

A8. LANDSCAPE CHARACTER

A8.1 INTRODUCTION

The design of the proposed Viking Wind Farm has changed since the Section 36 application, and its associated Environmental Statement, were submitted in the spring of 2009. The intention of this Addendum Chapter is not to re-present the 2009 Environmental Statement (2009 ES) Chapter 8 and accompanying drawings with amendments, but instead to assess and highlight how the design changes would alter the original findings of that Chapter. For this reason it must be read in conjunction with the Landscape Character Chapter of the 2009 ES.

Before reading this chapter, please first read Addendum Chapter A1, the Introduction, and Chapter A4, the Development Description. Failure to read these two chapters carefully may lead to a misunderstanding of the assessment work described in this chapter.

A8.2 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

For a full list of all comments from all consultees please refer to Appendix A1.1. A summary of objections from Statutory Consultees is provided at Table A1.1 in Chapter A1 of this Addendum, and the relevant section is reproduced below.

SNH commented that the Landscape Character and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA) in the 2009 ES was “generally well laid-out and illustrated and has enabled us to understand and appraise the impacts”. Following submission of the 2009 ES, Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) requested additional information in order to allow them to make a judgement about the results of the assessment presented within the ES. The additional information was largely graphic based and did not alter the results of the assessment. Extracts from the VEP response to these queries, details of the additional information provided and minor amendments to text and drawings arising from this consultation response are contained within Appendix A8.2.

Table A8.1: Summary of objection from SNH

Ref	Summary of objection	Response
SNH - Designated sites, birds, landscape character and visual impact		
SNH LS P1/ILCC 7.10	Current proposal exceeds landscape capacity with significant adverse effects on visual amenity. SNH objects to current proposal unless appropriate modifications can be made.	A number of turbines have been deleted on landscape character and visual impact grounds, and deletions of other turbines for other reasons also help to reduce the residual impact. Please see further details in paragraphs A8.6 to A8.9 below.

In its objection, SNH cited a report commissioned by Shetland Islands Council from Land Use Consultants (LUC), entitled “Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for Wind Farm Development” which, although dated March 2009, was published just after the

preparation of the wind farm application, too late for the ES to respond or refer to it. Please see paragraph A8.3 below for a discussion of the status of this document.

SNH requested that up to fifty turbines should be removed from the 2009 design to alleviate the main landscape and visual impacts and bring the proposal within, or close to, the level of wind farm development which the LUC Report regards as the “landscape capacity” of mainland Shetland. As part of the EIA process and having taken all of the various responses from consultees into account, VEP has made changes that reduce turbine numbers by twenty-three in total, including the complete deletion of all turbines in the Collafirth quadrant. These changes have helped to reduce localised adverse impacts upon landscape character and are reviewed in more detail below.

The starting points for the 2009 Wind Farm layout design and the LUC Report are similar in that both the windfarm layout design and the LUC study identify areas within mainland Shetland which are less sensitive to impacts on the landscape character caused by wind turbines, and it is within these areas that a majority of the proposals are sited (although this fact did not appear to be taken into account in the SNH response).

However, at this point the Viking Wind Farm design and the LUC Report diverge. The latter ascribes a “potentially suitable development typology” - a notional numerical turbine “capacity”- to these areas. The Viking Wind Farm proposals are within the capacity suggested by LUC in “Visual Compartments” H and N (the Delting and South Nesting quadrants). However, this capacity is exceeded by the proposals in LUC Visual Compartments K, J and M (the North Nesting/Collafirth quadrant - despite the omission of all turbines in Collafirth; the Kergord quadrant; and the Mid-Kame Ridge). This numerical landscape capacity typology value is arrived at - as with the Landscape Assessment of the 2009 ES - by means of professional judgement, according to the LUC Report methodology. The divergences between the two reports may, however, be explained to some extent by the differing remits of the Wind Farm design brief and that of the LUC Report. The latter is a strategic landscape capacity study, looking at generic wind farm proposals using only landscape and visual criteria. However, as described in Chapters 3 and 4 of the 2009 ES, the proposed Viking wind farm layout commenced with an optimum engineering layout and then progressively reduced the extent of this by overlaying constraints in a series of iterations on a subject-by-subject basis (including landscape and visual) culminating in the scheme presented in the 2009 ES. These other criteria necessarily also included consideration of economic viability of the scheme as a whole. It is worth bearing in mind in this context that PAN 58 states that “...it is accepted that the alternatives available will be constrained by economic and operational reasons. The planning authority should determine the planning application on the merits of the proposal before them and not on the merits of potential alternatives.”

In reviewing the landscape and visual objections to the 2009 proposals VEP is therefore content to stand by the original ES conclusions which have been arrived at by professional judgement based on recognised and sound methodologies.

A8.3 CHANGES IN THE POLICY CONTEXT

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for Wind Farm Development on the Shetland Islands (LUC for Shetland Islands Council, March 2009)

In 2009 Shetland Islands Council commissioned a Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for Wind Farm Development on the Shetland Islands, as mentioned in 8.2 above. This LUC report was commissioned to inform the Shetland Islands Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) 2009. We understand that Shetland Islands Council has used this report in formulating a revised Supplementary Planning Guidance (SPG) which is due to be reported to their Planning Board in 2010, with a recommendation that the revised SPG is approved for consultation purposes. The consultation draft SPG is not public but will be a relevant consideration when available. For further information on this subject please see Addendum Chapter A7, Renewable Energy and Planning Policy Context. The LUC report has been cited by SNH in its response to the Viking ES and it has strongly informed that response; in fact it appears to form the basis of the SNH view that the wind farm exceeds the capacity of the landscape to accept wind turbines.

It is recognised that the LUC report is a privately commissioned study intended to inform Shetland Islands Council's SPG, and is not itself Council Policy. Nevertheless a review of this document confirms that the proposed Viking Wind Farm is generally in accordance with the report recommendations in locational terms, being situated within areas identified as being of lower landscape sensitivity to wind farm development. Where the VEP assessment and the LUC report differ is on turbine distributions, with the LUC report recommending lower turbine numbers for the central Mainland area. In the "Sullom Voe visual compartment" area, however, the comparison is reversed and proposed turbine numbers are now below the notional landscape "capacity" identified by the LUC report.

Natural Heritage Futures Update – Shetland

In 2009 an update to the Natural Heritage Futures document for Shetland was published by SNH. The update recognises "Shetland's potential for a large scale renewable energy development" as among the key influences in the natural heritage of Shetland. The document also states that the potential for such a development is currently constrained by the lack of connection to the National Grid. However, it recognises that this position "may change in the next five years...allowing the development of a major windfarm in central Shetland." The update also recognises the "unparalleled renewable resources" of Shetland and states that connection to the National Grid would mean that "Shetland can provide electricity for mainland Britain, contributing to the UK's commitment to greenhouse gas reductions and benefit the island financially."

A8.4 CHANGES IN METHODOLOGY

In the 2009 ES the landscape methodology, as described in Chapter 8, Section 8.4 of that document, was based upon the Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (GLVIA), Second Edition, 2002, and there have been no changes in the methodology of the Landscape Character Assessment since then.

A8.5 CHANGES IN BASELINE CONDITIONS

There have been no significant changes in the baseline conditions.

A8.6 CHANGES IN THE PROPOSED WIND FARM

The assumed design and management proposals of the 2009 layout which have the potential to result in impacts upon the landscape character of the study area were described in the 2009 ES in Chapter 8, Section 8.6.1(b) and these general principles have not changed. However, twenty-three turbines, approximately 14 km of tracks, four borrow-pit areas of search, two anemometers and a construction compound have since been removed from the proposed wind farm design; please see Addendum Chapter A4 for further details. This reduces the number of wind farm elements which would impact directly and indirectly upon the landscape character of the study area. This in turn would reduce the magnitude of change received by a landscape character area and/or designated landscape site. The level of reduction would be dependant on a number of other factors such as distance, the extent or nature of the impact, and whether the impact was direct or indirect. The changes in the impact assessment are described in section A8.8 below. However despite these localised beneficial changes, because of the scale of the proposals, the overall landscape and visual assessments have not changed dramatically in their findings. The number of turbines proposed in the 2010 design is within the “landscape capacity” suggested by LUC in “Visual Compartments” H and N (the Delting and South Nesting quadrants). However, this capacity is exceeded by the proposals in LUC Visual Compartments K, J and M (the North Nesting/Collafirth quadrant - despite the omission of all turbines in Collafirth; the Kergord quadrant; and the Mid-Kame Ridge), for the reasons described above in Section A8.2.

A8.7 CHANGES IN AGREED MITIGATION

The assessment presented in the 2009 ES took into account primary mitigation measures related to site selection and the design of the layout (see 2009 ES Chapter 3, Site Selection; Chapter 4, Development Description; and Chapter 8, Landscape Character, Section 8.7, Mitigation, for more details). The broad landscape constraints which were applied to the siting and design of the layout as presented in the ES have been carried through into the revised layout, as presented within this Addendum. The findings of the Landscape and Visual Impact Assessments and feedback from consultation with SNH have influenced changes to the layout, as described in Addendum Chapter A4.

Proposed secondary mitigation principles, for example woodland screen planting, were outlined in Chapter 9 of the 2009 ES. SNH have advised against these principles and therefore they will not be pursued further. As stated in the 2009 ES, potential sites for mitigation planting had not been agreed and therefore they were not taken into account in the impact assessment. Therefore the removal of the mitigation proposals has not affected the outcome of the assessment.

Mitigation in relation to construction activities is now explicitly referred to in the Site Environmental Management Plan (SEMP), in Appendix A14.6 of this ES Addendum. The SEMP embraces principles such as reinstating track verges, borrow-pits, temporary site compounds and turbine bases with in-situ peat “topsoil” and reducing double-width tracks to single width on completion, all of which would progressively mitigate adverse

landscape and visual effects arising from construction during the operational period. However, due to the scale of the changes proposed, this mitigation would not be sufficient to alter the conclusions in respect of significance of impact contained within the 2009 ES and as amended by this Addendum.

A8.8 CHANGES IN THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

The assessment of impacts in the 2009 ES was carried out in accordance with GLVIA methodology and was comprehensively explained in a series of tables in Chapter 8, Section 8.6.3 of that document which reviewed in turn the sensitivity to change, magnitude of change, impact assessment and significance of impact for each Landscape Character Area within 15km of the proposals and all areas with landscape designations within 35km. The SNH Landscape Character Areas have been broken down into sub-groups where relevant or necessary, i.e. where the outcome could be important in respect of determining potentially significant impacts, e.g. D1 (A) D1 (B) D4 (A) D4 (B).

Reductions in the size of the proposed wind farm would reduce both direct and indirect impacts within a number of character areas within the study boundary. In most cases, the changes would result in fewer elements of the proposed wind farm affecting the landscape character of a given area, compared with the 2009 proposals. However, these changes would not necessarily result in a reduction of the predicted *level* or *significance* of impacts - for example by reducing an assessed impact from “moderate adverse” to “slight adverse”.

The deletion of all eight turbines, an anemometer mast, tracks, borrow pits and a construction compound from the Collafirth “quadrant” is the most important and significant landscape change to the proposals since the publication of the 2009 ES, especially in respect of reduction in direct impacts. Collafirth is part of the wider **Landscape Character Area (LCA) A2 - “East and West Kame”** (see paragraph 8.5.6(a) in Chapter 8 of the 2009 ES for further details of this LCA), where most of the wind farm would be situated. In the Delting “quadrant”, between Voe and Sella Ness and also in LCA A2, a further nine turbines have been deleted. The reduction in the magnitude of change is important locally, although less significant in the context of the wider evaluation of LCA A2. As noted in the 2009 ES, despite the low sensitivity of this area to wind farm development, the magnitude of direct change on this LCA would generally be **Moderate to Substantial** where impacts are direct and **Moderate** where impacts are indirect. These conclusions remain unchanged.

The reduction of direct changes (and consequent reduction of indirect changes) on the Collafirth and Delting “quadrants” would locally reduce magnitude to the extent that impacts would no longer be significant in Collafirth.

There would also be a negligible reduction in indirect adverse impacts upon the adjacent **LCA F6 – Dales Voe and Colla Firth** (see paragraph 8.5.6(f) in Chapter 8 of the 2009 ES for further details of this LCA). However, the magnitude of change to this area was evaluated as low and impacts assessed as not significant, and this assessment remains unchanged.

A8.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Overall, the impact on the character of **Landscape Character Area A2 “East and West Kame”** would remain significant. However, the deletion of all proposed development in Collafirth would reduce the magnitude of change in Collafirth to the extent that impacts would no longer be significant in the Collafirth area if looked at in isolation; but impacts would remain significant in Delting.

In adjacent **Landscape Character Area F6 “Dales Voe and Colla Firth”** the magnitude of change caused by deleting turbines from the proposed design would be negligible, and as impacts in the ES are assessed as not significant the 2009 ES conclusions remain unaltered.

Elsewhere the changes to the layout are not considered to be of sufficient magnitude to alter the landscape assessment conclusions of the 2009 ES.

A8.10 REFERENCES

Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity Study for Wind Farm Development on the Shetland Islands (*LUC for Shetland Islands Council, March 2009*)

Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) (*February 2010*)