
Report To:	The Planning Board	Date:	7 September 2011
Report By:	Head of Regeneration and Planning	Report No:	10/0340/IC Plan 09/11
			Local Application Development
Contact Officer:	Guy Phillips	Contact No:	01475 712422
Subject:	Erection of wind turbine at High Mathernock Farm, Auchentiber Road, Kilmacolm		

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site is to the north east of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park on a hillside at High Mathernock Farm, approximately 1.2km to the east of the B788 between Greenock and Kilmacolm and 140m north of Auchentiber Road. Access is from a farm track to the north of Auchentiber Road, which runs between the B788 to the west and Auchenbothie Road to the east. It is identified as a core footpath in the Council's Core Paths Plan. There are two linked lines of approximately 23m high electricity pylons, each running east to west, to the north and south of the site.

Residential properties in proximity to the site include Auchentiber Farm to the west, High Mathernock Farm, Priestside Farm, "Cauldside" and "Pennysteral", all to the south east and "West Kilbride" and "Cunston Cottage" to the east.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed to erect a wind turbine mast, 44.7m in height to hub and 61m to the blade tip. Further proposed is a 2.5m high, 12 square metre flat roofed service unit and a 130m access formed from the existing farm track. Output of the proposed turbine is 0.33 MW.

Submitted with the planning application are a Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, an Associated Infrastructure Assessment, a Noise Impact Assessment and an Impact on Birds Assessment.

LOCAL PLAN POLICIES

Local Plan Policy UT6 - Renewable Energy Infrastructure

In assessing proposals for renewable energy infrastructure, Inverclyde Council, as Planning Authority, will have regard to the impact on:

- (a) the natural environment and built heritage of the locality;
- (b) the landscape, particularly when viewed from major transport corridors;
- (c) residential amenity;

- (d) tourism and leisure resources, particularly if within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park; and
- (e) the operation of aircraft and telecommunications equipment.

Local Plan Policy UT6A: Wind Farms of 20MW and Above

Wind farms with an output of 20MW and over will be supported where:

- a) the objectives of international natural heritage designation are not compromised or where the proposed development is likely to have an adverse effect:
 - there is no alternative solution; and
 - there are imperative reasons of over-riding public interest, including those of a social or economic nature;
- b) the objectives of national natural heritage designation and the overall integrity of the area are not compromised or where any significant adverse effects on the qualities for which the area has been designated are clearly outweighed by social and economic benefits of national importance;

and where the proposed development:

- c) is sited within the landform to ensure it does not have a detrimental effect on the landscape and wider environment;
- d) does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the positive strategic assets of Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park and the West Renfrew Hills Scenic Area, such as:
 - i. landscape and visual amenity;
 - ii. tourism;
 - iii. recreation; and
 - iv. conservation;
- e) does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the historic heritage of the area;
- f) does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on biodiversity;
- g) does not have an unacceptable impact on the water environment, including its quality, quantity and ecological status;
- h) does not lead to unacceptable cumulative impacts on the landscape;
- i) does not have an unacceptable adverse effect on aviation interests;

and where:

- j) in consultation with the relevant bodies, the presence of notifiable installations and exclusion zones are taken into account when designing sites; and
- k) in consultation with the relevant bodies, the presence of broadcasting and telecommunications infrastructure are taken into account when designing sites.

Note (1) These criteria would also apply to smaller scale wind farms (<20MW) which can often be more easily accommodated in the landscape, therefore, some of the areas that are not suitable for strategic wind farms could be acceptable. It would still be necessary to protect the environmental and built heritage resources and the local community by ensuring they were designed and sited to incur minimum impact. Given the variety of combinations and sizes of turbines that could be used

to produce an output up to 20MW, it is likely that it will only be possible to determine what is acceptable when specific applications are assessed.

Policy UT6B: Small Scale Wind Turbine Development

In assessing proposals for small scale wind turbine developments, Inverclyde Council, as Planning Authority, will be supportive where the proposed development satisfies the criteria of Local Plan Policies UT6 and UT6A, where relevant and will have regard to the impact on:

- (a) neighbouring/adjoining properties and residential amenity generally.
- (b) road safety.
- (c) natural and built heritage resources in proximity to the site.
- (d) wildlife resources and habitats.
- (e) proximity to pylons and overhead power lines, and other service infrastructure.
- (f) the landscape, especially when viewed from public vantage points, including local roads, neighbouring settlements and when set against the skyline.

Local Plan Policy DS8 - Green Belt

There is a presumption against development in the designated Green Belt, as identified on the Proposals Map. Proposals will only be considered favourably in exceptional or mitigating circumstances and where the criteria for development in Policy DS10 for the 'Countryside' can be satisfied.

Local Plan Policy DS10 - Countryside

Development within the countryside (including the Green Belt) will be permitted only where it can be supported with reference to the following criteria:

- (a) it is required for the purposes of agriculture and forestry;
- (b) it is a recreation, leisure or tourism proposal which is appropriate for the countryside and contributes to the social and economic development of the area;
- (c) there is a specific locational requirement for the use and it cannot be accommodated on an alternative site;
- (d) it entails appropriate re-use of vacant buildings which it would be desirable to retain for their historic or architectural character; or
- (e) it forms part of an establishment or institution standing in extensive grounds; and
- (f) it does not adversely impact on the landscape character;
- (g) it does not adversely impact on the natural heritage resource;
- (h) it does not adversely affect the visual amenity of the area and is capable of satisfactory mitigation;
- (i) there is a need for additional land for development purposes, provided it takes account of the requirements of the Structure Plan; and
- (j) it complies with other relevant Local Plan policies.

Local Plan Policy HR1 - Designated Environmental Resources and Built Heritage

Development that would adversely affect, directly or indirectly, the natural or built heritage resources listed in Schedule 9.1 and where indicated, on the Proposals Map, will not normally be permitted.

Having regard to the designation of the environmental resource and built heritage, exceptions will only be made where:

- (a) Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) will not be compromised;
- (b) visual amenity and townscape will not be compromised;
- (c) no other site, identified in the Local Plan as suitable, is available;

- (d) the social and economic benefits of the scheme outweigh the total or partial loss of the environmental resource;
- (e) the developer has demonstrated that the impact of the development on the environment will be minimised; and
- (f) the loss can be compensated by habitat creation/site enhancement elsewhere, and where there are satisfactory arrangements to achieve this.

Local Plan Policy LR6 - Inverclyde Access Strategy

Inverclyde Council, as Planning Authority, will seek to protect and promote the 'core path network' (both existing and proposed) and the other key themes of the adopted Inverclyde Access Strategy, where these do not conflict with other Local Plan policies, in particular DS8 and DS10.

CONSULTATIONS

Scottish Power - Current policy on turbines states that they should be sited 1.5 times their height away from steel towers but there is currently no policy in place for wooden poles. There is no overhead apparatus within this distance of the proposed tower. There are no objections to the proposed turbine development in so far as it relates to the current consultation for the preferred route of the Erskine-Devol Moor overhead transmission line.

Biodiversity Officer - No major concerns because of the small scale of this proposal. It is recommended that the land owner is conditioned to manage a comparable area of land for biodiversity to the area that will be lost as part of this development (i.e. reduce grazing and allow heath to regenerate). This will ensure the development fulfils best practice guidelines for sustainable development.

Argyll & Bute Council- No objections. Although the 61 m high turbine would be visible over a wide area from Cardross to Helensburgh at distances from 5-15km, it would be seen in the context of the urbanised foreground of Port Glasgow and existing electricity pylons on the higher ground. The visual impact of this single turbine would therefore be moderate at worst.

Head of Safer and Inclusive Communities- No objections, including the issue of noise.

NATS - CTC - The proposed development has been examined from a technical safeguarding aspect and does not conflict with safeguarding criteria.

Scottish Natural Heritage - The proposed development will not have a significant effect on nationally important natural heritage features, but there may still be impacts on locally important biodiversity outwith SNH's natural heritage remit. The ecological importance of the site is reflected in its designation as a Site of Importance for Nature Conservation (SINC) - part of the Devol Road Upland SINC. The ecological assessment also highlights habitats and species listed on the Local Biodiversity Action Plan that may be affected by the development proposals, namely dwarf shrub heath and, to a lesser extent, hen harriers (overwintering). Inverclyde Council should ensure that the impacts of this development (and all associated infrastructure works e.g. access improvements, underground cabling, borrow pit excavation etc) are acceptable in line with the Council's biodiversity duty of care and that these proposals do not result in significant impacts upon locally important natural heritage. SNH also note that there may be significant landscape and visual impacts associated with this development.

Head of Environmental & Commercial Services- No objections.

Council's Landscape Advisors- Sufficient information is provided to allow Inverclyde Council to make a decision on this proposal. Any wind turbine application will have a number of significant landscape and visual effects. This turbine proposal is not unique in that sense, as a similar sized turbine would have effects of this nature within almost all landscapes.

MOD Safeguarding - No objections.

PUBLICITY

The application was advertised in the Greenock Telegraph on 22nd October 2010 as there are no premises on neighbouring land.

SITE NOTICES

The nature of the proposal did not require a site notice.

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Seven letters of objection have been received including four from Kilmacolm Civic Trust. One of the objectors makes reference to a proposed anemometer mast at the nearby Priestside Farm. That proposal is the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

The objectors to the proposal are concerned that:-

1. Residential amenity.
 - Views from Cunston Cottage and West Kilbride Farm would be spoiled.
 - The value of neighbouring houses would be adversely affected.
 - Private water supplies would be disrupted and contaminated during site excavations, adversely affecting neighbouring properties and wildlife.
 - Cunston Cottage would be affected by shadow flicker and noise.
2. Economic impact
 - The turbine will have no positive effect and will make the location less attractive to tourists.
 - In the absence of government subsidy, wind energy is not commercially viable. Power output is variable and electricity generation only effective for part of the time.
 - The power output of the proposal makes little contribution to the Government's aim for renewable energy and conflicts with Council policy on wind farms in excess of 20 megawatts as the development is inappropriate, not exceptional, does not meet national priorities and does not meet a specific established need. The fact the proposal is for a single turbine does not mitigate the policy direction set out in SPP21.
 - The power output makes little contribution towards the Government's aim for renewable energy and will be joined to the national, rather than, a local grid. It does not meet the guidelines in SPP6 where the encouragement is for community and decentralised energy schemes or those within urban and industrial settings.
 - The power output of the turbine would be sufficient for 182 households. Consequently, 200 such turbines would be required to satisfy Inverclyde's domestic power requirements.
3. Opposition to single turbines.
 - A differentiation requires to be made between small turbines for domestic use and large scale commercial wind farms. The scale of the proposal is not domestic and contravenes a principal that wind turbines should not be constructed in the Green Belt. The visual appeal of the Green Belt landscape would be spoiled with wind turbines dotted about in a disorganised and unplanned manner and is not an appropriate way forward for meeting renewable energy targets.
 - A precedent would be set, leading to proposals for additional turbines in the area, similar to that previously refused at Corlic Hill.
 - The application cannot be considered in isolation. Other proposals under consideration for an anemometer mast at Priestside and for a wind turbine at Dowries farm, Old Largs Road,

Greenock would have cumulative effect despoiling Inverclyde's countryside with random single turbines on high points.

- There is no case for individual or small scale wind farms around Kilmacolm and its immediate rural environment. Single turbines and small wind farms can create disproportionately high environmental damage and should be considered as if they cumulatively form part of medium or large scale wind farm applications.

4. Visual impact

- It is the policy of Kilmacolm Civic Trust, based on current evidence and technology, not to support wind farm construction in the Inverclyde countryside, especially that visible from the villages. The Trust is supportive of national policy for development where landscape quality, energy infrastructure and weather make such development appropriate.
- The site is within 2km of Port Glasgow and, as such, breaks Scottish Government policy that a separation distance of up to 2km between areas of search and the edge of cities, towns and villages is recommended.
- The turbine would be visible from Port Glasgow and Kilmacolm. The applicant's argument that tree cover within Kilmacolm serves to reduce views of the turbine is disputed due to most of the trees being deciduous and there being a large number of upper conversions with views over the trees.
- The turbine would be clearly visible from approach roads to and from Kilmacolm, especially Port Glasgow and Bridge of Weir Roads. There would also be views from the Sustrans footpath.
- Impacts of the proposal are all negative. The natural landscape will have a large and highly visible structure implanted into it, which will be visible not only from Kilmacolm but also from the wider Clyde estuary, the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, the B788, surrounding countryside and Quarriers Village. Visitors seeking to enjoy the natural environment will see a degradation in addition to the existing powerlines for little benefit in terms of power generation.
- There is a substantial, distant wind farm at Whitelees in Lanarkshire, visible from the application site and Kilmacolm. Development would extend wind turbine presence far west and impact not only on the views from the area but also towards it from the Clyde estuary, the Argyll hills and Dunbartonshire.
- The application would have an impact on the environment and amenity of the area disproportionate to the energy benefit it would secure.
- The kiosk associated with the proposed wind turbine would be visually intrusive.
- No benefit is indicated by the applicant for any community. There are disbenefits from long term visual disruption and noise for residents of upper Port Glasgow, golfers on Port Glasgow golf course and walkers.

5. Impact on wildlife and nature conservation.

- Bats and birds of prey would be adversely affected by the rotor blades.
- The applicant's study of the impact on birds is limited and has no stated methodology.
- The site is designated as a SINC.

6. Other issues.

- There would be a danger to walkers and wildlife from ice thrown from the turbine blades in winter.
- There would be disruption to road users from the construction and eventual dismantling of the turbine.
- The turbine is not essential to the farm as there is little evidence of farming activity at High Mathernock.

ASSESSMENT

The site is located within the Green Belt, where Local Plan policies DS8 and DS10 apply. However, as a renewable energy development which may be expected to be located in a Green Belt / rural location, it is considered appropriate to assess the proposal against national and local planning policy for such developments.

The general planning policy position, stemming from Scottish Planning Policy, is that planning authorities should support the development of a diverse range of renewable energy technologies and that development plans or supplementary guidance must clearly indicate factors that will be taken into account in decision making. The Government itself provides web based renewables advice and this is reflected in the Council's Interim Planning Policy Position Statement on Small Scale Wind Farms, approved by the Safe Sustainable Communities Committee in March 2011. This statement introduced a new Policy UT6B which identifies that the Council will be supportive of development where the criteria of policies UT6 (Renewable Energy Infrastructure) and UT6A (Wind Farms of 20MW and above) have been met and there has been regard to:

- a) the impact on neighbouring and nearby properties and residential amenity generally;
- b) road safety;
- c) natural and built heritage resources in proximity to the site.
- d) wildlife resources and habitats.
- e) proximity to pylons and overhead power lines and other service infrastructure.
- f) the landscape, especially when viewed from public vantage points, including local roads, neighbouring settlements, and when set against the skyline.

Policies UT6 and UT6A require assessment against the natural and built environment, landscape, and residential amenity, all of which are also addressed by assessment against Policy UT6B. While I note objectors' concerns regarding impact on tourism and cumulative impact, there are currently no other turbines within visual proximity and there is no evidence to suggest tourism detriment from this single turbine. I further note that the National Air Traffic Service has no objection. While I note the comments on electricity requirements for High Mathernock Farm, the turbine is proposed to link into the national grid. It rests therefore to assess the application against the criteria listed in Policy UT6B with reference to Scottish Planning Policy and other development plan policies as applicable.

- a) Impact on neighbouring and nearby properties and residential amenity generally

Policy UT6B requires development to have regard to impact on neighbours and general residential amenity. Potential impacts on nearby residential amenity arise from visual impact, noise, shadow flicker and the issue of contamination of private water supplies raised by the objectors. It is inappropriate to consider impact on property value. There are no objections from the Head of Safer and Inclusive Communities regarding noise impact and private water supply. All the properties on Auchentiber Road are south of the site and, as such, are not impacted by shadow flicker. Auchentiber Farm is approximately 850m west south west of the site and West Kilbride Farm and Cunston Cottage lie approximately 1.7km and 1.3km to the east, respectively. Given the degree of separation from these properties I consider impact from shadow flicker unlikely. Scottish Government guidance for assessing visual impact indicates that scale is a relevant consideration, taking into account the significance of the landscape and the views, proximity, intervisibility and sensitivity of visual receptors. While the residential properties around the site are not in close proximity, a combination of terrain, openness of views and the 61m height of the turbine determine that there is a significant adverse and unacceptable visual impact on these visual receptors.

b) Road safety

There are no objections from the Head of Environmental & Commercial Services on road safety grounds.

c) and d) Natural and built heritage resources in proximity to the site and Wildlife resources and habitats.

The site is within a SINC and as such it requires assessment against Policy HR1. The policy advises that development that would adversely affect, directly or indirectly, listed natural or built heritage resources will not normally be permitted. The proposal requires further assessment against criteria (a) – (e) within policy HR1:

- (a) Sites of Special Scientific Interest will not be compromised. The proposal is acceptable in this regard.
- (b) Visual amenity and townscape. I shall assess this impact in detail under criterion (f) of policy UT6B.
- (c) Available other sites, identified in the Local Plan, are suitable. There are other parts of Inverclyde's countryside, more remote from public access than the proposal site, where a large wind turbine could be located with less impact.
- (d) The social and economic benefits of the scheme outweigh the total or partial loss of the environmental resource. In this instance, I am not satisfied that a case has presented supporting the benefits to be accrued in terms of renewable energy outweigh the visual impact of a 61m high wind turbine.
- (e) The impact of the development on the environment will be minimised. I shall assess this impact in detail under criterion (f) of policy UT6B.
- (f) Loss can be compensated by habitat creation/site enhancement elsewhere on the applicant's land. The site is small and habitat disruption may be compensated.

Noting the aforementioned in the context of consultations with SNH and the Biodiversity Officer, I am satisfied that this proposal does not compromise Policy HR1.

e) Proximity to pylons and overhead power lines and other service infrastructure.

There are no objections from Scottish Power.

f) The landscape, especially when viewed from public vantage points, including local roads, neighbouring settlements, and when set against the skyline.

Scottish Natural Heritage's guidance on the assessment of small scale wind energy projects which do not require Environmental Impact Assessment advises that for turbines over 50m in height a more detailed landscape and visual impact assessment is likely to be required. The applicant has submitted a study in accordance with this guidance. The assessment incorporates photomontages from the junction of the B788 with the A761 south of Kilmacolm, the junction of Auchentiber Road with the A761 north of Kilmacolm, Castlehill Farm at Port Glasgow, the entrance to Horsecraigs off the B788, the junction of the B788 and Auchentiber Road and moorland between the Devol electricity sub station and Harelaw reservoir. The photomontages serve to demonstrate that the wind turbine breaks the skyline in all instances. The greatest visual impact on the greatest number of people, I consider, is from the public roads and houses in closest proximity to the site. The B788 serves as a direct route between Kilmacolm and Greenock.

Auchentiber Road is designated as a core footpath, encouraging walkers into the countryside. Policy LR6 informs that the Council will seek to protect and promote the 'core path network' (both existing and proposed) and the other key themes of the adopted Inverclyde Access Strategy. Given the adverse visual impact on Auchentiber Road, designated as a core path

route, I consider that walkers' enjoyment of this part of Inverclyde's countryside may be reduced and as a consequence act against the aims of Policy LR6.

Views of the proposed wind turbine from the B788 and Auchentiber Road are within the context of the existing powerlines traversing the countryside at this location. The pylons are, on average, approximately 23m high and have a significant visual impact on the countryside and skyline. The proposed wind turbine is 38m taller. As a result, I consider the proposed wind turbine to have a visual impact in excess of the existing powerlines.

It will be a dominant and unexpected visual interruption to motorists travelling between Greenock and Kilmacolm on the B788, to walkers on Auchentiber Road, (designated as a core path), and to the occupiers of houses on the B788, Auchentiber Road and Auchenbothie Road. Overall, I consider the scale of the proposed wind turbine relative to the proximity to nearby roads and houses to be so close as to render its dominant visual impact unacceptable.

Consideration also requires to be given to the visual impact over longer distances. The applicant's Landscape & Visual impact Assessment contains a map indicating visibility up to 15km linked to a table indicating settlements where there is impact, some impact, little impact and no impact. Settlements identified affected by impact are Kilmacolm, Dumbarton and Helensburgh. Kilmacolm is in the range of 0-5km distant and Dumbarton and Helensburgh 5-10km. Helensburgh is within Argyll & Bute. I concur with the view expressed in the consultation response of their Planning Service, that due to the degree of separation from the site, visual impact would be moderate at worst. West Dunbartonshire Council was consulted on the planning application but did not respond. The Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment advises much of Dumbarton is predicted to have views of the site, principally from its waterfront with views from within the town being obstructed by buildings. I consider that this visual impact is also moderate and note the lack of response from West Dunbartonshire Council in this matter.

Regarding Kilmacolm, the visual envelope shows extensive views of the wind turbine. Kilmacolm is approximately 3km away. The study advises the village has a high degree of tree cover which, along with buildings within will screen views of the turbine. It concludes Kilmacolm is the settlement most likely to be visually impacted by the development but there are few places at street level from which views are afforded. I do not consider it sufficient to dismiss visual impact on Kilmacolm on this basis. There are heavily used parts of the public domain in Kilmacolm that shall be afforded a view of the proposed turbine, notably Port Glasgow Road at the entrance to the village and the Sustrans cyclepath. Consideration also requires to be given to longer views of the site from residential properties within the village. To that end, I am in agreement with the Kilmacolm Civic Trust; interruption of views by tree cover shall reduce in winter and that there are upper conversions and flats within the village likely to be afforded views over the trees.

Addressing potential impact on Port Glasgow, Scottish Government SPP paragraphs 187-191 refers to a guideline separation distance of up to 2km between areas of search for groups of wind turbines and the edge of towns, cities and villages aimed at reducing visual impact. The 2km separation distance is a guide not a rule and decisions on individual development should take into account specific local circumstances and geography. The fringes of Port Glasgow are within this zone, but as indicated by the Landscape & Visual Impact Assessment, topography and the intervening landscape are such that there is little visual impact.

The Council's landscape advisors have advised that any wind turbine application will have a number of significant landscape and visual effects. They consider the proposed wind turbine to be not unique in that sense, as a similar sized turbine would have effects of this nature within all landscapes. Throughout Scotland, there are numerous examples of wind turbines of the scale under consideration in this report, however, there are, as yet, no such examples in Inverclyde. Accepting the Scottish Government's support for renewable energy, locations require to be found in Inverclyde for wind turbines. That, however, requires to be done with sensitivity to the key issues of scale, landscape impact and visual impact with an emphasis on locations distant from public

viewing points such as roads, core footpath routes and settlements. I further consider that if it is accepted that the impact on landscape and visual amenity are acceptable in this instance, a precedent may be set for other large scale turbines at other farm properties in the sensitive countryside between Port Glasgow and Kilmacolm.

Overall, I consider that the proposal is unacceptable with reference to Inverclyde Local Plan Policy UT6 criteria (a), (b) and (c) and Interim Policies UT6A (c) and UT6B (a) and (f).

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be refused.

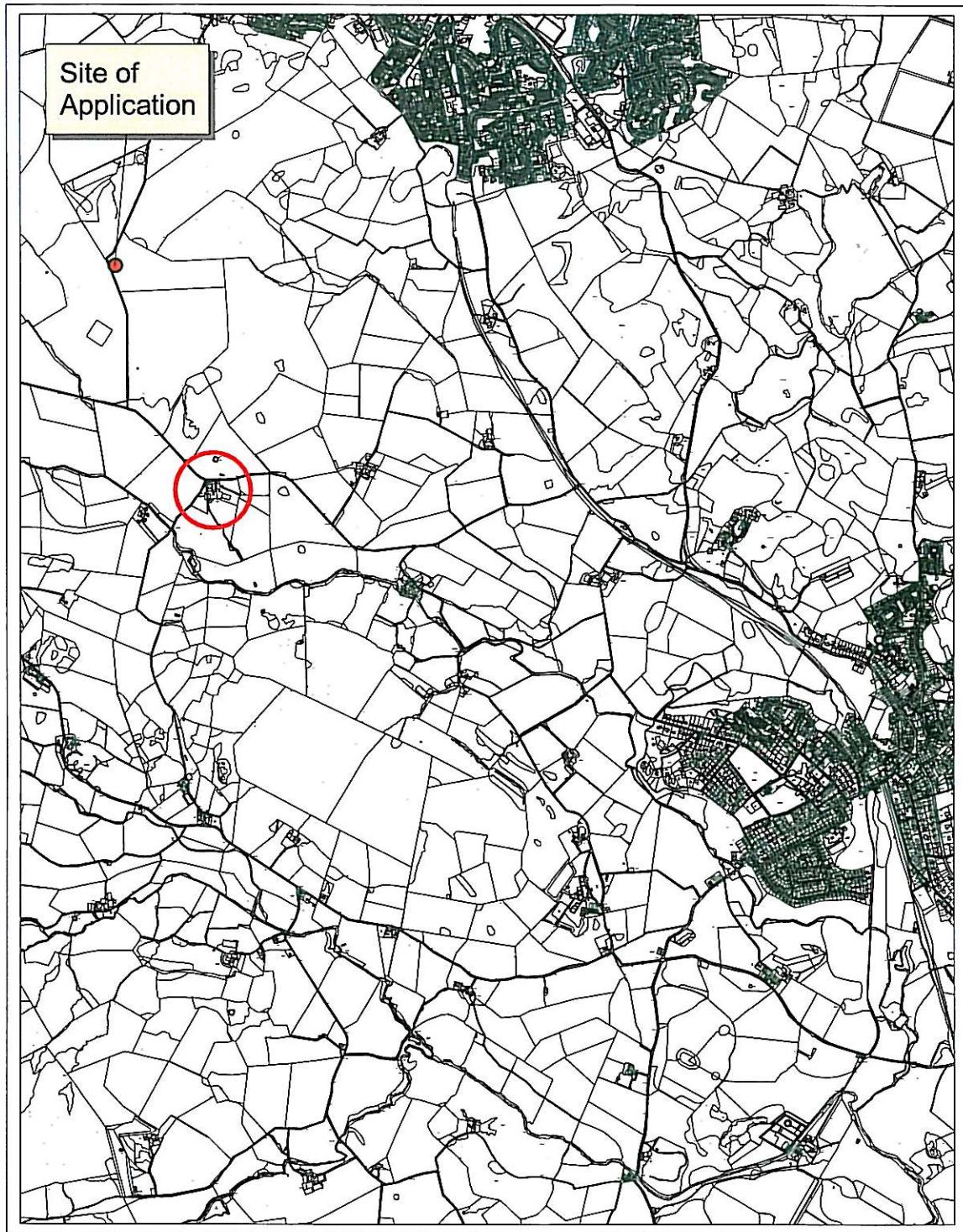
Reasons

- I. A combination of height and scale, proximity to public roads (including Auchentiber Road, designated as a Core Footpath to encourage the public into the countryside), proximity to residential properties and visual prominence from Kilmacolm, combine to create a dominant and excessively prominent feature in this part of Inverclyde's countryside, contrary to:-
 - a. the Council's interim policy on Small Wind Turbine Development UT6B, criteria (a) and (f).
 - b. the Council's interim policy on Wind Farms UT6A criterion (c); and
 - c. Policy UT6 of the Inverclyde Local Plan, criteria (a), (b) and (c).

Stuart Jamieson
Head of Regeneration and Planning

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Application form
2. Application plans
3. Inverclyde Local Plan
4. Inverclyde interim policy on small scale wind energy developments
5. Consultation responses
6. Written representations
7. Noise impact assessment
8. Associated infrastructure assessment
9. Basic assessment of the impact on birds
10. Landscape & visual impact assessment



Drawing No. 10/0340/IC High Mathernock Farm, Auchentiber Road, Kilmacolm.

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Date: 22:06:11



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