

THE HIGHLAND COUNCIL

**NORTH PLANNING APPLICATIONS COMMITTEE
24 March 2015**

Agenda Item	6.2
Report No	PLN/011/15

**14/03832/FUL : Fine Energy Ltd
Land 265m NW of Upper Northfield Farm, Hempriggs, Thrumster, Wick**

Report by Area Planning Manager

SUMMARY

Description : Erection of 50kW single wind turbine, 34.2m height to tip and 24m to hub

Recommendation : REFUSE

Ward : 03 Wick

Development category : Local

Pre-determination hearing : not required

Reason referred to Committee : call in by ward Members -in

1. PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 1.1 The proposal is for the development of a second wind turbine at the Upper Northfield Farm site, to the north of Loch Hempriggs. The existing single turbine was consented in 2012, and also stands at 34.2m to tip.
- 1.2 This new turbine would appear similar to the existing and is sited 125m NE of its position. The proposed turbine is 24m to hub and 34.2m to upper blade tip; type Endurance E-3120. The required foundation is 6m x 6m x 1.4m deep.
- 1.4 An Environmental Statement has been submitted with the application, which includes 14 montage views of the new turbine in position.
- 1.5 Variations: None

2. SITE DESCRIPTION

- 2.1 The site is an agricultural field 265m to the NW of the Northfield Farm steading, 850m to the west of the A99 and is 1.6km SW of Wick. The plot is rough grazing/bog with scrubby trees and woodland to the NE.
The landscape is very open and perceived as generally flat, sloping gently up to the west and the proposal site is close to being on the highest point in the immediate area. Loch Hempriggs is 800m to the SW of the site and forms the single most prominent landscape feature within the local area, helping to emphasize the perceived horizontality and low topography of the landscape.

There is an existing turbine on the farm site, 125m SW of the proposal, and to the NW of the loch the Achairn and Wathegar windfarms form a backdrop when viewed from the A99, with Camster further to the west. The Burn of Whilk windfarm is currently being erected to the south, and will form a backdrop in views from the north.

The nearest (non-financially linked) properties to the site are, approximately: Northfield House 525m to the ESE; Humster 535m to the NE, Hill of Newton Farm 560m to the ENE and the new house 630m to the SE.

3. PLANNING HISTORY

3.1 14/03392/SCRE, dated 26.09.2014 noting that EIA is not required.

For the adjacent wind turbine:

11/04425/FUL was consented on 16.05.2012 for the installation of 50Kw Endurance E-3120 wind turbine, 19.0m blade diameter on 24.0m tower, plus required hard-standing for installation from existing access.

The submitted Planning Support Statement makes the point that the existing and proposed turbine sites are in different land ownership, although Mr Manson (existing) and Ms MacKay (proposed) are both addressed as resident at Upper Northfield farm; the exact ownership is not a material consideration however, particularly as the focus of issues here is on visual and landscape impact.

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

4.1 Advertised : John O’Groat Journal; SECT 34 - Schedule 3 development
Representation deadline : 02.02.2015

Timeous representations : 0

Late representations : 0

4.2 Material considerations raised are summarised as follows:

- None

5. CONSULTATIONS

5.1 **CAA – No objections, standard response.**

5.2 **HIAL – No Objections.**

With reference to the above, our calculations show that, at the given position and height, this development would be close to infringing the safeguarding surfaces for Wick Airport. However, due to its height and position, a red obstacle light may be required to be fitted at the hub height of the turbine. Provided that this condition is met Highlands and Islands Airports Limited would not object to this proposal.

5.3 **MoD – No objections.** Wish to be advised of the following:

- the date construction starts and ends;
- the maximum height of construction equipment;
- the latitude and longitude of every turbine.

This information is vital as it will be plotted on flying charts to make sure that military aircraft avoid this area. Consider by informative.

5.4 **SNH – no objection.**

1. Summary

There are natural heritage interests on international importance on the site, but in our view these will not be adversely affected by the proposal.

2. Appraisal of the impacts of the proposal and advice

The proposal could affect the East Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA) which is classified for its cliff nesting seabirds and population of peregrine falcon¹. The site's status means that the requirements of the Conservation (Natural Habitats &c.) Regulations 1994 as amended (the "Habitat Regulations") apply. Consequently, the Highland Council is required to consider the effect of the proposal on the SPA before it can be consented (commonly known as Habitats Regulations Appraisal). Please see our website for a summary of the legislative requirements (<http://www.snh.gov.uk/docs/A423286.pdf>).

In our view, the proposal is likely to have a significant effect on herring gulls and great black-backed gulls from this SPA. Consequently, the Highland Council is required to carry out an appropriate assessment in view of the site's conservation objectives for its qualifying interests.

To help you do this, we advise that, in our view, based on the information provided, the proposal will not adversely affect the integrity of the site. The appraisal we carried out considered the impact of the proposal on the following factors;

- Herring gulls and great black-backed gulls were recorded at collision risk height in the Vantage Point (VP) surveys carried out at this proposal site;
- Collision Risk Modelling was carried out for herring gull, which predicted a collision risk of 5.54 herring gulls per breeding season after avoidance (98%). Due to the low number of flights recorded, no collision risk modelling was undertaken for great black-backed gulls. Therefore, collisions of great black-backed gulls are predicted to be very low;
- To account for sabbatical and non-breeding birds (non-SPA birds), the collision risk for herring gull is reduced to 2.05 birds per breeding season;
- In combination with other proposals affecting this SPA (both onshore and offshore), the cumulative collision risk for these species will not affect the conservation objectives for the site; and
- Therefore, the proposal (both individually and cumulatively) will not adversely impact the SPA population.

You may wish to carry out further appraisal before completing the appropriate assessment. We would like to note that the survey effort carried out to inform this assessment was slightly below our recommended level of 36 hours (30 hours were completed). We are happy to accept this deviation from our advice in this case. However, we would like to note that completing less than the required survey work may not be accepted for future proposals.

5.5 **THC Environmental Health – No objections subject to conditions relative to noise levels and specification of the proposed turbine.**

Noise arising from the wind turbines shall not exceed an LA90, 10 min of 35dB at the nearest noise sensitive premises within Highland Council. This condition shall apply at wind speeds not exceeding 10ms⁻¹, as measured or calculated at a height

of 10m above ground level at the wind farm and shall only apply to dwellings or other Noise Sensitive Premises existing or the subject of full Planning Permission at the date of submission of this Planning Application (vacant or occupied). Should these noise levels be exceeded, the Wind Turbine operator shall take steps to ensure that noise emissions from the wind farm are reduced to the aforementioned noise levels or less.

Prior to the delivery to the site, full details of the wind turbines including the make, model, design, power rating and sound power levels of wind turbine to be used on site shall be submitted to, and require the approval of, the Planning Authority.

The applicant shall secure a warranty from the turbine supplier and/or manufacturer for the absence of tonality of the turbines, as determined in accordance with a recognised standard. A copy of the standard detailing the assessment method shall be submitted for approval by the Planning Authority. In the absence of such warranty a tonal penalty of 5dB will be assumed and noise levels specified above will be reduced by 5dB.

5.6 Development Plans – no objections.

Note that the proposal is small scale, and that The landscape and visual assessment carried out by Land Use Consultants (LUC) in July 2014 does not form part of the adopted Development Plan. However, it may be used as a material consideration for the determination of medium-to-large planning applications. It does not take account of proposals for wind turbines under 35 metres to tip and has very limited relevance for, what they consider as small proposals (35m to 50m). Nevertheless, the proposed site is identified as an “area where cumulative effects could be limited by siting additional development in association with existing patterns of development”

5.7 Transport Planning – no objection

We have been consulted on the above application; however, having looked at the submission on ePlanning there wouldn't appear to be any local roads issues. Access to the site will be via a private access connecting directly to the A99 trunk road, vehicle movements will be limited and any roads and transport impacts will largely be matters for Transport Scotland to consider.

5.8 Historic Environment Team – no objection.

Given the existing turbine to the south-west it is considered that the proposed turbine will not add significantly to the existing indirect impacts with regard to cultural heritage. HET therefore have no objection to the proposed development.

5.9 Historic Scotland – no objection

The development proposal does not raise issues of national significance such that we would object. We note that there is a consented similar scale turbine located just SW of the location of the proposed scheme. Both of these turbines are located in the vicinity of the scheduled monument known as Cairn of Humster broch 200m N of Northfield (Index No. 533) and are likely to be visible from it. However, given the relatively small scale nature of these turbines, we are content for our historic environment interests that significant adverse impacts on the setting of the monument are unlikely.

5.10 **Tannach & District Community Council – no objection** but would make the following observations

The Community Council has looked at this Application and have no objections. Neither have we received any representations from members of the public. We do however have some comments:

1. The turbine at Leafin, Newton Row is not mentioned in the cumulative list.
2. The costs for decommissioning appear to be as at September 2014 with no additional sum for inflation.
3. We have concerns that because there is a single turbine, it is inferred that another can be constructed with little or no adverse impact on communities.
4. We have concerns about the number of single turbines proposed already, if this proposal is approved could it set a precedent?

5.11 **Landscape Officer**

Advises that the visualisations do not meet the Highland Council Standard in that :

- Some single frame images are at 70mm focal length and not the 75mm prescribed.
- The camera height is 1.6m rather than 1.5m.
- The Application number on the visualisations is for a two turbine development at Wick Airport Industrial Estate (12/01296/FUL) rather than 11/04425/FUL.
- VP4 is poorly positioned with the view towards the development aligned with the utility poles.

More significantly, the language in the Supporting Planning Statement's Landscape and Visual Impact paragraphs is idiosyncratic and, on occasion unclear. For example :

- the meaning, in context, of 'landscape hierarchy' and 'landscape resource'
- the references to visual receptors being 'Transitory and residual' is confusing, it seeming possible that the terms are being used to indicate 'transport related' and 'residential', respectively.
- recurring use of the terms Primary Transitory, Secondary Transitory and Primary Visual and Secondary Visual with no explanation of what these area. 'Secondary effects' in LVIA are generally those that are distant from the cause, either in time or geography. The usage here seems to be 'of secondary importance', but this is not explicit. In several of the viewpoint summaries there is no detail at all given under these headings.
- unclear use of 'geographic extent'.

Summaries of Findings on Impacts at Viewpoints:

The Supporting Statement is difficult to understand. Some of the confusion may be due to the author trying to identify impacts attributable to the proposed turbine in isolation and then adding 'cumulative impacts'. However in a situation where the proposed development can *only* be seen in association with the existing, there really is only one set of impacts. This confusion can be seen for example in the 'Visual Impact including cumulative visual impact' column where initial assessment of high impacts are moderated down to an unspecified level by the presence of the existing turbine.

A critique of the specific confusions which arise for each viewpoint, or item which is unclear has not been specified. Whilst each confusion may be seemingly trivial in itself, cumulatively they convey no clear message about the assessor's understanding of the significance of impacts arising from the proposed development.

Cumulative Impacts:

There is no consideration of developments such as Burn of Whilk, where there may be sequential impacts even if there is no simultaneous visibility. Likewise there is no analysis of the impacts on receptors on the road between Gansclet and Haster where there is likely to be sequential visibility with Walthegar and Camster 2.

It is considered that the landscape and Visual Impact information supplied in the Planning Supporting Statement is not of an appropriate quality to be relied on in decision making

From a desk based assessment the following observations are made. For the reasons stated above with reference to cumulative impact, these are confined to the Northfields turbine and do not look at impacts of Walthegar, Camster 2 or Burn of Whilk.

Visual receptors will see the proposal in the context of the existing turbine at Land NW of Upper Northfield which is the same model as that applied for. The assessor's opinion that the applicants will be viewed as one development is likely to be correct.

Initially there was a concern with Motion Parallax, the effect of a viewer travelling on the A99 perceiving the relative positions of the turbines to change as they pass them. From a further review of the alignment of the turbines it is not considered that this would be a significant issue. However, the changing relationship between the turbines, as perceived by a road traveller, would make it easier to pinpoint the combined development in space and may make viewer perception of distance and scale more accurate. This may influence perception of the expansiveness of the local landscape as a whole.

Conclusion:

•On Landscape Impact: 'I have, as a desk study, examined the SNH Landscape Character descriptions and Key Characteristics for the Character Types which come together in this area: Open Intensive Farmland, Mixed Agriculture and Settlement and a small area of Sweeping Moorland (approx. 1.2km²). On the basis of this information and the application detail, but in the absence of a site visit, I would not anticipate unacceptable impacts on the key qualities of the Landscape Character to arise. However, there may be specific qualities to the local Landscape character, found at this intersection of the broader types, which make the Landscape more sensitive to the development of wind energy. Such localised factors may lead to a conclusion that impacts are not acceptable.'

•On Visual impacts 'Having been unable to visit the site on this occasion I am not able to offer a fully informed opinion on the acceptability of Visual impacts arising from this development.'

6. DEVELOPMENT PLAN

The following policies are relevant to the assessment of the application:

6.1 Highland-Wide Local Development Plan 2012

Policy 28	Sustainable Design
Policy 57	Natural, Built and Cultural Heritage
Policy 58	Protected Species
Policy 59	Other Important Species
Policy 61	Landscape
Policy 67	Renewable Energy Developments including impact on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Natural, built and cultural heritage features;• Species and habitats;• Visual impact and impact on the landscape character;• Amenity at sensitive locations;• Safety and amenity of any regularly occupied buildings;• Ground water/surface water;• Safe use of airport, defence or emergency service operations;• Other communications infrastructure• Public access• Tourism/recreation interests;• Land and water based traffic and transport interests.
Policy 69	Electricity Transmission Infrastructure
Policy 72	Pollution

6.2 Caithness Local Plan 2002 (as continued in force):

NB. This local plan is relevant only insofar as it continues in force post-adoption of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. More information at: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2012/90/made>

7. OTHER MATERIAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Highland Council Supplementary Planning Policy Guidance

Highland Renewable Energy Strategy & Planning Guidelines (May 2006)

Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy (March 2012)

Small-Scale Wind Turbine Proposals: Interim Supplementary Guidance (Nov 2012)

Sustainable Design Guide (Jan 2013)

*The landscape and visual assessment carried out by Land Use Consultants (LUC) in July 2014. *advisory document only.

7.2 **Scottish Government Planning Policy and Guidance**

Scottish Planning Policy (The Scottish Government, June 2014)

National Planning Framework 3 (The Scottish Government, June 2014)

Onshore Wind Turbines; December 12, 2013.

7.3 **Other**

SNH: Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment. 1998

SNH: The Siting and Design of Small-Scale Wind Turbines between 15 and 50m in Height. 2012

SNH: Assessing the Cumulative Impact of Onshore Wind Energy Developments. 2012

8. **PLANNING APPRAISAL**

8.1 Section 25 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 requires planning applications to be determined in accordance with the development plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise.

8.2 This means that the application requires to be assessed against all policies of the Development Plan relevant to the application, all national and local policy guidance and all other material considerations relevant to the application.

8.3 **Development Plan Policy Assessment**

In order to address the determining issues, the following must be considered:

- a) Development Plan including Supplementary Guidance
- b) Design, Landscape & Visual Impact
- c) Natural Heritage
- d) Roads and Traffic Impact
- e) Noise
- f) Shadow Flicker
- g) Cultural Heritage
- h) Tourism
- i) Construction Impacts
- j) Aviation Interests
- k) Radio and TV
- l) Water & Drainage (including peat)

This application needs to be assessed principally within the terms of Policy 67 (Renewable Energy Developments) and Policy 61 (Landscape) of the adopted Highland wide Local Development Plan (HwLDP). Other policies set out in the HwLDP, as highlighted earlier in this report, relate to the assessment of key factors which are material considerations noted within this main policy. These elements will be addressed throughout this report. Policy 67 gives general support to renewable energy development, taking into account any mitigation measures, where these are located, sited and designed such that they will not be significantly detrimental either individually or cumulatively with other developments having regard to any significant effects on criteria listed earlier in this report. Policy 61

requires that new development should be designed to reflect the identified landscape characteristics, with an appropriate scale, form and pattern; the cumulative impact of potential developments should also be considered.

Supplementary Guidance

The proposed wind turbine would be considered as small in scale, owing to a hub height of 24m as per THC Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy March 2012. The site is identified as being within a Stage 2 Area as being within an area of potential constraint.

National Policy

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) advises 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. However SPP acknowledges that the design and location of any wind farm development should reflect the scale and character of the landscape. The location of the turbines should therefore be considered carefully to ensure that the landscape and visual impact.

The Scottish Government in responding to climate change and advancing sustainable development has emphasised in SPP and more recently in the '2020 Route map for Renewable Energy in Scotland', a commitment towards a significant majority of Scotland's electricity demand to be generated from renewable sources by 2020 (from a mix of energy types). With regard to these targets Highland has been successful in assisting the delivery of targets for renewable energy, including onshore wind farms projects, a factor which will increasingly require assessment of cumulative impact. Given the current levels of permissions and applications across the area, the Council is well placed to contribute to these targets in addition to its own targets for installed capacity and therefore, choices can be made as to the most appropriate locations for wind energy development.

8.4 **Material Considerations**

The scale of the wind turbine is considered as small in terms of capacity criteria, being 50kw and in consideration of hub-height and rotor diameter as defined within the Wind Energy Development Categories per the Interim Supplementary Guidance: Onshore Wind Energy, THC March 2012. The Small-Scale Wind Turbine Guidance, Interim Supplementary Guidance, November 2012, being the other THC guidance. The main points of consideration are; siting and design, impacts upon amenity, impacts on the natural heritage, landscape considerations and cumulative impact assessments. The application has, through processing, been subject to wide consultation.

It's notable that this would be the second turbine on this farm site, the existing development being 125m to the SW of the proposal.

Submission of inaccurate visualisations and site assessment

The Landscape Officer has noted faults and discrepancies related to the production of the visualisations, as well as the text and terminology within the supporting statement. While this makes a thorough and accurate desk-based assessment problematic, the case officer has visited and is extremely familiar with the site and the surrounding area. The Planning assessment of this application is based upon a

detailed appraisal of all submitted information along with an assessment and appraisal of the proposal in the context of the site and its wider setting; it is important to be familiar with the site (and existing turbine) from all angles/aspects as well as in a variety of weather backdrops. On visual impacts, the Landscape Officer concluded "Having been unable to visit the site on this occasion I am not able to offer a fully informed opinion on the acceptability of Visual impacts arising from this development".

Roads and Transport

Subject to conditions were this application to be subject to approval, it is not considered that access and accessibility would be an issue for this proposal as the wind turbine would be delivered to site in relatively few HGV movements with limited preparatory works and operational maintenance requirements for access.

Water, Drainage and Soils

Construction impacts on water and drainage are largely unspecified with limited information provided on construction specification on site in excess of detail of concrete foundations required; further detailed information would be sought and secured by condition if this development was approved in relation to the likely impacts on water, drainage and soils however.

Noise

An assessment of noise impact has been included within the applicant's ES which assesses potential noise levels at properties closest to the proposed turbine. This identifies that noise levels will not exceed 35dB at the surrounding noise sensitive properties. It should be noted however that the Applicant's house at Upper Northfield will receive 38/39dB (cumulative).

Shadow Flicker

See also section 8.5. As per Scottish Government advice, the Council expects wind turbines to be located a minimum distance equivalent to 10 times the blade diameter from any regularly occupied building not associated with the development. 10 rotor diameters equates to 200m. The nearest non-financially involved property is located approximately 525m to the east-south-east of the proposed location. It is therefore considered unlikely that a negative impact upon residential amenity would accrue from shadow flicker. It is noted that the Applicants house at Upper Northfield is only 270m from the proposed turbine and existing turbines, which is close but still compliant.

Natural Heritage

SNH have identified that there are natural heritage interests of international importance close to the proposed development site but consider they are not adversely affected by the proposal and have no objections.

The proposal lies approximately 2km west from the East Caithness Cliffs Special Protection Area (SPA), classified for its cliff nesting seabirds and population of peregrine falcon. It is likely to have a significant effect on herring gulls from this SPA. In undertaking an Appropriate Assessment it is considered that the conservation objectives for herring gull will be maintained and there will be no

adverse impact on the integrity of the site. This is confirmed by the submitted Environmental Statement Ecology Report, although this also notes the risk of bird collision as 'limited but potentially significant'.

SNH, as a rule, do not comment on landscape/visual impacts for 'small-scale' projects.

Built and Cultural Heritage

The development is located in relatively close association with a number of known historic or archaeological sites and listed buildings. As a moving structure at height the development may have an impact on the setting and enjoyment of historic and/or archaeological sites in the wider countryside within the ZTV. In this instance given the scale and location of the turbine, its impact is unlikely to significantly detract from the historical and archaeological sites in the wider vicinity.

Landscape and Visual Impacts

Landscape Impacts

Landscape impacts relate to the direct physical changes to the fabric or individual elements of the landscape. They also relate to the potential indirect changes to the wider patterns of land-use, land-cover and the arrangement of landscape features which determine the character and value of the landscape.

The site is located within an area of mixed landscape type as identified by SNH's Caithness and Sutherland Landscape Character Assessment, primarily 'mixed agriculture and settlement' in close association/transition with 'town' (Wick), 'open and intensive farmland' and developing 'sweeping moorland' to the NW and SW. Loch Hempriggs to the south forms the single most dominant landscape feature in the immediate area, and its wide expanse of water serves to emphasize a horizontality that defines the low topography and perceived flatness of the surrounding landscape. This is a complex landscape with many signs of human activity, such as the commercial forestry plantation to the west, the many houses and farms as well as the A99 corridor, which forms most viewer's/receptors route of movement through the landscape.

When travelling northwards to Wick along the A99 north of Thrumster there is discernible change in the character of the landscape, which prior to this point had been partially enclosed to the west by rising ground. On leaving Thrumster, the land to the west becomes more level and there is a clear transition to a more open and longer views to the west across Loch Hempriggs and beyond. Here the surrounding landscape is agrarian in nature and the predominant built form is reflective of that in its form and function with wind farms evident beyond this with the town of Wick emerging in the distance.

A second turbine at this location at the proposed scale would become an additional tall vertical focal feature accentuated through movement at height owing to the turning blades; within this open and sparsely developed landscape the pair of turbines would appear as incongruous and overly prominent. While wind turbines have become a more common reference point in the Scottish landscape, the placement of them in highly prominent positions (especially close to population centres) remains problematic relative to landscape impact. This appreciation is heightened when compared to the landward areas of Caithness where the

cumulative impact of turbines and wind-farms has become a significant and at times dominant factor within the landscape. The existing turbine on the site becomes a singular focal point in views due to its scale, colour and vertical nature, all of which are quite incongruous within the landscape. The singularity of its nature does however give it certain unique qualities as an 'event' which are more transitory and less of a significant change to the landscape characteristics than a pattern of development such as multiple turbines. The pattern that is formed by adding a second turbine, in this prominent hill-top position within this wide open landscape, changes the landscape character by becoming a dominant landscape feature that bears no relationship to the other characteristics of the locale. The fact that this change will be experienced by so many people, both resident or in passing, serves to exacerbate its impact upon the landscape.

The Application's submitted landscape assessment considers that the proposal will not accord with Policy 61 Landscape (Planning Support Statement, 7.10 page 18) but considers that the detrimental impact [on landscape character] is no worse than that already established by the existing turbine. It also considers that the siting of the proposed turbine will relate to traditional rural activities and fulfils a need for farm diversification.

Visual Impacts

Visual impacts relate to the potential changes in views and perception of the proposed development on visual amenity.

The Landscape and Visual Assessment undertaken as part of the ES outlines that the most significant effects will be limited to those areas which would have close views of the turbine, that is, those located within a 5km radius-zone of the turbine where the magnitude of change is greatest. Within this zone, the turbine would be theoretically visible from most locations, excepting an arc to the north, and crucially is always visible from the A99 and can be viewed by most of the Wick township area. Extending beyond this there is limited further visibility to the north and north-west, but at 34m in height the impacts are accepted as being predominantly local.

Views 12, 9, and 6 (moving south to north on the A99) are considered particularly important for the assessment of this proposal, being at key locations where the impacts are most clearly visible, as well as being taken from the main road. In all views the turbines are assessed as a pair, rather than the proposal by itself, as the proposal cannot be viewed/considered in isolation.

Viewpoint 1 is a close aspect from the north, showing the turbines as isolated and dominant within the relatively flat landscape of primarily horizontal features. Views 2 and 7 are more distant, from the north and NW, and show the turbines prominently on the skyline. Views 3, 5, 6 and 8 all show a similar north-easterly aspect in close proximity and close to the southern edge of the Wick town boundary; view 6 is the most useful, being on the A99, showing the dominance of the turbines on the skyline contrasting with the rolling undulations of the predominantly horizontal landscape topography. View 4 is wrongly titled as the view from the entrance to Upper Northfield Farm (the site) when it is actually the entrance to 'Northfield'; this is a somewhat misleading view (as noted by the Landscape Officer) as the proposed turbine is blocked by Northfield's farm-shed and the telegraph poles lining the roadway are overly dominant in this single view. View 9 shows the northward view from close to the A99/head of Loch Hempriggs,

with the turbines prominent on the skyline and dominant in their visual impact. Views 10 and 11 are more distant views from the west/WSW, and views 13 and 14 from the north/ENE, which show the turbine blades above the horizon but with their visual impact diminished by the spatial separation from the viewpoint.

View 12 is key in the assessment of visual prominence, being as it is at the point on the northwards A99 journey where the landscape opens out to Loch Hempriggs and Wick beyond, and the turbines come into view. In many ways this is a typical Caithness view of a wide open landscape, and the typically 'big-sky', that contribute so much to the character of the county. A singular turbine within this landscape is prominent, but it provides a solitary and unique vertical element in the viewpoint that doesn't necessarily become overly prominent. Its acceptance was based on its singular nature and the scale and association of its form and function with the adjoining farm complex. Two such elements however change the dynamics and the relationship between the turbine and the associated buildings and present a transition with an industrialisation of the landscape which significantly alter and impact on the character and setting of this area by establishing a pattern of development which take on a visual prominence (emphasised by their kinetic movement), whereas a single turbine has a more sculptural quality with a simplicity of form and impact that adds less to the 'complexity' of a perceived landscape.

The visual impact is thereby considered to be significant and will, due to its scale and cumulative impact with the existing turbine, detract from the landscape immediately surrounding it and along sections of the A99(T), a key tourist route, together with the properties in close proximity to the site. It is therefore considered to be significantly detrimental to individual and community amenity and thus contrary to Policies 61 and 67 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan. The issue of scale is of course key to the visual impact assessment; while these may be classed as 'small-scale' in general wind turbine designation, the impacts of a 34.2m high structure are bound to be considerable. This scale is equal to almost seven times the height of the average single-storey house ridge, which serves to emphasise the impact it will have (by an incongruous man-made object) on the landscape.

The Application's submitted landscape and visual impact assessment considers that the impact on visual receptors, both transitory and residual, is major (Planning Support Statement, 7.8 page 17). It goes on to note that the proposal will not accord with Policy 61 Landscape (7.10 page 18) but considers that the detrimental impact [on visual impact as well as landscape character] is no worse than that already established by the existing turbine. We would counter this statement by saying that the impact of two cannot be the same as the impact of one, as will be assessed further in the following section.

Cumulative Impact

The cumulative impact of this proposal has to be considered from two aspects: the immediate local impact with the existing turbine on the site, as well as the wider impact with surrounding windfarms. A number of other wind energy developments are under consideration at pre-application and screening for Environmental Impact Assessment. It is not competent to assess such within this consideration. However it does demonstrate the cumulative pressure of wind energy development within the wider area of the proposed wind turbine.

Nearby wind farms that have been considered include: Camster 1 at 7.8km to the west; Achairn/Wathegar 5km to the north-west and; Burn Of Whilk 7.5km to the south-west. The Camster2 project will be less than 3km west from the proposal (if consented). In northwards views the Stroupster windfarm, some 16km distant, is visible in the distance. It is therefore considered that there will be extensive visibility of a number of landward wind energy developments from the coastal A99(T) corridor likely to give a sense of continuation of visibility/sequential impact with such developments. No other small/single turbines are visible in local views of the proposal.

A case can be made that the cumulative effect will be sequential or successive, suggesting a linear view of development, rather than development in depth. However, in combination with other existing and consented developments it is considered that this development would introduce an inappropriate visual link with both larger windfarms such as Burn of Whilk and other smaller/singular turbine developments elsewhere in the locale area, of which there are at least six within the 5km radius. This visual link to the wider wind-farm network is considered to be especially problematic when it is so close to a principal population centre such as Wick, from which the wind-farms have a better degree of physical and visual separation.

The more direct effect of cumulative impact is that which would be established with the existing turbine on the farm site. This existing turbine has already made a significant impact on the local landscape character and has a visual impact that is also not viewed positively; this turbine did of course receive planning permission from The Council, but its visual and landscape impacts are only fully realised/appreciated from the built development. The Applicant's (Planning Support Statement, 7.10 page 18) also notes that these existing impacts are negative. The addition of a second turbine is considered to be exacerbating these impacts, an effect which entirely changes the nature of the development on this site. The wide open nature of this typically expansive Caithness landscape is particularly sensitive to the cumulative impact from wind turbines, both singular and in larger groupings. The addition of a second turbine changes the dynamics and the relationship that the development has within this open agrarian landscape irrevocably in that one's perception is now of significantly changed and which will now be visually linked to the much larger wind farms within the area to its detriment. The close proximity of this site to the Wick township only serves to increase the potential negative visual impact that would be applied to the landscape character and to both residual and transitory receptors (viewers).

Tourism/Economical Impact

Separate studies have been carried out by industry and the Scottish Government into the effects of wind farm developments on tourism and public acceptability respectively, for example; The Scottish Government commissioned report Economic Impact of Wind Farms on Tourism in Scotland (2008) undertaken by Glasgow Caledonia University/Cogent Si and more recently a questionnaire survey Wind Farm Consumer Research (2011) conducted by OnePoll for Visit Scotland. These studies have indicated both benign and positive effects. The issue of tourism is not discussed in the EA and therefore there no assessment of potential impact can be made in this regard. It is acknowledged that the Caithness economy is fragile with tourism playing an important role. There is a wider concern that there is

potential for this development, particularly when considering the wider cumulative impact, to reduce the attractiveness of the immediate area and Caithness as a whole for business and particularly tourism.

In terms of economic impact, the ES states that the energy generated by the turbine will be exported fully into the grid, from which the farm will benefit from the current feed-in-tariff system.

Aviation

As noted in Section 5, statutory consultees have no objections in terms of aviation/military aviation impact, subject to appropriate warning lighting.

TV/Radio

There is potential for wind turbines to cause interference with radio communication links due to their physical presence in the landscape and also the electromagnetic fields that are created by the turbines and electrical connection cables. A planning condition can be applied requiring an applicant to submit a TV and radio reception mitigation plan to be submitted to and approved in writing by the Planning Authority prior to commencement of development were this development to be consented.

8.5 Other Considerations – not material

None

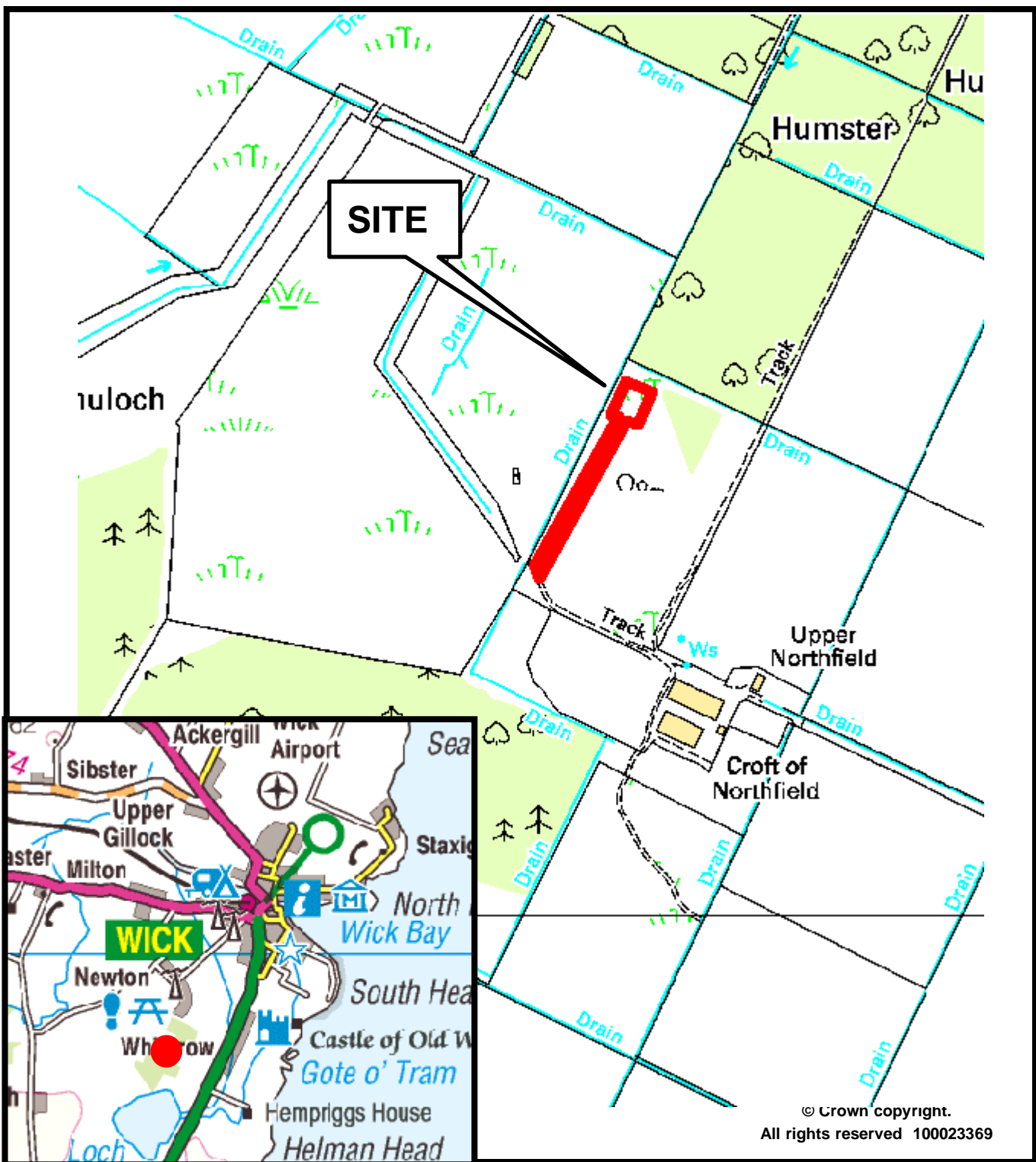
8.6 Matters to be secured by Section 75 Agreement

Not applicable.

9. CONCLUSION

9.1 As outlined previously the application must be determined principally in terms of Policies 61 and 67 of the Highland-wide Local Development Plan, which also reflects the tests set out within other policies in the plan, for example Policy 28. The Council is supportive in principle of renewable energy developments, subject to siting, design and mitigation of their inherent impacts. In this instance it is considered that the provisions of the Development Plan cannot be met by the proposal both in terms of its landscape and visual impact. All relevant matters have been taken into account when appraising this application. It is considered that the proposal does not accord with the principles and policies contained within the Development Plan and is unacceptable in terms of applicable material considerations.

It is recommended that permission be refused.



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The Highland Council
Comhairle na Gàidhealtachd

Planning & Development Service

Plan 1

14/03832/FUL

Erection of 50kW single wind turbine, 34.2m height to tip & 24m to hub

Land 265M NW Of Upper Northfield Farm
Hempriggs, Thrumster, Wick

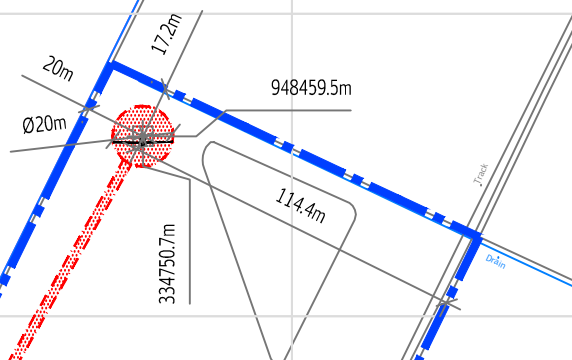
24 March 2015

N



UPPER NORTHFIELD FARM (T2) LOCATION PLAN 1:2500

- - - - - PLANNING SITE BOUNDARY
- - - - - OWNERSHIP BOUNDARY




AREA OF PROPOSED SITE
 (including all blade overhangs
 and delivery access routes) -
 314.159sq.m or 0.0314ha

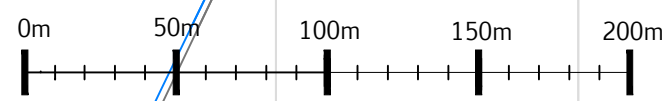
location of temporary
 delivery and construction
 route (EXTENDING BACK TO
 MAIN ROAD)

Cairn of Humster Broch (remains of)

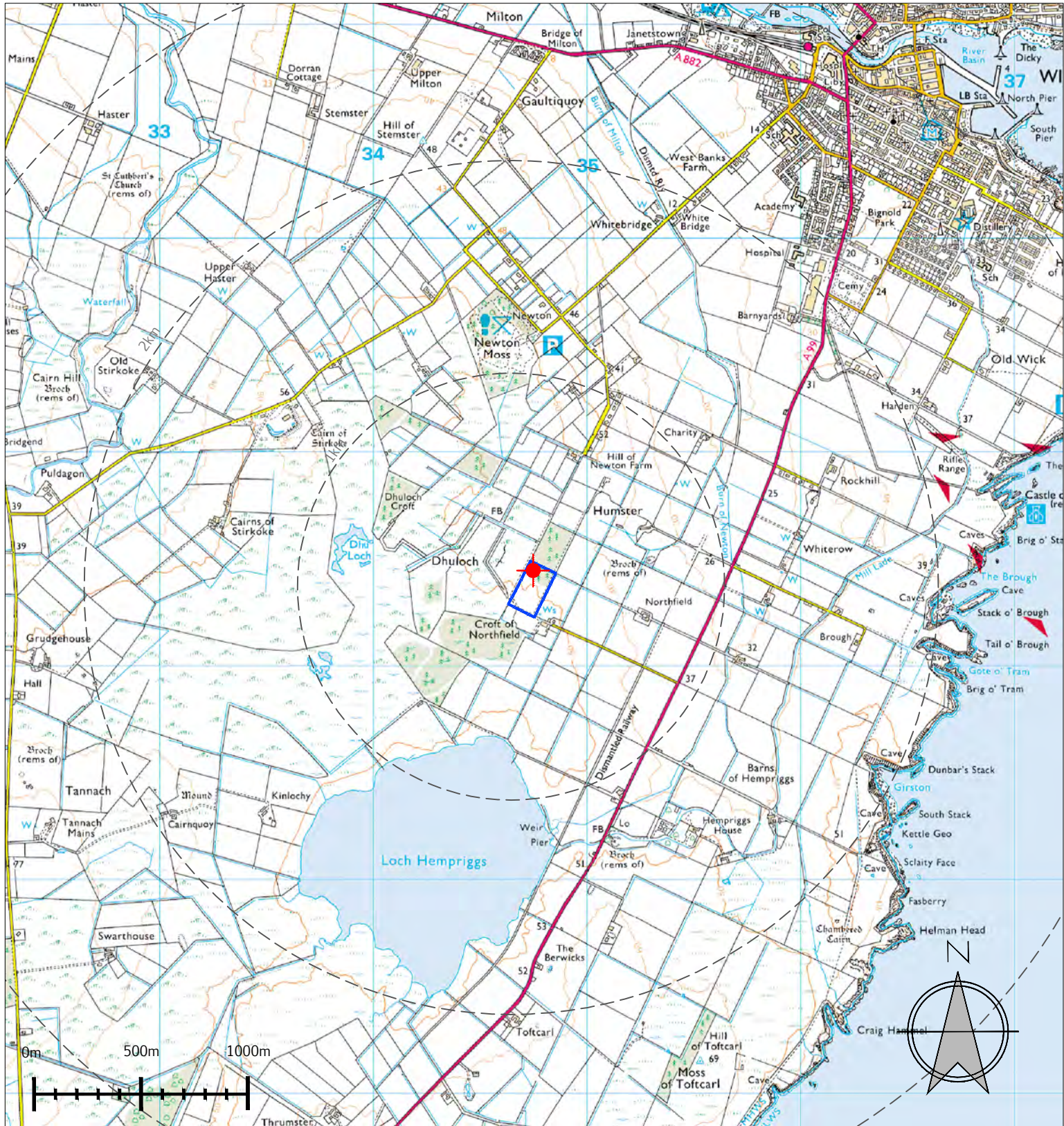
Northfield

Croft of Northfield


REV	DATE	BY	REASON
			
9 KINGSKNOWE PARK EDINBURGH EH14 2JQ T: 0131 443 0040 W: www.fineenergy.co.uk			
PROJECT:		PROPOSED WIND TURBINE INSTALLATION	
ADDRESS:		UPPER NORTHFIELD FARM (T2), CAITHNESS	
SITE / CO-ORD:		CENTRE OF PREMISES: 334750.7E, 948459.5N	
PRINT SIZE:		A3	
DRAWN BY: SS		SCALE: 1:2500	DATE: 25/08/2014
TITLE: LOCATION PLAN 1		DWG NO: 02	

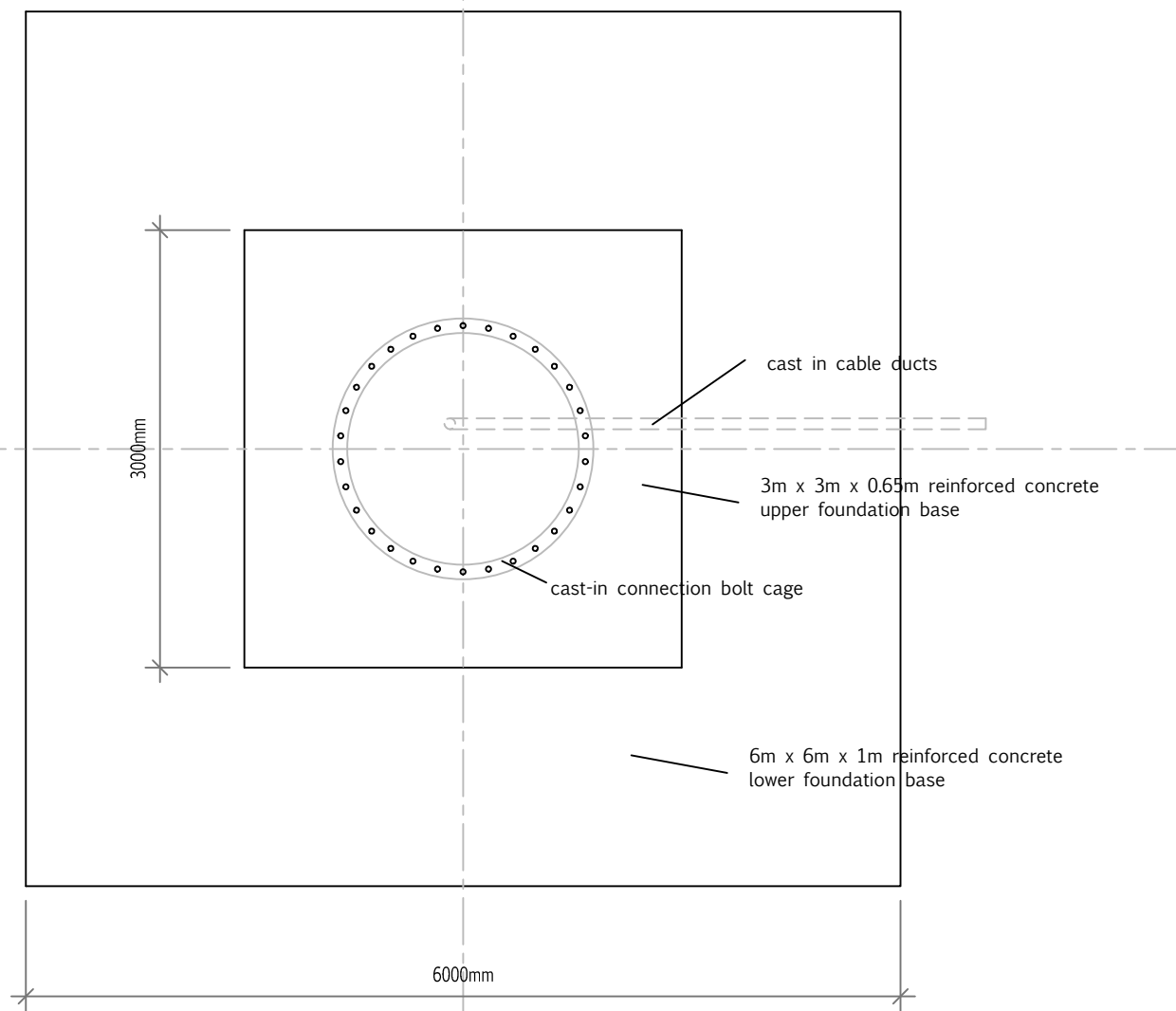


UPPER NORTHFIELD (T2) FARM LOCATION PLAN 1:25000

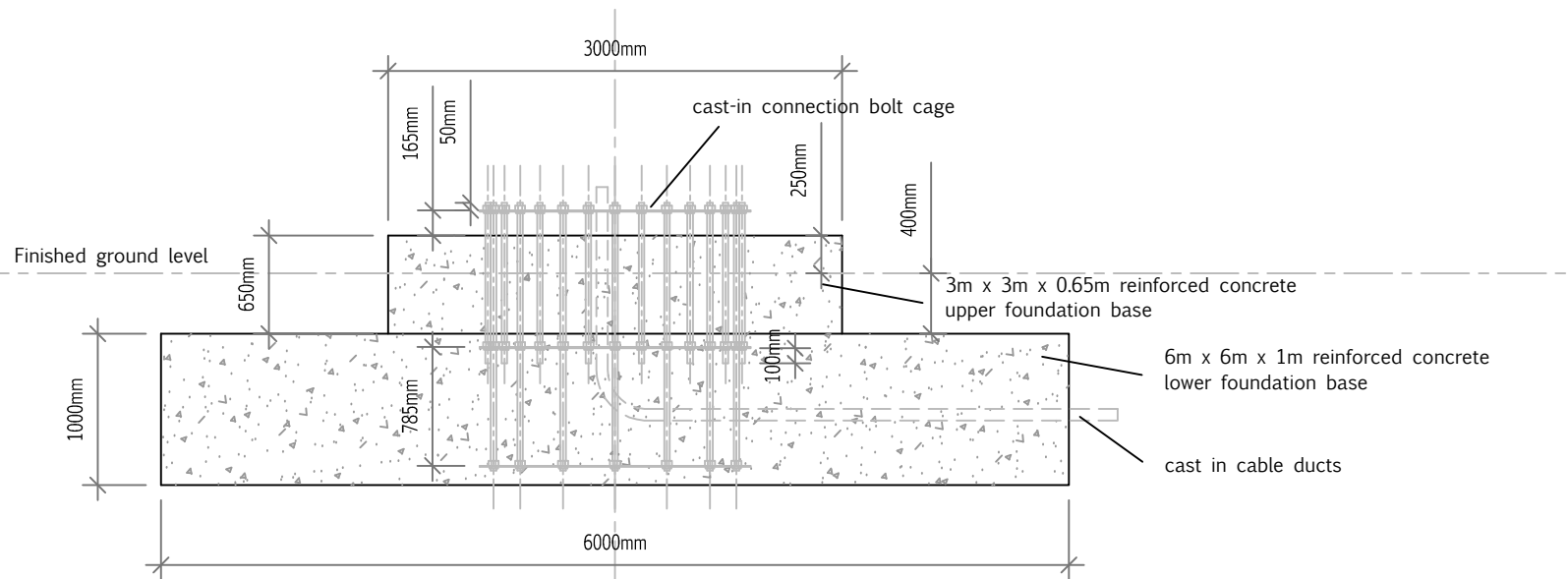


OWNERSHIP BOUNDARY - - - - -

REV	DATE	BY	REASON
		<p>9 KINGSKNOWE PARK EDINBURGH EH14 2JQ T: 0131 443 0040 W: www.fineenergy.co.uk</p>	
PROJECT:		PROPOSED WIND TURBINE INSTALLATION	
ADDRESS:		UPPER NORTHFIELD FARM (T2), CAITHNESS	
SITE / CO-ORD:		CENTRE OF PREMISES: 334750.7E, 948459.5N	
PRINT SIZE:		A4	
DRAWN BY: SS		SCALE: 1:25000	DATE: 25/08/2014
TITLE: LOCATION PLAN 2			DWG NO: 03

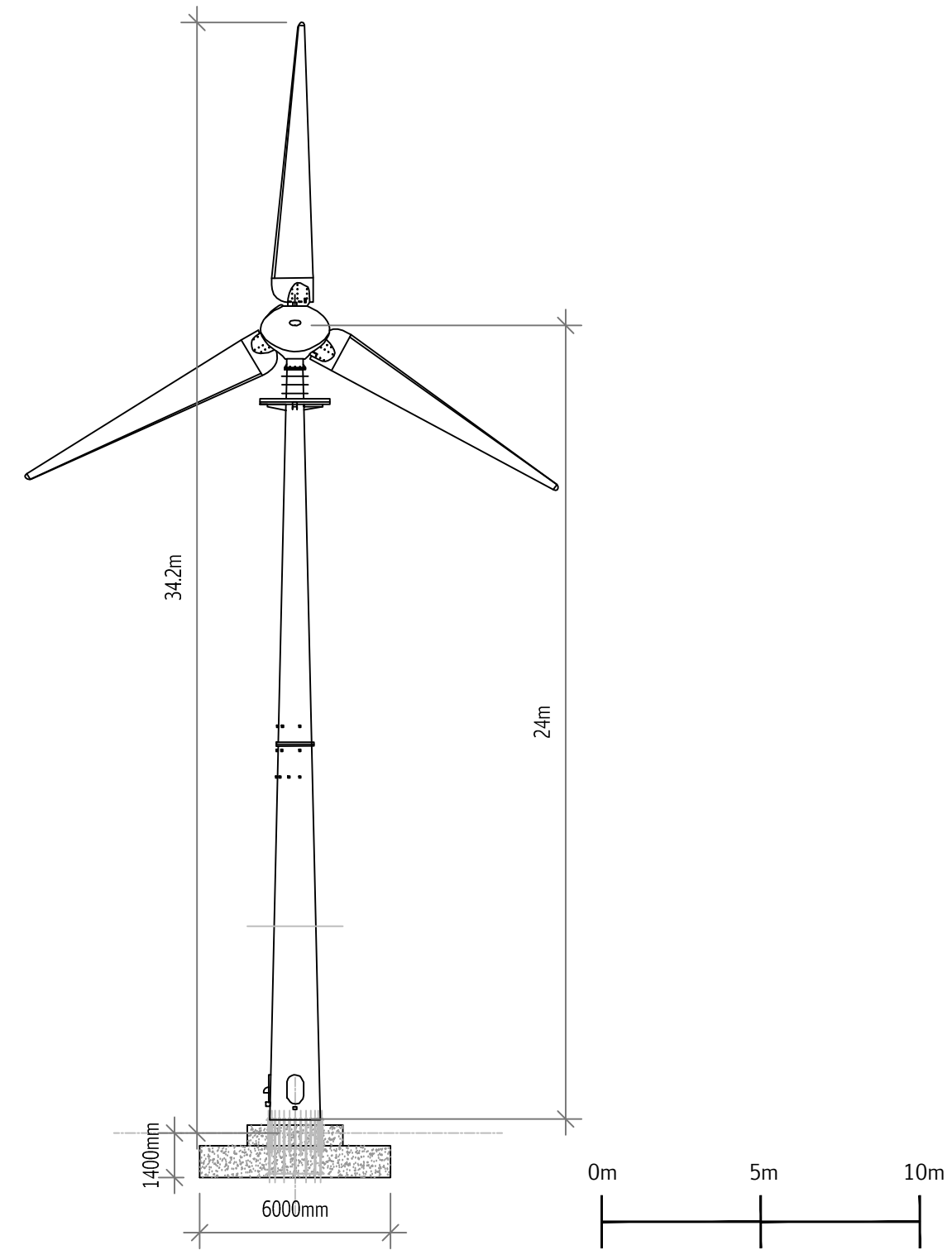
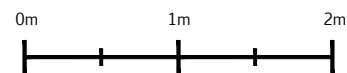


FOUNDATION PLAN 1:50

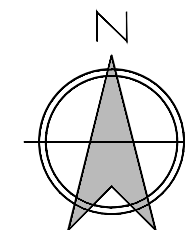



FOUNDATION SECTION 1:50

NOTE: TO BE READ IN CONJUNCTION WITH HUTCHISON ENGINEERING
DRAWING: EWP50_24m-F_001 FOR FULL FOUNDATION / BOLT AND
REINFORCEMENT DETAILS



FOUNDATION / TURBINE ELEVATION 1:200



REV	DATE	BY	REASON
			
PROJECT:		9 KINGSKNOWE PARK EDINBURGH EH14 2JQ	
ADDRESS:		UPPER NORTHFIELD FARM (T2), CAITHNESS	
SITE / CO-ORD:		CENTRE OF PREMISES: 334750.7E, 948459.5N	
PRINT SIZE:		A3	
DRAWN BY: SS		SCALE: 1:200/1:50	DATE: 20/10/2014
TITLE: TURBINE DETAILS/ELEVATION			DWG NO: DETAILS1