

## Appeal Decision Notice

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Decision by Michael J P Cunliffe, a Reporter appointed by the Scottish Ministers

- Planning appeal reference: PPA-370-2043
- Site address: Land near Breaker Hill, Pinwherry, South Ayrshire
- Appeal by Wind Prospect Developments Limited against the decision by South Ayrshire Council
- Application for planning permission 13/01310/APP dated 12 November 2013 refused by notice dated 19 June 2014
- The development proposed: Construction of 9 wind turbines with a maximum tip height of 86.5 metres and supporting infrastructure
- Dates of site visits by Reporter: 6 and 19 January 2015

Date of appeal decision: 2 February 2015

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### Decision

I dismiss the appeal and refuse planning permission.

### Reasoning

1. I am required to determine this appeal in accordance with the development plan, unless material considerations indicate otherwise. Having regard to the provisions of the development plan the main issues in this appeal are the landscape and visual effects of the proposed turbines, including cumulative effects, and the contribution to renewable energy needs.

#### *The proposal*

2. The proposal is for nine turbines with a maximum height to blade tip of 86.5 metres, together with supporting infrastructure including two borrow pits, crane hard standings, foundations, temporary construction compound, switchgear house, meteorological mast and access tracks. The maximum output would be 7.2 megawatts. The site is partly within coniferous forest (most of which would be felled as part of the development), and partly on open moorland. Turbine base heights are between 181 metres and 221 metres above Ordnance Datum (AOD).

3. The site location is on the south-facing slope of Breaker Hill (summit 237 metres AOD) overlooking the Stinchar valley, 2.5 kilometres north-west of Pinwherry and 2.7 kilometres north-east of Colmonell. The A714 Girvan to Barrhill road and the Girvan to Stranraer railway line runs through Pinwherry from north to south, following the Stinchar



valley from the north and the Duisk valley southwards. Just north of Pinwherry, the Duisk joins the Stinchar which flows westwards towards Colmonell and the sea. The B734 road follows the north side of the lower Stinchar valley. East of the site, and overlooking the Duisk/Stinchar confluence, is the prominent Bargain Hill (219 metres). Wind farms have already been built in the areas east, north-east and south of the site. These include Mark Hill (28 turbines, 7 kilometres south-east), Hadyard Hill (52 turbines, 8 kilometres north-east) and Arecleoch (60 turbines, 7 kilometres south). Planning permission has been granted on appeal for wind farms at Assel Valley (10 turbines, 6 kilometres north-north-east) and Tralorg (8 turbines, 8 kilometres north-north-east). There is a single turbine at Maclachrieston Farm in the Assel valley near Pinmore, about 4 kilometres north-east.

### *The development plan*

4. The development plan comprises the South Ayrshire Local Development Plan (LDP), adopted in September 2014. LDP policy: renewable energy supports proposals for generating and using renewable energy if they will not have a significant harmful effect on residential amenity, the appearance of the area and its landscape character, biodiversity and cultural heritage.

5. LDP policy: wind energy supports proposals if:

- a. they are capable of being accommodated in the landscape in a manner which respects its main features and character (as identified in the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study or in any subsequent updates to that study), and which keeps their effect on the landscape and the wider area to a minimum (through a careful choice of site, layout and overall design);
- b. they do not have a significant detrimental visual impact, taking into account views experienced from surrounding residential properties and settlements, public roads and paths, significant public viewpoints, and important recreational assets and tourist attractions;
- c. they do not have any other significant detrimental effect on the amenity of nearby residents, including from noise and shadow flicker;
- d. they do not have a significant detrimental effect on natural heritage features, including protected habitats and species, and taking into account the criteria in LDP policy: natural heritage;
- e. they do not have a significant detrimental effect on the historic environment, taking into account the criteria in LDP policy: historic environment and LDP policy: archaeology;
- f. they do not adversely affect aviation, defence interests and broadcasting installations; and
- g. their cumulative impact in combination with other existing and approved wind energy developments, and those for which applications for approval have already been submitted, is acceptable.

6. The policy also states that the council will produce supplementary guidance on wind farms, which will identify preferred areas of search, areas with potential constraints and areas requiring significant protection; and will provide more detail on how the above-mentioned criteria will be applied in assessing all proposals for wind farms and turbines. The council will use the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study to help decide the effect of proposals on the landscape. The supplementary guidance on wind farms had not been published by the date of my decision.

7. LDP policy: landscape quality commits the council to maintain and improve the quality of South Ayrshire's landscape and its distinctive local characteristics. Proposals for development must conserve features that contribute to local distinctiveness, including:

- a. community settings, including the approaches to settlements, and buildings within the landscape;
- b. patterns of woodland, fields, hedgerow and tree features;
- c. special qualities of rivers, estuaries and coasts;
- d. historic landscapes; and
- e. skylines and hill features, including prominent views.

8. LDP policy: protecting the landscape states that the council will consider proposals within or next to Scenic Areas (as defined on the LDP environment map) against the following conditions:

- a. the significance of impacts and cumulative impacts on the environment, particularly landscape and visual effects as informed by the Ayrshire Landscape Character Assessment (SNH 1998);
- b. how far they would benefit the economy;
- c. whether they can be justified in a rural location.

The site is within a Scenic Area.

### *Effects on landscape*

9. As a general comment, my assessment of landscape and visual effects has not been helped by the lower than normal quality of the photographs and photomontages supplied by the appellant. Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) made a similar observation. For example, the photomontage for VP3 (Pinwherry) does not appear to represent all the turbines shown on the wireline. Some photographs are very dark or lack sharpness. Where in doubt, I have therefore relied on the wirelines, and on my observations of the site and the surrounding area.

10. The proposed turbines would be located within the Coastal Foothills landscape character type (LCT) as identified in the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study. They would be close to the south-eastern edge of this LCT where it borders the Intimate Pastoral Valley LCT that encompasses the Stinchar, Duisk and Assel valleys. The turbines would affect the appearance and character of both LCTs.

11. As described in the capacity study, the Coastal Foothills comprise a narrow band of relatively small hills set between the Raised Beach Coast and the Intimate Pastoral Valley character types. The northern hills directly overlooking the coast form a highly scenic ridge of sheersided craggy hills. Similarly well-defined hills also arise on the outer inland edges of this character type close to the Stinchar valley and include Knockdolian and Bargain Hill. The landform of these foothills is more gently undulating elsewhere with some broader valleys and basins occurring in the south-eastern area, these being covered with a mix of grass moorland and coniferous forestry. Six of the proposed turbines would be sited on the slopes of Breaker Hill in an area currently occupied by coniferous forest, much of which would be felled as part of the project. The remaining three turbines would be on open moorland that forms part of an undulating plateau south-west of Breaker Hill and south-east of Knockdaw Hill (260 metres AOD) which is the highest feature in the locality. This plateau is partly screened from the lower Stinchar valley by Craig Hill (224 metres AOD).

12. Scale comparisons for the turbines would be provided by the surrounding geographical features and by the remaining trees. The blade tip heights would be between 267.5 metres and 307.5 metres AOD, and therefore higher than the summits of any hills in the locality. Land heights in the Stinchar valley along the B734 are around 50 metres AOD, so the rise to the summit of Breaker Hill is about 187 metres, to Bargain Hill 170 metres and to Knockdaw Hill 210 metres. While there would be limited visibility of the full height of the turbines from the valleys, where they were seen at full height they would appear large in relation to the hills, with the blades being the highest features in the landscape and the turbine height being around half the rise of the hills above the valley.

13. Guidance from SNH (Siting and Designing Wind Farms in the Landscape, 2014) advises that wind farms should be of minor vertical scale in relation to the key features of the landscape (typically less than one third), and of minor size compared to other key features and foci within the landscape. The visualisation from VP6 (Sixpence) shows that where a scale comparison is visible, the turbines appear large in relation to other landscape features of the Coastal Foothills, and tend to dominate the skyline and the neighbouring hills. From the elevated viewpoint of Knockdolian (265 metres AOD, VP10) the turbines would appear as a prominent feature and would detract from the scale of the neighbouring hills.

14. The capacity study identifies a high-medium sensitivity to the large typology (turbines over 70 metres high), notes the potential for cumulative issues in relation to existing wind farms, and lists a number of constraints. These include:

- The more prominent steep-sided peripheral hills with well-defined summits, which generally occur on the outer edges of the foothills and include Knockdolian and Bargain Hill, form 'landmark' features in views from the Stinchar and the lower Duisk valleys.
- The backdrop and scenic skylines these Coastal Foothills provide to the settled and smaller scale Intimate Pastoral Valley and the often limited relief of these hills appreciated in key views from settlements and roads which increases sensitivity to larger typologies.
- The relative narrowness of these foothills, particularly in the south-west, which increases potential for intrusion on more sensitive small scale and highly scenic adjacent valleys and coasts.

- Lower hill slopes and valleys within these uplands which are farmed and settled and have a smaller scale.
- Elevated views from hills such as Knockdolian and Byne Hill which are particularly popular with walkers.
- The openness and relatively unmodified character of these Coastal Foothills which are not affected by extensive forestry and large scale wind farm development, unlike other more extensive uplands within South Ayrshire and which, together with their rugged appearance and coastal context, give a heightened sense of naturalness.
- Cumulative effects with the Hadyard Hill, Arecleoch and Mark Hill operational wind farm developments on the Stinchar, Girvan and Duisk valleys.

15. The guidance concludes that there may be very limited scope for the large and medium typologies (turbines 50-70 metres and over) to be accommodated in the Coastal Foothills. Lower-lying basins and gentle hill slopes set within the broader parts of this landscape provide opportunities for larger turbines although they should be set well back from the more sensitive edges of these foothills to avoid significant intrusion on smaller scale well-settled valleys, and also to minimise cumulative effects with existing wind farm developments. Turbines should not be sited on, or close to, landmark hills. Turbine height will be critical in minimising effects on adjacent landscapes and also cumulative effects with operational wind farms seen principally from the Stinchar valley and from the A714.

16. The proposed turbines would be sited on relatively gentle hill slopes in one of the broader parts of the landscape, and would to some degree be set back from the edge of the foothills. The appellant has noted that they would be at least 540 metres behind the highest point along the valley ridgelines (defined by Craig Hill, Glessal Hill and Bargain Hill). This serves to limit, to some extent, their visibility from the lower Stinchar valley. This effect is shown in the Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) maps in the Environmental Statement (ES). However, there would remain extensive areas within the Stinchar and Duisk valleys where the turbines would be clearly visible and where scale comparisons of the kind described above would arise. These include the south side of the Stinchar Valley from Pinwherry to Colmonell, the upper Stinchar valley between Asselfoot and Barr, and the Duisk valley between Pinwherry and Barrhill. ES Viewpoints 3 (together with Dangart wireline ResVP27), 8 and 6 respectively show the effects on these valley sections.

17. The appellant has sought to downplay the significance of Bargain Hill as a landmark hill, pointing out that it is neither particularly high nor distinctive in shape. It does, however, occupy a pivotal position at the confluence of Duisk and Stinchar valleys, it is extensively visible within the Intimate Pastoral Valleys, and it has a shape which, while not as dramatic as Knockdolian or Byne Hill, is readily identifiable. With the nearest turbine only 1.2 kilometres from the summit of Bargain Hill, the wind farm would frequently be seen in close proximity and would detract from the scale and character of the hill and its setting.

18. The appellant has also pointed out that both the Assel Valley and Tralorg wind farms will be located within the Coastal Foothills LCT and that, with taller turbines located at higher altitudes and visible from the coast, they are likely to have greater landscape impacts than Breaker Hill. However, Assel Valley and Tralorg occupy the extreme north-east section of the LCT in close proximity to Hadyard Hill wind farm, and could be seen as extending westwards the neighbouring Foothills with Forest and Wind Farm LCT within

which Hadyard Hill sits. By contrast, Breaker Hill would be located right in the heart of the Coastal Foothills LCT at the point of maximum influence over the Intimate Pastoral Valleys.

19. The council has sought to draw a line along the A714 between Girvan and Pinwherry and to oppose wind farm development in the area to the west. The appellant maintains that this is an arbitrary line, but I do not agree. The road and the railway line follow a distinct natural feature formed by the Stinchar and Assel valleys and the saddle between Byne Hill and Laggan Hill, and make for a clear division between landscape compartments. The council's stance therefore appears to me to be a reasonable one. In addition, if the concept of the Scenic Area recently endorsed in the LDP is to continue to have meaning, it is important to retain some parts of the landscape in that area free from large-scale man-made elements which would detract from its scenic quality.

20. In terms of cumulative landscape impact, I consider that the main effects would be on the Intimate Pastoral Valleys where Mark Hill and, to a lesser extent, Arecleoch and Hadyard Hill already exert an influence. These wind farms are seen to the east, north-east and south of the valleys and (in the cases of Mark Hill and Arecleoch) are associated with the larger-scale South Ayrshire Plateau Moorlands. The addition of Breaker Hill would introduce a new impact to the north and west of the valleys, and would contribute to a sense of encirclement and a feeling of being within a windfarm-dominated landscape. The cumulative visualisations from Knockdolian (VP10) show how Breaker Hill would extend the influence of wind farms on the whole landscape of the area north-east of the viewpoint, from the backdrop (as at present) to centre-stage.

21. SNH, while not objecting to the proposal on national interest grounds, considered that its nature and scale could not be accommodated in this highly sensitive location without significant and adverse landscape effects, including cumulative effects, on the Coastal Foothills and on the Stinchar and lower Duisk valleys. SNH also found significant adverse effects on the South Ayrshire Scenic Area, and considered that the proposed wind farm would be contrary to the guidance set out in paragraph 25.7 of the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study, which recommends:

- Protection of the landmark hills and their setting;
- Protection of the richly diverse valleys of the Stinchar and Lower Duisk Valleys;
- Retaining the integrity of some of the more sensitive foothill landscapes, including Coastal Foothills; and
- Ensuring that any further development of larger typologies (over 50 metres) is associated with less sensitive upland landscapes.

22. I agree with SNH's assessment, which accords with my own observations set out above. I have considered the counter-arguments put forward by the appellant. In the appellant's opinion, little weight should be attached to the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study, which was not cited in the appeal decisions on Assel Valley and Tralorg. However, the adoption of the LDP in September 2014, subsequent to those decisions, means that under LDP policy: wind energy, I am obliged to consider whether the proposal is capable of being accommodated in the landscape in a manner which respects its main features and character (as identified in the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study). The Study must therefore be given substantial weight in determining whether the proposal complies with the policy.

23. The appellant draws numerous comparisons between Breaker Hill and Assel Valley and Tralorg, which are within the same LCT. As explained above, however, they are in different parts of the LCT and their settings are not directly comparable. While I acknowledge that the two consented schemes will have some significant landscape effects, each scheme has to be considered on its own merits and I do not accept that Assel Valley and Tralorg provide precedents which should influence my judgement on a different set of proposals in a different location. As indicated above, Breaker Hill would extend wind farm development into a part of the Scenic Area which is currently free of turbines and where the influence on the valley landscapes would be considerably greater (though I accept the effect on coastal landscapes would be less).

24. The appellant also cites the ‘improvements’ represented by the current proposals in comparison with an earlier scheme that proposed more turbines of greater height located closer to the valley edge. However, I must deal with the scheme before me, and the fact that it replaces a scheme with even greater adverse landscape impacts is not relevant. The appellant also considers SNH’s comments, and those of council officials, to be overstated. There are a few points in SNH’s detailed comments where I find a degree of overstatement (for example, a reference to the turbines “towering over the valleys”), but overall I consider that SNH’s assessment is balanced and accurate, and that the landscape effects of the proposal would be significantly adverse.

#### *Visual effects*

25. Settlements from which the wind farm would be visible are Poundland (1.3 kilometres), Pinwherry (2.5 kilometres) and Colmonell (2.7 kilometres). As well as a general view from Poundland (VP1), the ES shows a series of wirelines from individual properties. At most, two turbines and the blade tip of a third would be visible. Views would be partly obscured by retained and replanted trees. The two fully visible turbines could appear prominent from some locations, and there could be a cumulative effect with Mark Hill which is visible to the east. Overall, however, I would assess the visual impact on Poundland as moderate.

26. Pinwherry would have a view of all the turbines, though Assel Hill would screen the lower parts below hub height (VP3). The turbine rotors would be prominent in the view, and would detract from its qualities including the setting of Bargain Hill, which appears to overlap one of the turbines. While the visual effects would not reach the level of being dominant or oppressive, I would rate the effects on Pinwherry as significantly adverse.

27. Up to three turbines would be partly visible from Colmonell. VP5 shows the view from the main street, where buildings would largely screen the turbines. Additional wirelines WR8 and WR9 show limited visibility of blades from the outskirts of the village. I walked in the vicinity of the War Memorial and, taking account of the ZTV map, consider that rather more might be seen from this area, though visibility would still be confined to the blades of only three turbines. I would assess the effect on Colmonell as minor.

28. The ES contains an appendix (6.6) with an assessment of the visual impact on all residential properties within 2 kilometres of the site. Some of these are in Poundland, discussed above. Of the rest, only Millenderdale and Dangart are assessed as

experiencing significant visual impacts. I have not visited Millenderdale, which is on the high plateau moorland north of the site. I have walked in the vicinity of Dangart, which faces the site across the Stinchar from the south, and confirm that the turbines would be prominent and obtrusive in the view (ResVP27), though trees would provide partial screening. At a greater distance, the wind farm would be visible from Bardrochart (3.5 kilometres) on the south side of the Stinchar valley.

29. Road users would be exposed to intermittent views of the turbines from the A714 and the B734. The most pronounced view on the A714 would be when driving northwards from Barrhill to Pinwherry. This is shown at VP6, Sixpence, from where the full height of all nine turbines would be visible. They would dominate the hills and the valley landscape in the foreground, with significantly adverse impact. Driving west on the B734 in the upper Stinchar valley east of Asselfoot, the upper parts of 5 turbines would be visible and would have an adverse impact on the view, drawing the eye away from Bargain Hill (VP8). On the section of the B734 between Pinwherry and Colmonell, glimpses of the turbines would be seen to the north, and driving eastwards would have a cumulative effect with Mark Hill, though the latter would be more significant.

30. Major hilltop viewpoints include Knockdolian, Byne Hill and Bargain Hill. I have commented above on the landscape effect as experienced from Knockdolian (VP10). The Breaker Hill turbines would appear in front of those at Hadyard Hill, extending the visual impact of wind farms towards the viewer and laterally to the south. They would add significantly to the wind farm element in a view that is already heavily influenced by this type of development. From Byne Hill (VP9), three turbines would be visible but the ZTV map shows more extensive visibility from the ridge between Byne Hill and Pinbain Hill. I understand this is a popular walking route. Cumulative impact from Byne Hill would be limited given that Breaker Hill would represent a small addition to an extensive panorama of wind farms that would stretch from Tralorg in the north-east to Arecleoch in the south. A wireline from Bargain Hill is shown in the ES (Fig. 9.4). Though retained and replanted trees could hide the lower parts of some turbines, the wind farm would dominate the view westwards.

31. As regards recreational routes, there would be visibility of the turbines from sections of the Stinchar valley walk from Pinwherry to Colmonell and beyond. This follows the south side of the valley, and visibility is shown in ES Figure 6.30c. I have walked the section from Pinwherry to Dangart, and also in the vicinity of Craigneil Castle. The turbines would be particularly prominent at the eastern end of the route. When walking eastwards on this section, there would be cumulative impacts with Mark Hill and Hadyard Hill. The proposal would have a significantly adverse effect for walkers on this path.

32. The upper Stinchar valley is also popular with walkers and cyclists. I have described above the overall effect for road users on the B734 from Barr to Asselfoot. Walkers and cyclists are likely to be more sensitive receptors than vehicle users. Additional wirelines WR10-12 show the theoretical visibility of the turbines from the valley floor, though the actual views experienced would be modified in some locations by trees and buildings. Overall, the visual effects on recreational users of the valley would be significant.

33. SNH advised that the proposal would have significant adverse visual effects, including cumulative effects, on key views to and from the Stinchar and Lower Duisk Valley

area and Coastal Foothills. This includes settlement; elevated views from popular hill tops: Bargain, Byne, Knockdolian, and Pinbain; recreational areas; tourist destinations; key routes; and offshore including the views available from Ailsa Craig and the Firth of Clyde. I agree in part with SNH's assessment. As described above, I find significant visual effects for Pinwherry and for some individual properties; for the summits of Bargain Hill and Knockdolian, and the ridge from Byne to Pinbain; for road users on the A714 and parts of the B734; and for recreational walking and cycling routes, particularly in the Stinchar valley. However, I have not identified tourist destinations (other than the routes and viewpoints already mentioned) where there would be significant visual effects. I have not visited Ailsa Craig, but at a range of 17.8 kilometres I do not think the impact would be more than minor, in a view where several other wind farms are, or will be, visible.

### *Natural heritage*

34. The site adjoins the Lendalfoot Hills Complex Special Area of Conservation (SAC) selected for its grassland, heathland and bog habitats. In SNH's view, it is unlikely that the proposal would have a significant effect on any qualifying interests either directly or indirectly. An appropriate assessment is therefore not required. The proposed development site also adjoins both the Aldons Hill Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and the Knockdaw Hill SSSI, both of which are components of the Lendalfoot Hills Complex SAC. While there are natural heritage interests of national importance adjacent to the development site, these would not be significantly affected by the proposal.

35. Bat monitoring carried out for the appellant identified the presence of rare bats (*Nyctalus* species) over the site. SNH has advised that the development could kill bats due to damage by blade strike or barotrauma (damage to soft tissues due to pressure created by wind turbine blades). In SNH's opinion the potential risks to these rare bats could be mitigated successfully by regulating the operational regime of the turbines to ensure that they were not turning (and therefore representing a hazard to the bats) during the periods when the bats are most likely to be active. To achieve this, the turbines would need to be switched off during the period from May to September inclusive, between sunset and sunrise when the wind speed is lower than 6 metres per second. This could be secured through a planning condition.

36. Objections from the Scottish Wildlife Trust, the Ayrshire Red Squirrel Group and others express concern about the impact of the scheme on red squirrels. The ES states (7.5.13) that no evidence of red squirrels was found during surveys, though their presence in the surrounding area is acknowledged. About 153 hectares of coniferous woodland would be felled as part of the proposal, and could cause fragmentation of red squirrel populations. The magnitude of effects on red squirrels is predicted to be moderate. However, the objectors dispute the survey findings and claim evidence of a thriving colony of red squirrels on Breaker Hill. While there is some uncertainty over the degree of red squirrel presence, the scheme would cause extensive disturbance and loss of potential habitat (though that could happen anyway through the felling of commercial plantations). Were the proposal acceptable on other grounds, I consider that a scheme of red squirrel mitigation would be required.

37. While some concerns have been expressed about bird species, I note that neither SNH nor the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds has objected, subject to suitable

conditions to safeguard bird interests. The Scottish Wildlife Trust noted that about 8 skylark nests were identified in the area of turbines 1,2 and 4, and asked that these turbines be removed. Skylark is on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern because of long-term declines in the British breeding population, and the Trust suggested that the Habitat Management Plan should be required to pay special attention to creating suitable habitat for Skylark and other farmland bird species.

38. Overall, therefore, it appears to me that the impacts of the scheme on wildlife species and habitats could be mitigated to an acceptable level through conditions. However, in the case of bats the required condition would reduce the potential electricity output of the wind farm.

### *Residential Amenity*

39. The ES has shown that predicted noise levels at residential properties would be within the limits set out in ETSU(R)97, and that shadow flicker would not be a problem. There remain significant visual effects on some residential properties. These contribute to my overall assessment of significant adverse visual impact, though they are not on their own at a level that would in my view justify refusing planning permission on residential amenity grounds.

### *Tourism*

40. The council's reasons for refusal include that the proposal is considered likely to have an adverse impact on the tourism resource in the locality of the application site which includes its high scenic value. Evidence suggests that while a majority of tourists have a neutral or positive attitude to wind farms, there is a significant minority for whom they could have a deterrent effect. While I accept that the proposal would reduce the scenic value of the locality, I consider that tourists who are sensitive to wind farms are likely already to avoid this part of Ayrshire on account of the large number of turbines already operating. In my view the additional effect of Breaker Hill on tourism is likely to be small.

### *Other impacts*

41. Subject to the imposition of suitable planning conditions, there are no other impacts that individually or collectively would lead me to conclude that planning permission should be refused.

### *Benefits*

42. The turbines would have a maximum output of 7.2 megawatts. The ES (3.8.3) predicts that the amount of electricity generated would be 17,029 megawatt hours a year, equivalent to the needs of 3,897 households. The actual output would be less, given the need to switch off the turbines for bat mitigation purposes. The proposal would also save around 10,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide emissions each year.

43. These are significant benefits which would contribute to Scottish and UK targets for renewable electricity and reduction in emissions. However, I do not consider these benefits are sufficient to outweigh the adverse impacts I have identified.

44. The project would have some economic benefits. The total capital spend is estimated at £9.3 million, and the total operating and maintenance spend over 25 years is an estimated £9.5 million. South Ayrshire could potentially secure 8 per cent of the estimated capital expenditure budget and 35 per cent of the estimated operating and maintenance budget. The estimated total impact on the Scottish economy during the development and construction phases is an estimated £4.4 million and 41 job years, including a potential £0.8 million in South Ayrshire and 6 jobs. Each year operations and maintenance would potentially contribute £0.4 million to the Scottish economy and 4 jobs, including £0.1 million in South Ayrshire and 1 job. These are gross figures and assume that there would be no reduction in activity and employment in other sectors such as tourism.

#### *Consideration against the development plan*

45. The proposal would not accord with LDP policy: renewable energy since it would have a significant harmful effect on the appearance of the area and its landscape character. Similarly it would fail to comply with the criteria of LDP policy: wind energy because (a) it could not be accommodated in the landscape in a manner which respects its main features and character (as identified in the South Ayrshire Landscape Wind Capacity Study), and which keeps the effect on the landscape and the wider area to a minimum; (b) it would have a significant detrimental visual impact, taking into account views experienced from surrounding residential properties and settlements, public roads and paths, and significant public viewpoints; and (g) its cumulative impact in combination with other existing and approved wind energy developments would not be acceptable.

46. In terms of LDP policy: landscape quality, the proposal would fail to conserve features that contribute to local distinctiveness, particularly skylines and hill features, including prominent views. Under LDP policy: protecting the landscape, there would be a significant adverse impact on the Scenic Area in terms of landscape and visual effects, which would not be justified by the economic benefits. The proposal would therefore not be in accord with these policies, or with the development plan as a whole.

#### *Other material considerations*

47. Scottish Planning Policy (SPP, 2014) provides support for renewable energy developments. However, this has to be balanced against other considerations. SPP (paragraph 170) states that wind farms should be sited and designed to ensure impacts are minimised and to protect an acceptable level of amenity for adjacent communities. The siting and design of development should take account of local landscape character (paragraph 202). Planning permission should be refused where the nature or scale of proposed development would have an unacceptable impact on the natural environment (paragraph 203). While SPP introduces a presumption in favour of sustainable development, that does not override the primacy of the development plan, particularly if (as here) the plan is up-to-date. I consider that SPP, on balance, does not lend support to the proposal.

48. The proposal attracted 363 objections and 201 expressions of support. The grounds of objection, insofar as they relate to material planning considerations, mostly concerned matters I have dealt with in previous paragraphs. The expressions of support were mainly

based on the generic benefits of renewable energy, which are taken into account in the framework of national and local policies.

### *Conclusion*

49. I therefore conclude, for the reasons set out above, that the proposed development does not accord overall with the relevant provisions of the development plan and that there are no material considerations which would still justify granting planning permission. I have taken into account all the other matters raised by the appellant, but have found none that lead me to a different conclusion

*Michael J P Cunliffe*

Reporter

