

Advice Note Wind Farms



The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland

Introduction

The general approach of APRS to wind farm developments is set out in our Wind Farm Policy, which is on our website under 'What We Said'. We support the principle of harnessing renewable energy sources in appropriate locations. However, wind farm proposals do not necessarily identify appropriate designs or locations.



Influencing decisions

Decisions on wind farm developments smaller than 50 Megawatts (about 20 to 25 large modern wind turbines) are made by the local Council, whilst decisions on larger developments are made by the Scottish Government. If you wish to influence the location or design of a wind farm proposal you will need to understand the planning system and how to influence the decisions of the local Council or the Scottish Government (see our Advice Note on the Planning System). If the decision is to be made at the local Council level make sure your views are known to the decision makers, who are the elected Councillors sitting on the area planning committee, both by speaking and writing formally to them. You should write to planning officials and to your Councillors if they are considering the proposal and copy your letters to the head of the Council's Development Services. If the Scottish Government is to make the decision your views should be made known to Government officials, your MSPs and the Scottish Government Energy Minister (currently Jim Mather MSP). You can find the names of your Constituency and regional MSPs on the Scottish Parliament website: www.scottish.parliament.uk — search under 'MSPs'.

The Association for the Protection of Rural Scotland (APRS)

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The larger the number of people and organisations commenting on a proposal, the more impact they are likely to have. Make sure that others who may be affected are aware of the proposals and how they can express their views on them. Engage with your Community Council and lobby them to respond in writing, and also contact other Community Councils in the affected area. In addition to writing as an individual you may find it helpful to join up with others to form an action group.

The Importance of the Development Plan

The Development Plan for any area comprises the combination of the current Structure Plan and Local Plan for that area. The Development Plan is crucially important because, under the Planning Act, the determination of a planning application should be made in accordance with the Development Plan unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Further information on this is available in our Advice Note on the Planning System.

National Policy

National policy is the main driver of such developments and the key documents are :

Scottish Planning Policy 6 – Renewable Energy (SPP 6)
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications (under ‘Keyword’ enter ‘SPP 6’)

Planning Advice Note 45 – Renewable Energy (PAN 45)
www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications (under ‘Keyword’ enter ‘PAN 45’)

Departures from the Development Plan

Any application that may be contrary to the policies contained in the Development Plan should be advertised as a Departure (or potential Departure) from the Development Plan, and sometimes a ‘departure hearing’ is held. This usually takes place when the official report is complete but before a recommendation to approve or refuse has been made. A panel of elected Councillors and officials hears submissions from supporters and objectors. Sometimes representations are made in the Council chambers immediately before the area planning committee considers and debates the application.

Environmental Assessment

The developer is required to produce a lengthy and detailed Environmental Statement and also a non-technical summary of this. These are publicly available documents, usually to be found in the local public library or school, or such other place as the Council announces. They are also usually available on CD from the developer on payment of a fee. They are of very variable quality but required reading. They should give a balanced view of the positive and negative impacts of the proposed development, including those on landscape,

ecology, cultural heritage, visual and residential amenity. They are a valuable source of information and may provide useful material on which to base your comments and underpin your arguments. If they are inaccurate in a significant matter, for example about the number of households affected, the significance of the effect or their distance from the proposed site, you can undermine the general validity of the environmental assessment if you can demonstrate this inaccuracy. This may weaken the developer's case.

Grid Connections

Once in operation, a wind farm obviously has to be connected to the National Grid so that the electricity it produces can be transmitted to where it is used. However, surprisingly, an application for a wind farm does not necessarily have to include proposals for the route and type of such a grid connection; this is often the subject of a separate and later application. It is therefore a reasonable question to ask by what means and by what route the developers intend to connect the proposed wind farm to the grid, as you might wish to comment on the likely impact of this as well as that of the wind farm itself.



Influencing Effectively

It is important to follow the details of decision-making closely. Several years can elapse between the date of the first application and the final refusal or consent. During this process the developers may come back several times with revised proposals. If you wish to comment on them you must do so in new letters to the decision-making body.

Objectors often become discouraged by these delays and cease to be involved in the process. Alternatively some of them lose track of what is happening and assume that the proposal must have been refused. Where an action group has been formed it is easier to keep everyone well informed about the progress of the proposal. There are usually a number of public occasions during the planning process at which objectors may speak. Even when there is no opportunity or desire to speak up, the weight of numbers attending gives a valuable indicator of the strength of public feeling. It is important that as many local people as possible attend these public sessions. If only one or two turn up, it is difficult to argue that any objections are seriously supported by the majority of the local community.

It is worth discussing with other action groups how they have managed to involve others and how they have kept up the interest and the momentum of objection. They can be found via Views of Scotland (see below) or by searching the internet with terms such as “wind farm action”. It is also useful to find out from successful action groups how they have pursued what can be a very expensive process. Costs that may need to be incurred for groups to object effectively to a wind farm application could include fees for professional advice on issues such as planning, landscape and visual impact, noise, residential amenity and hydrology.

Public Exhibitions

When the developers are in the final stages of preparing their Environmental Statement, and usually shortly before an application is lodged, they will often hold a public exhibition. This will be advertised in the local papers. On display will be a selection of visualisations of the wind farm from a variety of viewpoints and plans of the site. They will have staff on hand to answer questions and provide information on their proposal. You should make sure that all area committee Councillors are aware of the exhibition and request them to attend. Planning officials should also be invited, but they may not attend. Comment forms will be provided which are part of the developer’s consultation process. This is an opportunity to demonstrate the level of opposition to the development but will not necessarily deflect the developer. An exit poll can measure evidence of local feeling, which can provide material for any press coverage you may arrange.

Other Organisations

It is helpful as well to have your views supported by relevant, respected conservation and heritage experts, so it is worth contacting them for advice — see our Advice Note on the Planning System. The planners may invite some of these organisations and statutory consultees to comment on the proposal. Your views may help them form an opinion, and hearing their perspective will help you decide how to make your own representations more effective. Their responses will often be posted on the Council’s website.

Other Useful Sources

- Views of Scotland www.viewsofscotland.org
- Caithness Windfarm Information Forum www.caithnesswindfarms.co.uk
- Country Guardian www.countryguardian.net
- National Alliance of Windfarm Action Groups www.webjam.com/nawag
- Renewable Energy Foundation www.ref.org.uk

Further Information

Contact the APRS office — **email:** info@ruralscotland.org **telephone:** 0131 225 7012

January 2010