Sròndoire Community Wind Farm

Operational Life Extension

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1 SUMMARY

1.1 Application & Background

1.1.1 Srònboire Wind Farmers Limited (the 'Company') is applying under Section 42 of the Town and Country Planning (Scotland) Act 1997 to extend the operational life of Srònboire Community Wind Farm (the 'Wind Farm') from 25 to 40 years.

1.1.2 The Company, established to develop, own and operate the Wind Farm, is owned by its founding host landowners alongside their development and investment partners and the beneficial community ownership of the Tighnabruaich District Development Trust and the Tarbert & Skipness Community Trust. Alongside its sister development Allt Dearg Community Wind Farm built in 2012, the local and community share ownership structure of the Wind Farm has delivered the highest level of local community benefit of any wind farm in Argyll & Bute and remains a benchmark model of best practice development and community shared ownership in Scotland. The Wind Farm is one of the highest performing wind farms in the United Kingdom, with an excellent annual capacity factor.

1.2 Project Description

1.2.1 Located on the Ormsary and Stronachullin Estates in Mid-Argyll, the Wind Farm has been operational since October 2015 and comprises 3 x Vestas V80-2MW wind turbines with a total installed capacity of 6MW. The current planning consent is due to expire on 31st October 2040 pursuant to condition 2 of its planning permission (13/01427/PP, 12th December 2013).

1.2.2 The operation of the Wind Farm has been supported by a 15-year maintenance contract with turbine supplier Vestas since its commissioning in late 2015. Working alongside Vestas it has become clear that the serviceable life of the turbines can be safely extended well beyond the term of the planning permission, and it is the Partner's intention to extend the operational life of the Wind Farm with the appropriate level of maintenance and refurbishment. This is an emerging opportunity across the wind power sector, where the project life is running beyond the originally envisaged equipment lifecycle.

1.3 Conclusion

1.3.1 Continued operation of the Wind Farm will extend the socio-economic benefits currently delivered by the Wind Farm, including three full-time equivalent jobs, direct income to the local community and the continuation of an Educational Trust Fund. In addition, the Wind Farm will of course continue to produce significant renewable energy thus increasing its overall contribution to low carbon renewable electricity generation by over 60% from that originally envisaged.

1.3.2 As the proposed development remains unchanged from that described in the original Environmental Statement (ES) and as built in accordance with the terms of its planning permission, this Section 42 application is not expected to cause any new or increased environmental effects beyond those assessed and predicted in the original EIA.

2 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Purpose and Background

2.1.1 This report supports a Section 42 planning application by Srònd oire Wind Farmers Limited (the 'Company') to extend the operational life of Srònd oire Community Wind Farm (the 'Wind Farm') until 31st December 2055, thus extending its permitted operational life from 25 to 40 years.

2.1.2 The current planning consent for the Wind Farm expires on 30th October 2040. This application therefore seeks to amend Condition 2 of the original 2013 permission, which required decommissioning of the wind farm after 25 years from the date of its commissioning unless a new application was approved.

2.1.3 It is not proposed to make any physical changes to the wind farm or its infrastructure beyond any necessary replacement of components under its maintenance programme

2.1.4 This report therefore supplements the original Environmental Statement (ES) and provides justification to extend the operational period of the wind farm from that conditioned as part of the original consent.

2.2 The Applicant & Agent

2.2.1 The Applicant is Srònd oire Wind Farmers (the 'Company'), which owns and manages the Wind Farm, which comprises its founding host landowners alongside their development and investment partners and the Tighnabruaich District Development Trust and the Tarbert & Skipness Community Trust as shareholders.

2.2.2 Alongside its sister development Allt Dearg Community Wind Farm built earlier in 2012, the local and community share ownership structure of the Wind Farm has delivered the highest level of local community benefit of any wind farm in Argyll & Bute and remains a benchmark model of best practice development and community shared ownership in Scotland.

2.2.3 Lomond Energy Ltd is the appointed Agent for this application and acted as development consultant for the original wind farm application. It has been commissioned by the Applicant to undertake this Section 42 application and provide environmental, development and planning advice.

3 PROJECT DESCRIPTION

3.1 Location

3.1.1 The Wind Farm is located on the Ormsary and Stronachullin Estates in Mid-Argyll and has been operational since November 2015.

3.1.2 Built on one of the highest ridges in Mid-Argyll with lower topography out towards the west coast in the prevailing wind direction, the site enjoys one of the highest wind resources in mainland Britain alongside its adjacent sister development Allt Dearg Community Wind Farm.

3.1.3 None of the Wind Farm infrastructure are located within any environmentally sensitive areas, designated or otherwise.

3.2 Wind turbines and ancillary infrastructure

3.2.1 The Wind Farm comprises 3 x Vestas V80-2MW wind turbines with a total installed capacity of 6MW. Two of the turbines are 120m and the third 100m to blade tip height with 80m and 60m towers respectively.

3.2.2 Main access to the turbines is taken from the Loch Fyne side at Stronachullin Farm, via a 6km access track (shared with Allt Dearg Community Wind Farm) to the summit of Cruach A'Phubail, from where the turbines are located around 1km to the east of the summit. Grid connection is on-site at Stronachullin to SSE's 33kV existing local electricity distribution network, with all cabling from the wind turbines to this point being underground.

3.2.3 The turbines and ancillary equipment are monitored remotely whilst on-site activity is relatively low, averaging around 7 maintenance vehicle return trips per week.

4 SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT

4.1 Pre-application consultation & scoping

4.1.1 Whilst there is no statutory requirement for formal pre-application consultation or public engagement for an application of this nature, the local community's interests are represented by its shared ownership in the Wind Farm.

4.1.2 In determining the scope of assessment for the purposes of this application, reference is made to the following key documents:

- The original EIA which supported the Wind Farm application (Appendix 1)
- Planning permission and associated planning conditions (Appendix 2)
- Allt Dearg Habitat and Landscape Enhancement Plan governed by legal planning (Section 75) agreement between the Council, the Partnership and the host landowners (Appendix 3) in respect of Allt Dearg Community Wind Farm, to which the Srònd oire Community Wind Farm contributes in respect of off-site habitat management mitigation.

4.1.3 The scope of this assessment has therefore been determined by identifying which aspects of this Proposal represent a change to the original, as set out in the following tables:

Srònd oire Community Wind Farm Environmental Statement Volume 3 Written Statement June 2013		
Key issue (by chapter)	**Scoped in/out**	**Reason**
Chapter 1: Introduction & background	Out	The rationale for this Proposal remains fundamentally the same as the original
Chapter 2: Site selection and project description	Out	The design, layout and infrastructure will remain the same.
Chapter 3: Planning context	Out	Whilst local and national planning policy has changed since the Wind Farm was approved, this is not a matter for the Applicant to assess.
Chapter 4: Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment	Out	The turbines and ancillary infrastructure are to remain in place, so there will be no change to the existing landscape baseline.
Chapter 5: Ecology	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional ecological impacts to assess.
Chapter 6: Ornithology	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional ornithological impacts to assess.
Chapter 7: Hydrology, Hydrogeology & Geology	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional hydrological impacts to assess.

Chapter 8: Cultural heritage	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional cultural heritage impacts to assess.
Chapter 9: Noise	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional noise impacts to assess.
Chapter 10: Traffic & Transport	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional traffic & transport impacts to assess.
Chapter 11: Social, Economic and Environmental Benefits	In	Extending the operational life of the Wind Farm extends the benefits which it has brought to the local area, whilst continuing to support carbon reduction targets beyond the end of its originally envisaged life.
Chapter 12: Infrastructure & Aviation	Out	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional infrastructure and aviation impacts to assess.
Chapter 13: Miscellaneous – Shadow flicker, air quality & climate, health & safety	In	There are to be no changes made to the turbines and ancillary infrastructure, so there will be no additional shadow flicker or air quality & climate impacts to assess. However, there are implications to safety related to extending the operational period of the turbines beyond their originally envisaged life.

Srònoire Community Wind Farm **Conditions of Planning Permission** **Reference 13/01427/PP** **Date: 12th December 2013**		
Condition reference/summary	**Scoped in/out**	**Reason**
1/ Operational start date	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant
2/ Operational period	In	The purpose of this Proposal is to extend the operational period from 25 to 40 years.
3/ To build project as stated in the plans	Out	The turbines and ancillary infrastructure are to remain in place, so there will be no change to the Wind Farm baseline.
4/ Borrow pits	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant

5/ Prior to commencement provisions	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant
6/ Change of intentions	In	The purpose of this Proposal is to extend the operational period from 25 to 40 years so this represents a change to the permitted development in this regard.
7/ Breakdown provisions	Out	This condition continues to be satisfied and will continue to apply.
8/ Colour & finish	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
9/ Illumination	Out	Condition satisfied, nor is it intended to fit obstruction lighting to the turbines.
10/ Decommissioning plan	Out	Whilst this condition remains relevant to this Application, the extension of operational period does not change this requirement.
11/ Underground cabling	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
12/ Removal of temporary construction infrastructure & machinery.	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
13/ Construction method statement	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
14/ Drainage proposals	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
15/ Post construction restoration	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
16/ Control building finish	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
17/ Ancillary equipment finishes	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
18/ Pre-construction archaeological investigation	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
19/ Ecological clerk of works	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
20/ Private water supplies	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
21/ Route access report	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
22/ Signage and traffic control during construction	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.
23/ TV survey	Out	Condition satisfied, so no longer relevant.

4.2 Habitat and Landscape Enhancement Plan

4.2.1 The original EIA which supported the Wind Farm planning application found there to be no expected significant effects of the project being built and operated. This has proved to be the case halfway into its originally permitted operational life.

4.2.2 Notwithstanding, the landowner host shareholders voluntarily committed to contribute to the existing Allt Dearg Wind Farm Landscape and Habitat Enhancement Plan (LHEP) in connection with the Wind Farm to enhance and secure land uses and management practices which positively contribute to the ecology and landscape of the area, on lands within their ownership which include the Wind Farm.

4.2.3 Contributing to the Allt Dearg LHEP is formally agreed under the terms of the Wind Farm Section 75 Agreement and remains in place throughout the operational period of the Wind Farm. It is therefore appropriate that this is scoped into this assessment.

5 ASSESSMENT OF EFFECTS

The residual effects of this proposal relate to the positive socio-economic impacts and renewable energy generation gains resulting from an extension of the Wind Farm operating period, whilst the implications of extending the operational period of the turbine beyond their originally envisage operational lifetime is also considered.

5.1 Socio-economic impacts

Local jobs

5.1.1 The Wind Farm supports three full-time jobs in its management, operation and maintenance, including two based at Ormsary. In addition to specialist maintenance of the turbines and electrical equipment, local contracting businesses are employed to maintain the access track network, fencing, drainage and undertake general grounds maintenance as required.

5.1.2 Extending the operational life of the Wind Farm will underpin these jobs and support local services for an additional 15 years.

Local community

5.1.3 Tighnabruaich District Development Trust, via their ownership of Tighnabruaich District Renewables Ltd is a 1/12th shareholder in the Wind Farm. Similarly, Tarbert & Skipness Community Trust owns a 1/12th share, held via Tarbert & Skipness Renewables Ltd. This novel community shared ownership arrangement has resulted in significant income to the adjoining communities well beyond the Scottish Government recommended guidance of £5,000/MW. Whilst actual income varies according to annual production and power price, since commissioning the community owners have each received a total of £367k – equivalent to over £11k per MW installed.

5.1.4 Extending the operational life of the wind farm will provide the basis of a new community benefit deal for Tighnabruaich, Tarbert and Skipness, possibly other communities in Mid-Argyll.

Educational Trust Fund

5.1.5 The Wind Farm presently provides around £25k annually to an Educational Trust Fund established to support further education opportunities for young people living in and around Mid-Argyll. To date around £620k has been granted to over 260 local students to assist their further education. Whilst not means tested, this has been especially beneficial to lower income households in the area.

5.1.6 The founding partners are committed to continuing the Educational Trust Fund throughout the operational life of the wind farm.

Business rates

5.1.7 Extending the operational life of the Wind Farm will maintain income from Non-Domestic Rates.

5.2 Environmental impacts

Habitat and Landscape Enhancement Plan

5.2.1 The provisions of the HLEP will continue for a further 15 years under this operational life extension proposal, thus continuing the positive environmental gains made to date including the recovery of eroded peat hag and Black Game, and the removal of invasive plant and fauna species.

Net-zero carbon reduction targets

5.2.2 The UK and Scottish Governments recognise renewable energy production as the backbone of a net-zero carbon future, with targets now set in law to achieve net-zero carbon emissions of 2050 and 2045 respectively.

5.2.3 Decommissioning the Wind Farm as required under the terms of its planning permission prior to these dates therefore sets back progress in reaching these targets.

5.2.4 Furthermore, the Applicant has determined that re-powering the Wind Farm with more modern, larger capacity wind turbines is neither technically nor economically viable due to local grid constraints and the cost of a larger capacity connection, such that extending the operational life of the Wind Farm whilst the turbines can continue to provide safe and reliable service remains the optimal solution to maximise its carbon reduction and extend local economic benefits.

5.3 Extending the safe operational period of the turbines

5.3.1 The operation of the Wind Farm has been supported by a 15-year maintenance contract with turbine supplier Vestas since its commissioning in late 2015.

5.3.2 Working alongside Vestas, scheduled maintenance has evolved to adapt to the high wind resource site conditions of Cruach A'Phubail including the development of a predictive maintenance programme. This includes site-specific condition monitoring of key components, including:

- Blade erosion – regular inspections by drone and ground mounted high-definition camera reveal early erosion wear to blades, whilst maintenance schedule includes the application of a multi-layered colour-coded gelcoat finish to provide a clear indication of advancement of wear.
- Foundation/tower interface – a bespoke sealing system is applied and maintained at the junction between steel tower and concrete foundation at the base of each turbine. This prevents water ingress and thus minimises corrosion at this critical junction.
- Mechanical components – frequency of gearbox oil sampling, inspection of hydraulic systems and mechanical actuators has been adapted to account for site conditions to help predict and prevent component failures by preventative maintenance and premature replacement of wear components. This reduces downtime and thus maximises production to ensure the turbines are serviceable over 98% of the time.

5.3.3 Through these actions and constant condition monitoring of the Wind Farm it has become clear that the serviceable life of the turbines can be safely extended well beyond the term of the planning permission, and it is the Partners' intention to extend the operational life of the turbines with the appropriate maintenance and emerging refurbishment technologies.

6 CONCLUSIONS

It is concluded that the Wind Farm can be safely operated for an additional 15 years beyond its originally permitted operational life of 25 years. Doing so will lead to no significant adverse effects, whilst extending and thus enhancing the long-term socio-economic impacts and environmental and renewable energy generation benefits beyond those originally envisaged under the existing planning permission.

Steve Macken

22nd August 2025