
Report To:	The Planning Board	Date	7th December 2011
Report By:	Head of Regeneration & Planning	Report No:	11/0209/IC Plan 12/11
			Local Application Development
Contact Officer:	Guy Phillips	Contact No	01475 712422
Subject:	Erection of two 20Kw wind turbines on 15m masts at Murdieston Farm, Old Largs Road, Greenock		

BACKGROUND

At the October meeting of the Planning Board the application was continued for a site visit to allow Members to consider the site and its environs. The site visit was undertaken on 9th November 2011.

SITE DESCRIPTION

The site, within the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park, is a hillside at Murdieston Farm, approximately 450m to the south east of the Greenock Cut and 100m to the west of Old Largs Road. Old Largs Road and the Greenock Cut are each identified as Core Footpath Routes. The Greenock Cut is also a scheduled ancient monument. Whinhill Golf Course lies to the east of Old Largs Road.

PROPOSAL

It is proposed to construct two 15.6m high wind turbines. The total height to blade tip of the three bladed propellers is 22m. Three photo montages and wire diagrams have been submitted, indicating views from Old Largs Road, Greenock Town Centre and the Lyle Hill. The applicant has also submitted a statement in support of his proposal.

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 LR 6- 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.

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.

CONSULTATIONS

NATS - CTC - No aircraft safeguarding objection to the proposal.

MOD Safeguarding - No objections.

Scottish Natural Heritage –The proposed development will not have a significant effect on the notified breeding hen harrier interests of the Renfrewshire Heights SPA. However, as no further ecological information has been provided it is unknown whether there will be any impacts on nationally and/or locally important natural heritage features such as protected species or rare/notable habitat. In line with SNH guidance 'Natural Heritage assessment of small scale wind energy projects which do not require formal Environmental Impact Assessment' (March 2008), they would encourage that these aspects are addressed within an appropriate level of assessment relative to the size and scale of the proposed development including all associated infrastructure works (e.g. access improvements, underground cabling, borrow pit excavation etc).

Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park Manager – The development does not present significant negative landscape and visual impact, would not impact on recreation and would not impact adversely on habitats or species.

PUBLICITY

The application was advertised in the Greenock Telegraph on 19th August 2011 as there are no premises on neighbouring land.

SITE NOTICES

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

PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Two written representations have been received. The objectors are concerned that:-

1. The development will have an adverse impact on landscape, when viewed from Old Largs Road, detracting from and dominating the view over the Clyde Estuary.
2. The site is within Clyde Muirshiel Park, close to Old Largs Road and would have an adverse effect on tourism and leisure.
3. The plans do not detail an access road, which would be required for construction and maintenance.
4. The application plans do not detail the method or routing of electrical connection.
5. The submitted photo montages are difficult to interpret.

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, which was approved by the Safe, Sustainable Communities Committee in March 2011. This statement introduced a new Policy UT6B which advises that the Council will be supportive of small scale wind turbine 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.

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

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. The nearest housing to the site, other than the applicant's farmhouse, is a terrace of four dwellings at MacBeth Road, approximately 300m to the north east. The orientation of these houses is such that their windows are not afforded a direct view of the proposed turbines.

- b) Road safety

The site is 100m from the road and has no direct road safety implications.

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

Views of the turbines from the Greenock Cut, lying downhill to the north east, are limited by intervening topography. The Greenock Cut is a scheduled ancient monument and also a core footpath route. The Local Plan does not confer any nature conservation designation on the site and I note that Scottish Natural Heritage does not object.

- e) Does not have an unacceptable adverse impact on the historic heritage of the area.

Given the restricted views of the turbines from the Greenock Cut I do not consider the proposal to adversely impact historic heritage.

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

The photomontages submitted with the planning application demonstrate that the two turbines break the skyline in the long views from central Greenock. While the proposed turbines are not tall, their position on the skyline determines that they shall be clearly visible. The skyline behind Greenock provides the town with an important visual setting, and it is considered that the encroachment of further disruption will have an unacceptable impact upon its landscape setting.

From the public vantage point at the distant Lyle Hill, the montages demonstrate the turbines are contained within the profile of the hillside. The most immediate visual impact, I consider, is from parts of the core footpath route along the nearby Old Largs Road in particular as it drops down towards Greenock near Murdieston Farm. Designation of Old Largs Road as a core footpath encourages walkers into the countryside. Policy LR6 informs that the Council will seek to protect and promote the core footpath network (both existing and proposed) and the other key themes of the adopted Inverclyde Access Strategy. Given the adverse visual impact I consider that walkers' enjoyment of this part of Inverclyde's countryside may be reduced by the dominant and unexpected visual interruption. Indeed, while much of the nearby Whinhill golf course is contained within a natural bowl, parts of the course are afforded views of the turbines. As such, another group of recreational users in the countryside are affected.

While the chosen point of view for the photomontage from Old Largs Road illustrates the turbines contained within the profile of the distant hills behind Helensburgh, I am concerned that they shall be read as prominent on a hilltop to users of the core footpath route. As Old Largs Road extends into the Regional Park, the visual impact declines. I note that there are electricity pylons to the south of the site and that approaches northwards on Old Largs Road shall view the proposed turbines within the context of the pylons and I also acknowledge the comments from the Clyde Muirshiel Park Manager.

Views of the turbines from the Greenock Cut, also designated as a core footpath are restricted by intervening topography.

Given the adverse visual impact of the turbines in the short views from Old Largs Road and Whinhill Golf Course and the long views from central Greenock, where they are seen to break the skyline, I consider the proposal is unacceptable with reference to Inverclyde Local Plan policies UT6 (a) and (b) and LR6, and Interim policies UT6A (c) and UT6B (f).

In seeking to support the development of wind turbines, the applicant was requested to consider resiting of the turbines to a more visually sympathetic position. The applicant declined this request.

Considering other issues, 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. In this instance, the overall height of the proposed turbines is 22m and, consequently, does not demand more detailed assessment.

Regarding the objector's concerns not covered by my assessment against the Local Plan, no road is proposed to serve the site and while the routing of electricity cables has not been detailed, this is a matter likely to be outwith planning control.

RECOMMENDATION

That the application be refused

Reason

1. The long views of the turbines from central Greenock, where the turbines are seen to break the skyline, their visual impact on the nearby Old Largs Road (designated as a core

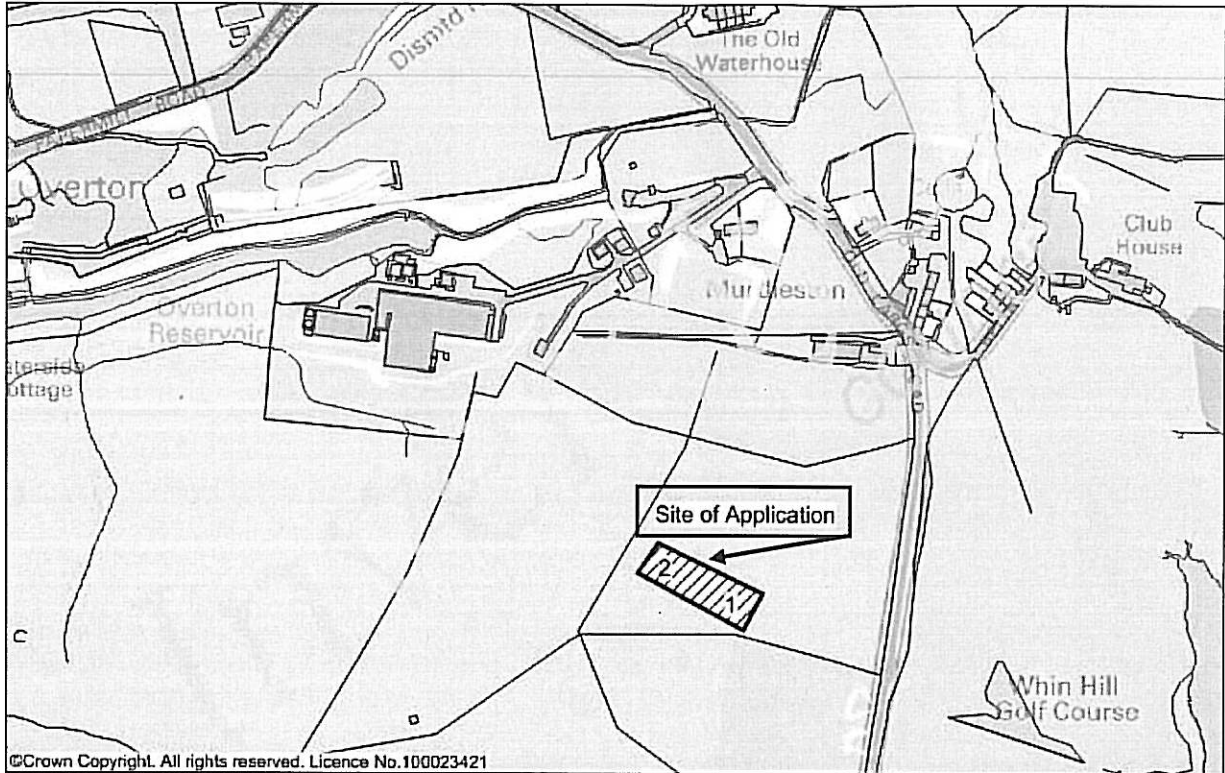
footpath route) and Whinhill Golf course combine to create a dominant and excessively prominent feature within Inverclyde's countryside contrary to:-

- (a) Policy UT6 of the Inverclyde Local Plan (a) and (b).
- (b) the Council's interim policy on Wind Farms UT6A (c).
- (c) the Council's interim policy on Small Wind Turbine Development UT6B criteria (f).
- (d) Policy LR6 of the Inverclyde Local Plan.

Stuart Jamieson
Head of Regeneration and Planning

BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Application form
2. Application Plans
3. Inverclyde Local Plan
4. Consultation Responses
5. Written representations
6. Scottish Natural Heritage Guidance
7. Scottish Planning Policy



Application Number	11/0209/IC
Location	Murdieston Farm Old Largs Road Greenock PA16 9LJ
Proposal	Erection of two 20Kw wind turbines on 15m masts



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