

Issue 70		Electricity Transmission Infrastructure	
Development plan reference:		Policy 70 (para. 22.4, page 116) [and text preceding policy 68]	Reporter:
Body or person(s) submitting a representation raising the issue (including reference number)			
Coriolis Energy LLP (1), Jones Lang LaSalle for Scottish and Southern Energy Plc and its Group Companies (SSE) (268), Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) (326), CASA Planning and Environment Ltd for Cube Engineering (449)			
Provision of the development plan to which the issue relates:		Electricity Transmission Infrastructure General Policy	
Council's summary of the representation(s):			
<u>Coriolis Energy LLP (1)</u> <p>A grid network 'fit for purpose' is vital to the expansion of renewables in Highland and Coriolis support the Council's commitment to ensure that electricity grid networks no longer restrict the economic potential of the area.</p> <p>Coriolis encourage Highland Council LDP policy to set out equal support for the expansion and installation of further onshore electricity connections in order to connect new renewable energy generators to the existing grid network. The timescale for sub-sea electricity cables around Scotland remains unclear and clear policy support must be given to onshore grid development or upgrade. Onshore grid improvements will provide the quickest and cheapest way of increasing renewable energy generation over the next 5-10 years. The grid situation is likely to change considerably over the next few years and planning policy needs to remain flexible enough to accommodate changes. (1)</p> <u>Jones Lang LaSalle for Scottish and Southern Energy Plc and its Group Companies (SSE) (268)</u> <p>The inclusion of a policy regarding electricity transmission infrastructure within the LDP is supported in principle.</p> <p>Electricity transmission infrastructure that requires express consent is progressed under the terms of Section 37 of the Electricity Act 1989 (as amended). In assessing a proposed development for electricity transmission infrastructure the decision maker requires to have regard to schedule 9 of the Electricity Act 'Preservation of Amenity and Fisheries', which requires the decision maker to have regard to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• 'Desirability of preserving natural beauty, of conserving flora, fauna and geological or physiographical features of special interest and are protecting sites, building and objectives architectural, historic or archaeological interest; and</li><li>• Shall do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effect which the proposals</li></ul>			

*would have on the natural beauty of the countryside or on any such flora, fauna, features, sites, buildings or on objects'.*

The matters that the decision maker will require to have regard to, regarding the protection of the environment, is significantly at odds with the LDP policy test. The legislative tests require regard to be had to the desirability of preserving certain environmental receptors and for the developer to do what he reasonably can to mitigate any effects. The policy test requiring a proposed transmission infrastructure development to not have a “significantly detrimental impact on the environment” is at odds with the legislative test set out above. Alternative wording for the policy is suggested.

It would be appropriate for the LDP to identify what aspects of the spatial strategy relate to National Developments, as identified by NPF 2, and to provide an appropriate policy framework to support them. SSE recommend that the Council is mindful that National Developments included within NPF 2 have essentially had the principle of development approved by their very inclusion within NPF 2.

The existing and potential transmission and distribution reinforcements within the Council's area are shown in materials submitted with the representation, differentiating between those National Developments within NPF2 and Local Infrastructure works. This information is submitted on the basis of informing the Council of the likely works that will be progressed in the future and to inform the preparation of the further more detailed LDPs. It is not intended that this information should influence any change to the spatial strategy of the plan at this time.

It would also be appropriate for the policy to refer to the Holford Rules, which are generally accepted by the transmission industry as setting the most appropriate guidance applicable to routing decisions for overhead transmissions lines. (268)

#### Scottish Environment Protection Agency (SEPA) (326)

SEPA recommend that Electricity Transmission Infrastructure be assessed against the same criteria as Renewable Energy Developments and that the policy is amended to reflect this. SEPA propose this amendment to the policy because both types of developments have many features and elements in common such as watercourse crossings, access tracks, underground cables, hard standings, site compounds and substations. (326)

#### CASA Planning and Environment Ltd for Cube Engineering (449)

The scope of the policy should go further in support of renewable energy developments that can be located to maximise efficient use of existing infrastructure. Further support should be offered to developments that are located in areas that are able to extract maximum efficiency from available infrastructure and thus negate need for mitigation in some instances, hence minimising environmental risk.

The threshold set in this policy is too high. Electricity transmission infrastructure will unavoidably have a significantly detrimental impact on the environment. The current threshold will pose an impediment to the development of necessary infrastructure required to deliver development targets and in particular renewable energy. (449)

**Modifications sought by those submitting representations:**

Wish to see policy set out equal support for the expansion and installation of further onshore electricity connections in order to connect new renewable energy generators to the existing grid network. (1)

The policy would appropriately refer to the Holford Rules. (268)

The policy would more appropriately refer to an "unacceptable significant impact on the environment" rather than using the term "significantly detrimental". (268)

The LDP would appropriately identify what aspects of the spatial strategy relate to National Developments, as identified by NPF 2, and a more specific and detailed policy framework to support those. (268)

Policy should be amended to provide that Electricity Transmission Infrastructure be assessed against the same criteria as Renewable Energy Developments (Policy 68). (326)

Policy should be amended to say: "In locations that are sensitive, mitigation may help to address concerns and should be considered as part of the preparation of proposals along with proposals that can make efficient use of available infrastructure including effective electrical grid connections with good access to proposed grid capacity". (449)

Lower the threshold for acceptability of proposals. (449)

**Summary of responses (including reasons) by Planning Authority:**

The Council is of the view that Policy 70, taken together with other policies in the Plan, provides a suitable framework for the consideration of proposals for electricity transmission infrastructure. The threshold of the policy is not set too high; it enables a balancing of considerations.

The Council acknowledges that the [‘Holford Rules’](#) provide a tool to guide the preparation of proposals and to assist assessment of options. However, proposals can have a wide range of impacts and the Council would not wish the scope of its consideration of proposals to be limited to the Holford Rules.

The use of the term ‘significantly detrimental’ in the policy is appropriate and fits with its use in Policy 68. The Council’s case on the use of this phrase is set out in more detail in respect of its response to representations on Policy 68 Renewable Energy Developments (Issue 68) and applies here also.

The Council does not consider it necessary to refer in this policy to offering further support to developments that are located in areas that are able to extract maximum efficiency from available infrastructure, although the generality of this point is agreed to by the Council in respect of Policy 68 which deals with renewable energy developments, where any change in response to this may be better placed. See Council's response to representations on Policy 68 Renewable Energy Developments (Issue 68).

The policy does provide sufficient support for onshore electricity infrastructure, whilst it does flag potential mitigation and alternatives including undergrounding and sub-sea options which may help to limit the impact of 'wirescape' in the Highlands and limit impact on landscape capacity.

It is agreed that the Plan would usefully be clarified in respect of grid reinforcements to indicate which of these are National Developments as identified in [National Planning Framework 2 \(NPF2\)](#) (see National Development 11 on Map 10 and in the Annex of NPF2) and what that means in terms of policy and process. This is commended below. However, a separate policy is not required.

It is agreed (within the Council's response to representations on Policy 68 Renewable Energy Developments (Issue 68)) that the Plan would usefully point out that additional infrastructure will need to be developed, for both transmission and distribution, and this is commended below.

#### **Any further plan changes commended by the council**

Indicate in the supporting text which of the electricity grid reinforcements identified in the Plan's spatial strategy are National Developments as identified in National Planning Framework 2, and explain what that means.

Add in reference in the supporting text to the fact that there will be need for other transmission and distribution infrastructure to be developed in the Highlands.

#### **Reporter's conclusions:**

Added by Reporter at later date.

#### **Reporter's recommendations:**

Added by Reporter at later date.