Technical Appendix 5.7: Assessment of The Highland Council's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance Criteria

Technical Appendix 5.7: Assessment of OWESG Criteria

5.7.1 Introduction

5.7.1.1 The Highland Council's Onshore Wind Energy Supplementary Guidance (OWESG) (2017) lists ten landscape and visual criteria the Council will use as a framework for assessing proposals. The Council's Scoping Opinion requires that these 10 criteria, form part of the Applicant's own assessment of the Proposed Development. The 10 criteria have been a consideration in the assessment of the Proposed Development and Table 5.7.1 in this Technical Appendix describes the assessment of the Proposed Development.

Table 5.7.1: Assessment of OWESG Criteria			
Criteria	**Description**	**Measure**	**Assessment of the Proposed Development**
Criterion 1	Relationship between Settlements/Key locations and wider landscape respected.	The extent to which the proposal contributes to perception of settlements or key locations being encircled by wind energy development	There would be no or very limited visibility from settlements within 10 km of the Site. Beyond 10 km the Proposed Development would potentially be visible from the eastern part of Alness, Invergordon, Cromarty, Conon Bridge, Muir of Ord and Inverness. Where visible it would occupy a relatively small part of available views and would not encircle any settlement identified in the Highland Wide Local Development Plan (HWLDP). The Proposed Development would be visible from Key Views identified in the OWESG such as A9 Duncanston (Viewpoint 5 – Figure 5.30a-g), Cnoc Fyrish (Viewpoint 11 - Figure 5.36a-f), Cromarty Harbour (Viewpoint 12 – 5.37a-g), Dornoch Point (Viewpoint 14 – Figure 5.39a-f), Ben Wyvis (Viewpoint 16 – Figure 5.41a-g), Knockfarrel (Viewpoint 24 – Figure 5.49a-g) and Allanfearn Junction A96 (Viewpoint 26 – Figure 5.51a-g). At most of these locations the residual effects would be Moderate or Moderate/Minor and Not Significant in the comparative scenario with effect at Ben Wyvis assessed as Moderate and Not Significant. Effects at Ben Wyvis only would be Major/Moderate and **significant** in the restored scenario. The proposed turbines would be more noticeable but would not contribute to the perception of settlements being encircled by wind farm development. Many key locations and routes are not affected or effects are **not significant** but where visible the Proposed Development would be a noticeable feature although not visually dominant. On balance the objective of this criterion is slightly diminished.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Turbines are not visually prominent in the majority of views within or from settlements/key locations or from the majority of its access routes.	
Criterion 2	Key Gateway locations and routes are respected	The extent to which the proposal reduces or detracts from the transitional experience of key Gateway Locations and routes.	There would be visibility form Key Gateway locations identified in the OWESG and these are represented by Viewpoint 5:A9 Duncanston (Figure 5.30a-g), Viewpoint 15: Dornoch Bridge (Figure 5.40a-f) and Viewpoint 17: A835 Leanaig Junction (Figure 5.42a-g). The assessment indicates there would be Moderate or Moderate/Minor and **not significant** effects at most in the comparative scenario. In the restored scenario, there would be Moderate and **not significant** effect at most at Viewpoint 5: A9 Duncanston (Figure 5.30a-g) where the Proposed Development would be seen on the skyline as a noticeable focal point occupying a small part of the view in a large scale panorama where the wider landscape and views are a more notable influence on the sense of arrival. On balance the effect on this criterion is neutral.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Wind turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise detract from landscape characteristics which contribute the distinctive transitional experience found at key gateway locations and routes.	
Criterion 3	Valued natural and cultural landmarks are respected	The extent to which the proposal affects the fabric and setting of valued natural and cultural landmarks	The OWESG describes Ben Wyvis as "*…a dominant landmark in the inner Moray Firth area."* Views to it are recognised as important. The Proposed Development would be visible in views of Ben Wyvis as shown on Viewpoint 5: A9 Duncanston (Figure 5.30a-g), Viewpoint 13: Easter Brae, Black Isle (Figure 5.38a-g) and Viewpoint 19: Culbokie (Figure 5.44a-g). However, the Proposed Development would be separated from Ben Wyvis by terrain and perceived in a different landscape to the landmark mountain. The Proposed Development would not interrupt views towards Ben Wyvis due to this separation and although the proposed turbines would be seen on the skyline there would be no adverse scale comparisons with Ben Wyvis. On balance the Proposed Development meets the requirements of this criterion.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The development does not, by its presence, diminish the prominence of the landmark or disrupt its relationship to its setting.	
Criterion 4	The amenity of key recreational routes and ways is respected.	The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of key recreational routes and ways (e.g. Core Paths, Munros and Corbetts, Long Distance Routes etc.)	There are 11 Munros in the 35 km Study Area and several Corbetts. Viewpoint 1: Beinn Dearg (Figure 5.26a-g) is representative of a group of Munros in the western part of the Study Area. Viewpoints 2: Carn Salachaidh (Figure 5.27a-g), 22: Tom Ban Mor (Figure 5.47a-g) and 23: Diebidale Ridge (Figure 5.48a-g) are representative of hilltops throughout the Study Area. Viewpoint 16: Ben Wyvis (Figure 5.41a-g) is representative of views from Ben Wyvis, the closest Munro in the Study Area. The assessment indicates that effects would be **significant** only from Ben Wyvis. From other Munros and hilltops the
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Wind turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of key routes and ways.	

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Criteria	**Description**	**Measure**	**Assessment of the Proposed Development**
			Proposed Development would be seen as a minor feature with limited changes to wider views. The assessment indicates there would be **significant** effects on four core paths within 10 km of the Site. The effects on NCN route 1 are assessed as **not significant** and effects on rail and road routes would be **not significant**. On balance the objective of this criterion is slightly diminished.
Criterion 5	The amenity of transport routes is respected	The extent to which the proposal affects the amenity of transport routes (tourist routes as well as rail, ferry routes and local road access)	Effects on rail and road routes would be **not significant**. On balance the Proposed Development meets the requirements of this criterion.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Wind turbines or other infrastructure do not overwhelm or otherwise significantly detract from the visual appeal of transport routes	
Criterion 6	The existing pattern of Wind Energy Development is respected.	The degree to which the proposal fits with the existing pattern of nearby wind energy development, considerations include: ▪ Turbine height and proportions; ▪ density and spacing of turbines within developments; ▪ density and spacing of developments; ▪ typical relationship of development to the landscape; ▪ previously instituted mitigation measures; and ▪ Planning Authority stated aims for development of area.	The Site is situated at an area where wind farm development is already established. The Proposed Development would result in the removal of the 34 smaller wind turbines of Novar 1. These turbines are scattered across a broad ridge with turbines appearing on the skyline and backdropped against landform and at different spacings presenting an irregular image. The Proposed Development would introduce larger but fewer turbines. These would be seen as a linear array corresponding with variations in underlying landform and presenting a simpler image and more consistent design. The Proposed Development would remain broadly within the footprint of the removed 34 turbines of Novar 1 and would overlap to a degree with Novar 2 resulting in limited perceived extension of wind farm development. On balance the Proposed Development meets the requirements of this criterion.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal contributes positively to existing pattern or objectives for development in the area.	
Criterion 7	The need for separation between developments and/or clusters is respected.	The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects the spaces between existing developments and/ or clusters.	The proposed turbines would be situated entirely within the footprint of the removed 34 Novar 1 turbines and the spacing with Novar 2 turbines would be respected. The separation distance between the Proposed Development and other developments would be maintained and the proposed turbines would be introduced to an already established area of wind farm development. On balance the Proposed Development meets the requirements of this criterion.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal maintains appropriate and effective separation between developments and/ or clusters.	
Criterion 8	The perception of landscape scale and distance is respected	The extent to which the proposal maintains or affects receptors' existing perception of landscape scale and distance.	The Site is situated on a broad ridge that extends to the west of an area of small, steep, rounded hills. In elevated views such as Ben Wyvis (Viewpoint 16 - Figure 5.41a-g) and more distant views such as Carn Salachaidh (Viewpoint 2 - Figure 5.27a-g), Tom Ban Mor (Viewpoint 22 - Figure 5.47a-g) and Diebidale Ridge (Viewpoint 23 - Figure 5.48a-g), the Proposed Development would be seen in expansive large-scale views. While there would be scale comparisons with landform, the Proposed Development would not affect apparent scale or distance. In views from the south and southeast the Proposed Development would be seen beyond intervening small scale hills that form the horizon to views. Viewpoint 13: Easter Brae, Black Isle (Figure 5.38a-g) and Viewpoint 19: Culbokie (Figure 5.44a-g) show that the Proposed Development would be seen in expansive views set back from the intervening ridge and separated from the key landmark of Ben Wyvis. The large scale of views and presence of other visible features such as forestry, buildings and infrastructure allow scale and distance to be perceived and the proposed turbines would not adversely affect that aspect of views. On balance the Proposed Development meets the requirements of this criterion.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	The proposal maintains the apparent landscape scale and/or distance in the receptors' perception.	

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Criteria	**Description**	**Measure**	**Assessment of the Proposed Development**
Criterion 9	Landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is respected	The extent to which the landscape setting of nearby wind energy developments is affected by the proposal.	The Proposed Development would not increase the visual prominence of Novar 2 which is the only nearby operational wind farm. On balance the Proposed Development meets the requirements of this criterion.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Proposal relates well to the existing landscape setting and does not increase the perceived visual prominence of surrounding wind turbines.	
Criterion 10	Distinctiveness of Landscape character is respected	The extent to which a proposal affects the distinction between neighbouring landscape character types, in areas where the variety of character is important to the appreciation of the landscape.	**Technical Appendix 5.2: Landscape Character Assessment** identifies that the Proposed Development would result in significant effects on the host LCT and parts of adjacent LCT only in the restored scenario. The assessment indicates significant effects would occur within 8 km of the Site in the host LCT and within 4 km in the adjacent LCT330 Rounded Hills and Moorland Slopes. **Significant** effects would also occur in the western part of LCT341 Forest Edge Farming and in a small part of LCT339 Inland Strath. These effects arise from increased visibility of the Proposed Development in the restored scenario when compared to the present baseline with Novar 1 turbines. The Proposed Development would not physically extend wind farm development beyond existing boundaries but would affect landscape character as perceived in adjacent LCT. The distinct features and elements in adjacent LCT would be unaltered and the effects of the Proposed Development would decrease with distance due to the greater influence of underlying key characteristics of the wider landscape. On balance the objective of this criterion is diminished to a degree due to the extent of **significant** effects on landscape character. The integrity and variety of landscape character is maintained due to the Proposed Development being situated in an area where wind energy development is already established.
	Development should seek to achieve a threshold where:	Integrity and variety of Landscape Character Areas are maintained.	