

Assessing impacts on Wild Land Areas

Case Study Example: Wind farm partially within one wild land area and outwith another two

Note: This example was prepared prior to publication of the 2020 guidance. Nonetheless it largely reflects the principles and methodology set out in the guidance, and usefully illustrates how it can be applied.

CASE STUDY INTRODUCTION

This case study is based on NatureScot’s (then SNH’s) evidence to the Caplich wind farm inquiry in 2017. The proposed development comprised 20 turbines (135 metres to blade tip) and 15 km of access track. The site straddled the boundary of WLA 34 Reay - Cassley, and was less than 6 km from the boundary of WLA 29 Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis and just over 14 km from WLA 32 Inverpolly – Glencanisp.

The following extract is from the Inquiry Report prepared by the SNH (now NatureScot) witness.

Appraisal of effects for WLA 34 Reay – Cassley

The wind farm straddles the boundary of WLA 34. Ten turbines, with their access tracks and hardstandings, lie within this WLA on an area of elevated ground along the broad and simple ridge to the south of Glencassley. A further ten turbines, their access tracks and hardstandings along with the borrow pits and sub-station, lie outwith but immediately adjacent to the WLA on ground of similar character. The appraisal conclusions for this WLA distinguishes between the effects of the development inside and out of the WLA to reflect Ministers approach to the application of policy contained in SPP, in addition to considering the proposal in its entirety.

Appraisal of effects on the qualities of WLA 34 Reay – Cassley		
Step 2: Establish the baseline (which qualities are likely to be affected)	Step 3: Assess the susceptibility of the qualities (susceptibility of qualities to type and scale of change proposed)	Step 4: Assess the magnitude of effects (effects on qualities and the potential for mitigation)
<i>A range of large, irregular, rocky mountains with steep, arresting slopes and a variety of lochs and lochans, possessing a strong sense of naturalness, remoteness and sanctuary</i>	Low: This quality is susceptible to new tracks which could decrease the challenge of ascending the mountains thus reducing the high sense of risk involved. New features may also detract visitors from the superlative qualities of the mountains within the WLA.	Negligible: The introduction of a network of new access tracks across the wind farm site within the WLA would reduce remoteness across the south western flank however this is not considered to reduce the challenge and risk involved in ascending the mountain range and is therefore not considered to be significant. There are limited locations from within this WLA where the turbines will be seen where views of the mountains are also appreciated therefore the superlative qualities will be maintained.

<p><i>An awe-inspiring, broad scale expanse of cnochan in which there is a complex pattern of features at a local level that contribute to the sense of naturalness and sanctuary</i></p>	<p>Negligible: This quality is not expressed to a high degree within the southern part of the WLA which will be most affected by the proposal.</p>	<p>Negligible: There will be no visibility of the proposal from areas of cnochan within this WLA and the effects on this quality are considered to be negligible and not significant.</p>
<p><i>A variety of spaces created by irregular landforms in which there is perceived naturalness, as well as a strong sense of solitude</i></p>	<p>Medium: Where it is difficult to judge relative elevation and orientation, this quality is well expressed and moderately sensitive to features which provide a sense of scale, regularity, elevation or orientation thereby reducing the sense of sanctuary and solitude.</p>	<p>Medium adverse long term: The layered hills increase in height, frequency and dominance towards the west, where the range of wild land qualities experienced varies. This gradual rise of the land becomes more apparent when viewed from elevated locations where the scale and diversity of the landscape is revealed, this adds to the sensitivity of these elevated locations as key receptors. Forestry is currently the predominant human element within the wide panoramas experienced from the WLA which themselves have a limited effect on the very high sense of wildness experienced.</p> <p>There is a substantial amount of visibility of the proposal across the south western half of the southern flank of this WLA. From these areas of lower moorland interior the complex patterns of landform and texture contribute to both a high sense of naturalness and enclosure provided by the nearby mountain range.</p> <p>Within this lower moorland interior the proposal will be seen generally within 10km and in a very different context than from the elevated and open summits. These locations include areas where external views are limited by the convex nature of the landform resulting in a high perception of seclusion and solitude resulting in a sense of sanctuary.</p> <p>The proposed turbines, being tall and sited on elevated ground, would introduce visibility of very obvious human elements into view where either other elements are at greater distances, or are not visible due to them being hidden within the lower strath floor. The turbines would therefore aid orientation within these locations whilst the movement of the blades would detract from the current sense of seclusion, solitude and resulting sense of sanctuary. These effects would occur as a result of both the ten turbines which lie within the WLA and the ten that lie outwith and are considered to significantly affect this quality.</p>



Looking towards Beinn an Eoin from upper Glen Cassley with proposal to right

Extensive, elevated peatland slopes whose simplicity and openness contribute to a perception of awe, whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains

Very High: This quality is very susceptible to features which add complexity to the simple and open landcover and landform. This complexity could affect the current contrast with the adjacent high mountains.

It is also susceptible to additional human artefacts which might appear to further limit the perceived extent of the WLA particularly in the south across to WLA 29.

High adverse long term: The proposal lies within the simpler, lower peatland slopes in the southern part of the WLA. The flanks of lower ground either side of Glen Cassley provide the contrast to the elevated mountains to the north, emphasising their varied shapes, colours and textures. As the description for this WLA sets out there are currently some elements including extensive conifer plantations and wind farms (particularly Achany and Rosehall which can be clearly seen appearing as a single cluster of turbines) outwith this WLA which currently impact on this quality and highlight the extent of the WLA to the far south and south west.

The proposal would introduce very obvious and moving turbines onto the currently simple moorland slopes (both within and outwith the WLA) bringing new complexity to the largely open landscape. It will introduce an additional linear grouping of turbines, akin to the Rosehall and Achany cluster but into views which will be largely backclothed by the complex high hills within WLA 29 where the proposal would encroach on the qualities of this area whilst further reinforcing the limits of this WLA in this direction (see Eagle Rock viewpoint).

Effects will be especially high on areas within the WLA where this quality is well expressed and where existing wind farms are not seen such as the south eastern gully's of Ben More Assynt, the moorland slopes through Glen Oykel and the moorland slopes and hills to the north and west of the proposal.

The proposal will result in a significant effect on the elevated peatland slopes which contribute to the appreciation of the adjacent Ben More Assynt range of mountains. The turbines will appear as



Looking south east towards the proposal from Meall an Aonaich, Eagle Rock

		<p>new human artifacts introduced into an area where currently features are at greater distances from the WLA or are less visually prominent such as the forestry plantations and transport corridor within Strath Oykel in addition to the wind farms in the south east. The proposal will substantially add to the cumulative effects of these elements by being both more prominent and physically encroaching into the WLA. These effects are considered to be significant on this quality as a result of either the turbines which lie within the WLA or those which lie out of it.</p>
<p>Step 5: Judgment of the significance of effect</p>	<p>Significant: The proposal lies partly within, and partly outwith this WLA where the simplicity of the peatland slopes provide enclosure and where a sense of seclusion, solitude and sanctuary are well expressed. These slopes make a particular contribution to the perception of awe whilst highlighting the qualities of adjacent mountains.</p> <p>The turbines will appear as new human artifacts introduced into an area where currently features are at greater distances from the WLA and are less visually prominent. The turbines would aid orientation within locations where other</p>	
<p>Looking south east towards the proposal from Meall an Aonaich, Eagle Rock</p>		<p>whilst the movement of the blades would detract from the solitude and resulting sense of sanctuary. The proposal</p>
		<p>will substantially add to the cumulative effects of other elements by being both more prominent and physically encroaching into the WLA. Collectively these effects are considered to be significant.</p> <p>The site layout plan together with the wireframes provided within the ES number the individual turbines which allows the identification of which ten turbines are within WLA 34. These turbines lie in a grouping on more elevated ground along the broad and simple ridge to the south of Glen Cassley. There are no obvious distinguishing features defining the WLA boundary at this point. These ten turbines are prominent in views from within WLA 34, as illustrated from Ben More Assynt, where they make up the left hand half of the proposal illustrated, bringing new complexity to the largely open landscape. If considering the ten turbines within WLA 34 alone I conclude that they would result in significant effects on the qualities of WLA34. The ten turbines outwith WLA 34 would equally result in significant effects on the same qualities of this WLA and for completeness the proposal as a whole would also result in significant effects on the same qualities.</p>

Appraisal of effects for WLA 29 Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis

The study area for the extensive Rhiddoroch - Beinn Dearg - Ben Wyvis WLA 29 which lies to the south of Strath Oykel, is widespread due to the more dispersed visibility of the proposal and likelihood of significant effects. The appraisal for this WLA is based on the experience through the hills each side of Strath Mulzie and up into the mountains north of Beinn Dearg. The proposal lies wholly outwith WLA29 which is separated from WLA 34 by Strath Oykel which contains the single-track road, a scattering of buildings and the extensive tracts of forestry which reinforce the extent of human activity in this glen corridor.

Appraisal of effects on the qualities of WLA 29 Beinn Dearg – Ben Wyvis

<p>Step 2: Establish the baseline (which qualities are likely to be affected)</p>	<p>Step 3: Assess the susceptibility of the qualities (susceptibility of qualities to type and scale of change proposed)</p>	<p>Step 4: Assess the magnitude of effects (effects on qualities and the potential for mitigation)</p>
<p><i>A range of awe-inspiring massive, high rounded hills and plateau, as well as steep rocky peaks and ridges, offering elevated panoramas</i></p>  <p>Looking north east from lower slopes of Meall an Fhuarain across to WLA 34</p>	<p>Medium: This quality is susceptible to features which may interrupt currently unbroken views from hill and plateau tops within this WLA, due to their convex nature, across to the adjacent WLA 34 where currently intervening human artifacts within Strath Oykel below are screened.</p>	<p>Medium – High adverse long term: The proposal is located above the actively managed forestry, which lies within the lower slopes of Strath Oykel, therefore this forestry is currently not seen from within much of the WLA. The proposal will be seen coming in and out of view when moving through this WLA away from its margins, clearly interrupting the perceived extension of wild land qualities from this WLA across to the adjacent WLA 34.</p> <p>The impacts on this quality are considered to be significant where forestry is no longer obviously affecting the appreciation of this quality nor where it acts as a feature which defines the extent of the WLA.</p>
<p><i>Long and deep penetrating glens, with steep, arresting side slopes that limit views, some containing access routes and clearly influenced by estate management</i></p>	<p>Medium: This quality is susceptible to new features which will be prominent from within the semi-enclosed glens which will impose on the seclusion and strong sense of sanctuary experienced.</p>	<p>Negligible: Although the more open and exposed higher reaches of the long glens within this WLA will experience effects from this proposal, the enclosed parts of the glens where this quality is best expressed will be retained to a high degree. This quality is therefore not considered to be significantly affected.</p>
<p><i>A very large interior with a strong sense of remoteness and sanctuary that seems ever more extensive where appearing to continue into neighbouring wild land areas</i></p>	<p>Very High: Due to the very strong relationship between this WLA and WLA 34 this quality is susceptible to elements which may interrupt open views which influence the perceived extent of this WLA as well as the sense of remoteness experienced.</p>	<p>Medium – High adverse long term: The proposal would be located on the elevated slopes heading within the adjacent WLA 34.</p> <p>The proposal will be seen from within this WLA where intervening development within Strath Oykel is screened, thereby the turbines would appear as a new and prominent feature encroaching on the appreciation of open views across this WLA and into WLA 34.</p> <p>Due to the proposal being of substantial height, of contrasting colour and form and sited on elevated ground (at approximately 220 - 340m) its effects extend further into this WLA than other human elements in this landscape. Where open views</p>

across to WLA 34 are interrupted the effect on this quality is considered to be significant.



Looking north west from south side of Strath Oykel Oykel

Rocky hills, cnochan and peatland slopes that appear simple and awe-inspiring at a broad scale, but harbour intricate features at a local level, as well as a strong sense of sanctuary and solitude

Low: This quality is less susceptible to development outwith the WLA as it is internally focused on the landform and cover of the interior.

Negligible: The locations within the WLA where this quality is well expressed are not considered to be affected by the proposal therefore there will not be a significant effect on this quality.

Step 5: Judgment of the significance of effect

Significant: This WLA is valued and recognised in part for its qualities which appear to extend beyond its boundaries including its extensive panoramas which draw on areas outwith the WLA to contribute to its apparent greater extent. The location of the proposal between this WLA and the adjacent area of wild land to the north (WLA 34), will introduce very obvious forms of human development interrupting these views. These effects are to the degree that there will be significant impacts on the appreciation of two of the qualities identified for this WLA.