

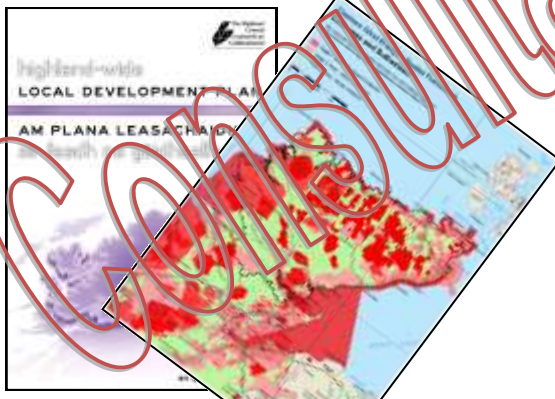
# Planning for Onshore Wind Energy

## How the Council uses its plans and guidance

When the Council deals with planning applications for proposed onshore wind energy development, it has regard to the development plan and to any other material considerations. 'Development Plan' includes Local Development Plans and Supplementary Guidance. The law says that unless material considerations indicate otherwise, the application is to be determined in accordance with the development plan. When the Council considers its response on applications made to Scottish Ministers under the Electricity Act, again it refers to its plans and guidance before coming to an opinion about the proposals.

## National Policy

The Scottish Government published new National Planning Framework 3 and Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) in June 2014. These have changed how planning authorities such as The Highland Council should plan for **Onshore Wind Energy** development. In particular, SPP has changed the way that we should prepare our spatial framework and what we should and shouldn't include in it, and it has introduced some newly mapped constraints to development.



## Local Policy

The Highland Council has begun reviewing its Highland-wide Local Development Plan and its Onshore Wind Energy Interim Supplementary Guidance (including its spatial framework), to take into account the changes to national policy. We intend to carry out consultation on these during 2015.

**To help us draft the policy and guidance, we are providing you with opportunity at this stage to find out more about the work we are doing and to give us your ideas on the attached comments form.**

## About the 'spatial framework'

A spatial framework identifies those areas that are likely to be most appropriate for onshore wind farms as a guide for developers and communities. Development proposals should take account of the spatial framework. The spatial framework is to be set out in the Council's development plan (local development plan or supplementary guidance). National policy says that when Councils prepare their spatial frameworks, they should follow the approach set out in Table 1 of SPP. This involves identifying:

- Areas where wind farms will not be acceptable
- Areas of significant protection
- Areas with potential for wind farm development.

**Table 1: Spatial Frameworks**

**Group 1: Areas where wind farms will not be acceptable:**

National Parks and National Scenic Areas.

**Group 2: Areas of significant protection:**

Recognising the need for significant protection, in these areas wind farms may be appropriate in some circumstances. Further consideration will be required to demonstrate that any significant effects on the qualities of these areas can be substantially overcome by siting, design or other mitigation.

**National and international designations:**

- World Heritage Sites;
- Natura 2000 and Ramsar sites;
- Sites of Special Scientific Interest;
- National Nature Reserves;
- Sites identified in the Inventory of Gardens and Designed Landscapes;
- Sites identified in the Inventory of Historic Battlefields.

**Other nationally important mapped environmental interests:**

- areas of wild land as shown on the 2014 SNH map of wild land areas;
- carbon rich soils, deep peat and priority peatland habitat.

**Community separation for consideration of visual impact:**

- an area not exceeding 2km around cities, towns and villages identified on the local development plan with an identified settlement envelope or edge. The extent of the area will be determined by the planning authority based on landform and other features which restrict views out from the settlement.

**Group 3: Areas with potential for wind farm development:**

Beyond groups 1 and 2, wind farms are likely to be acceptable, subject to detailed consideration against identified policy criteria.

**SPP: Table 1**

Table 1 of SPP specifies the features to be included in the spatial framework. SPP says that the Council should **not** add extra considerations into the spatial framework.

*1) What do you consider to be the minimum scale of onshore wind development that our spatial framework should apply to?*

*2) Apart from the matters identified in Table 1 of SPP, what other considerations do you think we should take into account when identifying where there is strategic capacity for wind farms and areas with the greatest potential for wind development? And what information is available to help us consider those issues?*

*3) What criteria do you think we should consider in deciding all applications for wind farms of different scales, including extensions and re-powering? And what information is available to help us set those criteria?*

**National policy also says we should do the following**

- Decide what the minimum scale of onshore wind development is to which we will apply the spatial framework.
- Identify where there is strategic capacity for wind farms and areas with the greatest potential for wind development.
- Set out the criteria that will be considered in deciding all applications for wind farms of different scales, including extensions and re-powering, taking account of a range of considerations which may include: net economic impact; scale of contribution to renewables targets; effect on greenhouse gas emissions; cumulative impacts; impacts on communities and individual dwellings; landscape and visual impacts; effects on the natural heritage; impacts on carbon rich soils; public access; impacts on historic environment, tourism and recreation, aviation and defence interests and seismological recording, telecommunications and broadcasting installations, road traffic, adjacent trunk roads; effects on hydrology, the water environment and flood risk; decommissioning and site restoration; opportunities for energy storage.
- Continue to deal with proposals for onshore wind turbine developments while we are preparing and updating our spatial frameworks and local policies.
- **Not** use limitations in capacity of the electricity grid as a reason to constrain development proposals.

# Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment of Wind Energy in Caithness

## Background

Impacts on landscape and views are typically key considerations for wind energy development proposals—not only the impacts that might occur as a result of the particular proposed development but also any cumulative impacts that it would have with other windfarms. When a developer puts together their proposal, they undertake detailed assessment. However, the Council wishes to get an overview of the overall pattern and potential impact of developments, particularly in areas such as Caithness where there has been and continues to be considerable pressure for wind energy development.

## The 'CLVA'

This is where the **Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment (CLVA) for Caithness** comes in. Undertaken by the Council's consultants LUC, the purpose of the Caithness CLVA is to identify areas where cumulative landscape and visual effects may be a factor in determining what opportunities there are for further wind energy development to be accommodated. The CLVA does not identify the cumulative effects of individual wind farms, but seeks to identify areas where such effects are more or less likely to occur. It differs from cumulative assessment usually carried out as part of assessment for a planning application, in that the potential for cumulative effects is considered strategically, rather than in the context of one specific development.



[www.highland.gov.uk](http://www.highland.gov.uk)

## LUC's methodology for the CLVA

- Established the baseline (establish study area and planning context; analyse existing and proposed wind energy developments)
- Assessed cumulative effects (define landscape and visual receptors, landscape and visual sensitivity assessment; analyse cumulative visibility; assess existing and potential cumulative landscape and visual effects)
- Recommendations (conclusion and recommendations on location of future development in relation to cumulative effects)

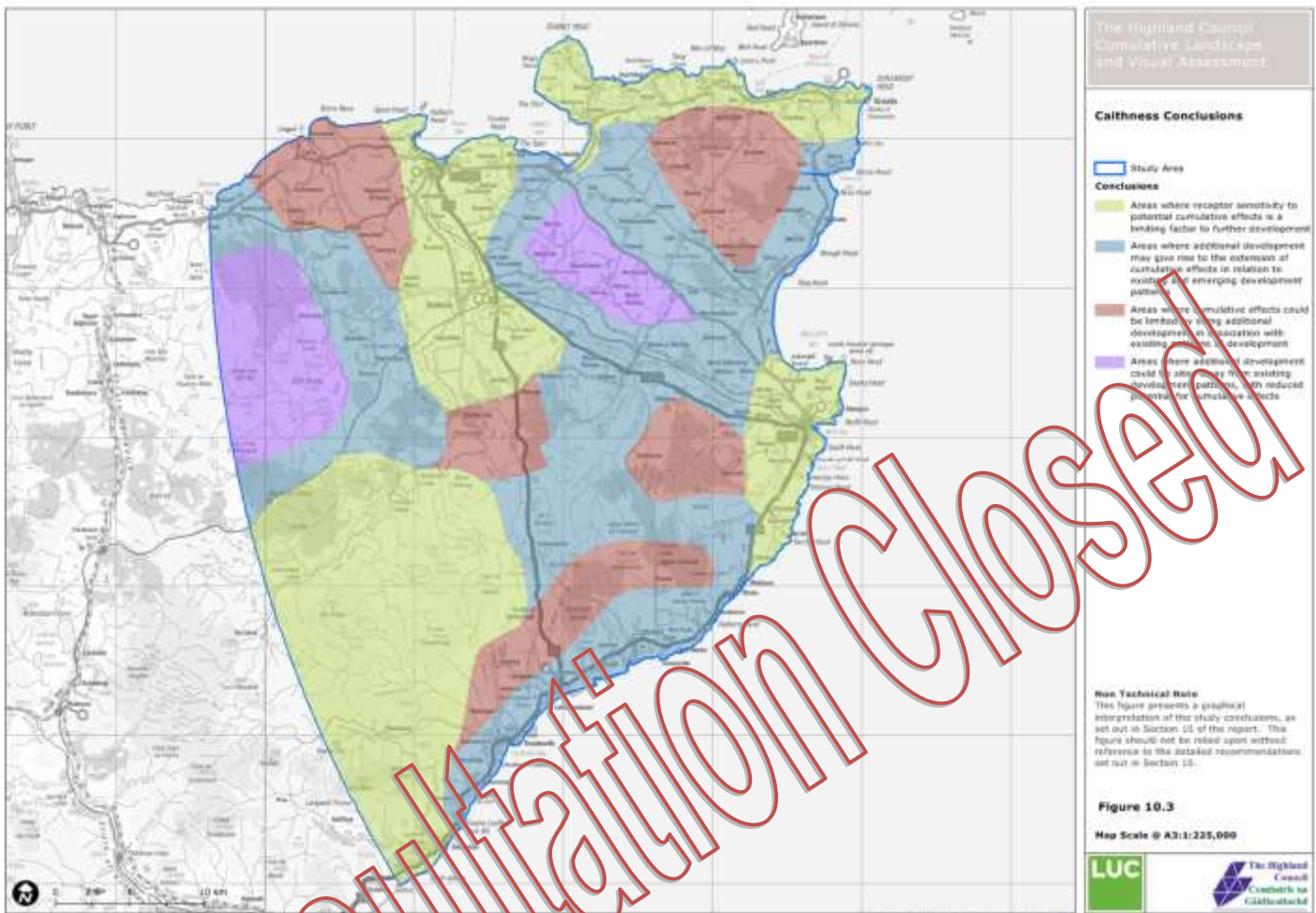
## LUC's recommendations

LUC's recommendations suggest that, in order to limit cumulative landscape and visual impacts, there are some areas where wind energy development should be generally discouraged and other areas where there is more likely to be potential to accommodate such development. A key principle underlying LUC's recommendations is the idea of having 'clusters' of wind energy development in addition to which, between them, there would be 'gap' areas where there would be little or no wind energy development. It should be noted that LUC's recommendations, being focussed solely on cumulative landscape and visual issues, do not take account of other planning issues that the Council will take into consideration, for example the impact of noise arising from the windfarm or the impact on birds.

4) Do you think that defining clusters of wind energy developments and important gaps between them is useful to help guide where further development may be most appropriate?



## LUC's conclusions figure, summarising their recommendations



### Using the CLVA

It is important to note that the CLVA is a strategic study and LUC's recommendations are not a substitute for landscape and visual impact assessment and cumulative assessment for individual windfarm proposals. It would be inappropriate to use the CLVA as a 'traffic-light' style indication of the acceptability, or otherwise, of particular developments. However, it can help the Council to see how a particular development proposal would relate to the **bigger picture** of wind energy development in the area – and whether it might help or hinder LUC's recommendations for managing cumulative effects.

Within the User Guidance section of the CLVA, our consultants acknowledge that the study presents a point-in-time analysis of a constantly changing situation. It should not be necessary to prepare updates of the analysis that they have undertaken. However, in using the CLVA some consideration must be given to recently consented developments, which were not consented at the time of the study, and the User Guidance in the CLVA report provides the Council with further advice on this.

LUC's finalised CLVA for Caithness is now published and is available on the Council's website. The CLVA is a technical study. It is **not** the Council's policy or guidance, but is advice to the Council by its consultant and has been produced primarily to inform preparation and revision of our policy and guidance. In particular it will feed in to revision of the Council's Onshore Wind Energy Interim Supplementary Guidance and the public will be consulted on that during its preparation. We may also refer to the CLVA as a material consideration when we are dealing with individual proposals for wind energy development, if we consider it is relevant to do so.

*5) Given that national policy does not allow us to include the results of the CLVA in the spatial framework, in what ways do you think we should take it into account in our plans and guidance?*

# Planning for Onshore Wind Energy

## Comments Form

***1) What do you consider to be the minimum scale of onshore wind development that our spatial framework should apply to?***

***2) Apart from the matters identified in Table 1 of SPP, what other considerations do you think we should take into account when identifying where there is strategic capacity for wind farms and areas with the greatest potential for wind development? And what information is available to help us consider those issues?***

***3) What criteria do you think we should consider in deciding all applications for wind farms of different scales, including extensions and re-powering? And what information is available to help us set those criteria?***

***4) Do you think that defining clusters of wind energy developments and important gaps between them is useful to help guide where further development may be most appropriate?***

***5) Given that national policy does not allow us to include the results of the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment of Wind Energy in Caithness (the CLVA) in the spatial framework, in what ways do you think we should take it into account in our plans and guidance?***

***6) If you have any general comments about the CLVA, please give them here:***

**Please either send us an email to [devplans@highland.gov.uk](mailto:devplans@highland.gov.uk) providing your response to these questions, or complete this form and send to Development Plans Team, Council HQ, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness IV3 5NX.**

**Responses need to be received by us no later than 7 January 2015.**