. In conclusion it is noted that:

- The wind turbines help fulfil the current Scottish and UK government policy on renewable and wind power production;
- The proposal satisfies the requirements stipulated in the Argyll and Bute Regional Plan;
- The proposal satisfies the requirements stipulated in the Argyll and Bute Local Plan;
- The proposed site and associated works have been shown to be of satisfactory design with regard to technical and environmental characteristics;
- Landscape and visual impacts have been assessed and it is considered that the landscape can accommodate the proposed development;
- There will be no negative impact through noise and shadow flicker;
- The safety of the public will be protected through a proper safety awareness and management programme; and
- The diversification opportunity created through the development will provide economic and tourism benefits to the local community.

The proposed Ascog Farm Wind Energy Project is clearly in accordance with the principals of sustainability and will provide significant environmental, economic and social benefits to the local community. Taking account of the National Scottish policy context and the environmental assessments, it is submitted that when all material planning factors are taken into account the balance clearly lies in favour of the desirability and benefits to be gained from the generation of clean renewable energy from this development.