

06 September 2024

Allan Kelly
Scottish Government
Directorate for Energy and Climate Change
Energy Consents
4th Floor, 5 Atlantic Quay, 150 Broomielaw
Glasgow G2 8LU

BY EMAIL ONLY

Dear Allan

ECU00003288: Cloich Forest Wind Farm, Scottish Borders

Further to your email of 15 August 2024, please find attached supplementary comments from Midlothian Council to add to previous comments submitted to the Energy Consents Unit on 22 October 2021 and 14 April 2023.

These comments are in respect of biodiversity, landscape and transport matters in relating to the haul route for the proposal where it passes through Midlothian. This response also requests that the following Midlothian community councils, whose areas through which the haul route passes, are informed and engaged by the applicant and kept up to date on the proposal: Midlothian Federation of Community Councils, Eskbank and Newbattle Community Council, Bonnyrigg and District Community Council, Rosewell and District Community Council and Howgate Community Council.

Based on the current, incomplete, information supplied in relation to the haul route, the Council would object to this part of the proposals, particularly at Howgate, on the grounds of potential adverse local landscape, visual and cultural impacts, and loss of tree canopy cover within Midlothian.

The Council's previous responses set out its concerns and comments on other aspects of the proposal, including transport, biodiversity, wider spread landscape and also cumulative landscape impact from other existing wind energy developments on Midlothian's southern border.

This response is structured in the following order:

- Biodiversity/Landscape
 - Biodiversity
 - Landscape
 - *Potential Landscape, Visual and Cultural Impacts at Howgate*
 - *Landscape Impact on Haul Route Pinch Points*
 - Additional Landscape Required Information
- Roads/Transport

Biodiversity/Landscape

Please ask for: Grant Ballantine
Our Reference:

Email: grant.ballantine@midlothian.gov.uk

The following comments come from a review of the technical appendix document Volume 3 A12.1 Abnormal Load Route Assessment June 2021 submitted in support of the proposal. Below are comments on the biodiversity, landscape, visual and arboricultural impacts, and further information required in order to assess the proposal more fully.

Biodiversity

Please note that these comments relate only to the review of A12.1 Abnormal Load Route Assessment and the haul route. They do not cover wider impacts on biodiversity or protected species as these would expect to be picked up by the determining authority. The issues in relation to the haul route would also require full assessment and review for the haul route. As the proposal is a National Project as defined in NPF4 and subject to Environmental Impact Assessment, it is noted that Policy 3 Biodiversity would apply. NPF4 states "Development Proposals for national, major or Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) development will only be supported where it can be demonstrated that the proposal will conserve, restore and enhance biodiversity, including nature networks". Based on this statement it is therefore expected that baseline habitat assessment would be required alongside statutory ecological survey work, and that development of biodiversity enhancement proposals would be required to be included for any landscape reinstatement of the temporary haul route locations.

Landscape

The technical appendix (A12.1) includes junction and pinch point evaluation drawings for all areas where a potential pinch point has been identified on the haul route along which turbine parts, including turbine blades, would be carried from Grangemouth through Midlothian to the project site in Scottish Borders. A number of the pinch points fall within Midlothian. The technical appendix assessment drawings (A12.1) highlight potential vehicle overrun and potential over sail by the turbine blades due to their length. Also, based on the vehicle auto turn software used to predict vehicle tracking, the drawings highlight areas where load bearing surfacing would be required, where street furniture would require removal and where trees and other vegetation would require removal or pruning.

Having reviewed the Abnormal Load Route Assessment technical appendix (A12.1), the Council has very serious concerns and objection regarding the proposed route option involving the requirement for a temporary haul route to be constructed over Howgate Village Green (as illustrated by Pinch Point 022). This route would create adverse local landscape and visual impacts (including tree loss) for the community in the Howgate village area, which is designated as a Conservation Area. Further information on the transport impact of the proposal is addressed in the Transport part this response.

Based on the current, incomplete, information supplied, the Council would object to this part of the proposals, on the grounds of potential adverse local landscape, visual and cultural impacts and loss of tree canopy cover within Midlothian.

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This is due to the requirement for the construction of a temporary haul route, and requirement for removal of trees and other hard and soft landscape features, on the village green. However, additional information is required in order to assess whether alternative routes are feasible and to supply further information on the potential impacts of the current proposed haul route at Howgate and surrounding pinch points.

Potential Landscape, Visual and Cultural Impacts at Howgate:

The village green is included in the Howgate Conservation Area, which was designated in 1972.

A Howgate Conservation Area Appraisal was published in 2006 and states the following:-

“Howgate is a small rural, linear village which has developed sporadically on either side of the busy A6094 roadway. Older individually sited buildings strung out along the roadside are vernacular or Victorian with the former Howgate Inn and the church providing focal points. Earlier buildings are single storey cottages or two storey stone houses frequently harled and most often with slated roofs. The original farm buildings have now been converted to domestic use but retain their agricultural character. Some between-the-wars houses have now become assimilated with the village character. One large gap site has considerable tree cover which adds to the generally leafy appearance of the village. This is located to the east of Howgate Church and to the north of a tributary of the Lead Burn. Some houses are joined, including the startlingly pink colour washed terrace at the southern end.”

The village green is a later addition to the village, constructed in 2006. The Conservation Area Appraisal of 2006 comments that:-

“In 2006 a new development of houses was added at the north end of Howgate. The houses are harled and slated, most of which are arranged around a village green. Landscaping over time will assist in integrating these with the remainder of the hamlet, while the village green should become an important focal point.”

The village green is now well established. Existing trees that would be potentially impacted by the haul route comprise a large mature willow tree that pre-dates the Tipperwell Way (new housing) development, five trees that were planted at the time of the Tipperwell Way development which are now well established, and numerous younger trees. Additionally, shrubs, bulbs and ornamental planting would be likely to be affected. There are ornamental ironwork gateway features that could also be impacted by the works along with street furniture including lighting columns and bins.

The village green is clearly highly valued by the local community, and as anticipated now forms an important focal point which contributes to the Conservation Area and to the setting of the category B listed Old Howgate Inn which is located immediately opposite the village green. It is also noted that the natural stonework of the mini

roundabout located at the approach to the village from the north would also be impacted by the proposals.

Based on this initial assessment it is the Council's view that, on the grounds of likely local landscape, visual and cultural impacts, impacts on the Conservation Area and on the setting of the listed former Howgate Inn, the adverse impacts on the Howgate Village Green should be avoided through the selection of an alternative route which avoids the need for a left-hand turn at the roundabout on the approach to the village, in order to avoid the need for the temporary haul route across the village green. As stated above, further information on the transport impact is addressed in the Transport part of this response.

Landscape Impact on Haul Route Pinch Points

Below are detailed landscape comments on haul route pinch points:

Pinch Point 16: Drawing 3439_DR_ALR_0016 BURNBRAE TERRACE

ROUNABOUT: The assessment for this location identifies the potential need for tree pruning works. Full details of the proposals are required to assess the proposals. See tree survey comments below.

Pinch Point B01: Drawing 3439_DR_ALR_0022: PC B01 A6094 / B6372

JUNCTION: This junction has experienced recent forestry clear-felling operations and recent restocking. Therefore the removal of mature trees in this location would no longer be required, so the impacts on landscape amenity, visual impact and biodiversity in this area would consequently be far reduced to those likely when this location was assessed by the applicant. It is likely that this location would be part of the Council's preferred route, should the application be approved - (a righthand turn off the A6094 onto the B6372), as approaching Howgate via the A6094/B6372 junction would appear to avoid the impacts at Howgate village green which would be necessary based on the current route assessed (see comments on drawing 3439_DR_ALR_0021, location PC 22: A6094/B7026 ROUNABOUT).

Pinch Point B02: Drawing 3439_DR_ALR_0023: ALV SWEPT PATH ANALYSIS

VESTAS V136 66.6m BLADE PC B02 B6372 / B7026 JUNCTION: A left-hand turn at this junction would be required if taking the alternative route described above (Drawing 3439_DR_ALR_0022). This junction has been assessed as not requiring tree removals or tree pruning works. This junction would be likely to be part of the Council's preferred route, should this application be approved.

Pinch Point 022: Drawing 3439_DR_ALR_0021: This drawing indicates the likely impacts on Howgate Village Green based on the current proposed haul route, approaching Howgate from the East on the A6094. The proposed route approaching from the east requires a left-hand turn at the roundabout on the northern edge of Howgate, at the junction of the A6094, B7026, and Tipperwell Way. Based on the drawing the manoeuvre would require an alternative temporary vehicle route to be constructed passing to the western edge of the village green, passing close to

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properties on Tipperwell Way. The proposed route is identified as requiring the removal of five existing trees on the green. However, it is noted that there are numerous small trees planting on the green between 2011 and 2019 which are not identified in the proposals due to their small size, and a very large mature Willow tree located to the south of the proposed haul route but not identified on the proposals plan. It is likely that the haul route could require removal of some of the young, smaller trees on the green and possible adverse impacts on the large mature Willow, such as impacts on its root protection area or potential for requirements for pruning works.

Based on the current information supplied, it is likely that, should this application be considered for approved, the Council's preferred haul route would avoid all damage and disruption to Howgate village green, and would similarly avoid any other tree removal or adverse impacts. It is likely that the following part of the route would form part of this preferred route:-

- B1-B02 Righthand turn off A6094 to B6372
- B02-22 B02 LH turn from B6372 onto B7026
- 22-23 Straight over roundabout on B7026 onto A6094 at Howgate village

Additional Landscape Required Information:

Additional information would be required to enable a fuller assessment of the potential tree impacts of the proposed routes and alternative route(s), as follows:

Tree Survey and Arboricultural Impact Assessment: A full tree survey and arboricultural impact assessment (AIA) to BS5837 should be submitted, for all trees and hedgerow in proximity to the identified pinch points. This should fully identify the existing trees species, age, size, condition and retention category and any existing health or safety recommendations for works. The AIA should then establish the likely impact of the proposals on the existing trees and should include a Tree Retention, Removal and Protection plan, including details of the accurate canopy spread and root protection areas, proposed tree removals (including small trees which are likely of cultural importance to the village community) or tree pruning and details of tree protection measures for trees to be retained. An arboricultural method statement and potentially the use of an arboricultural Clerk of Works, should the proposal be granted permission, is anticipated to be required to oversee any works adjacent to trees and to ensure protection measures are fully delivered.

Detailed Landscape Survey: The tree survey should also be accompanied by a full site landscape survey identifying location, size, species and numbers of all other planting likely to be impacted by the proposals. For example, this should include shrubs, bulb planting, other ornamental planting. Hard landscape features should also be fully identified and documented, including gateway features, boundary features such as stone property boundaries and fences and any street furniture and

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surfacing. Should this application be approved, reinstatement of all landscape features will be required.

Community Engagement: The potential impacts on pinch point locations in Midlothian will require community engagement and input from the community into the final designs. This engagement should commence at landscape survey stage, and should continue through the design process in order to ensure that community interests are fully represented through the design process, with impacts avoided wherever possible.

Tree Canopy Cover Assessment: Should the application be approved, replacement tree planting will be required, for any tree removals and it is anticipated that this will be required to exceed the tree canopy cover area of the existing tree cover. To calculate the extent of replacement tree planting therefore, existing canopy cover calculations should be carried out for each location where tree removals are proposed, in order to inform reinstatement landscape proposals.

Landscape Proposals: Should this application be approved, detailed landscape proposals would be required for the locations where impacts on landscape features are anticipated, drawing for the detailed survey work above. These should include the replacement tree planting but also containing detailed landscape proposals for reinstatement of all hard and soft landscape features and for establishment maintenance proposals to ensure successful establishment. Based on this assessment, projected future tree canopy cover assessment should also be submitted with proposed replacement planting, assessing the likely tree canopy cover at Year 5 and at intervals into the future.

Roads/Transport

Should the proposal be granted, the Council would want a walk/drive over the haul route, where it passes through Midlothian, with the applicant's project team to go through the various Amber/Red highlighted sections in the haul route assessment (Volume 3 A12.1 Abnormal Load Route Assessment June 2021). This would be to help ensure successful planning of the route, reduction and mitigation of impact on the route and recovery of impact on assets along the route.

Particular comments on the haul route are provided below:

- 1- A7 (complete corridor) - any assets which require relocation/removal will need to be fully covered by the project. In this location the Council would require new assets to be installed, potentially socketed for future works. Current assets are circa 40 years old and will not be reusable if removed;
- 2- A7 – Hardengreen roundabout - ensure Network Rail is made aware of the movements;

- 3- B6392 Hardengreen>Rosewell - any assets which require relocation/removal will need to be fully covered by the project. In this location the Council would require new assets to be installed, potentially socketed for future works. Current assets are circa 20 years old and will not be reusable if removed;
- 4- Chesters Farm bridge B9392 - the transport plans suggest good clearance - if the height of transport changes, the project should be aware this structure is very close to 5.5m with potential to have areas as low as 5.3m due to its 'bow' construction [B6392 - Google Maps](#);
- 5- The Council would recommend load turn right at A6094 Jct B6372. Recent deforestation has meant a far wider open areas on the RHS. This would remove the need for the left hand turn into Howgate, which is creating the sweep over the village green and threatening the trees and the village green;
- 6- If above is actioned – load would travel through Howgate roundabout B7026 - any removal of assets or amendments to roundabout would require to be returned to an 'as is' condition.

Please contact me if you have any questions on this.

Yours sincerely

REDACT

Grant Ballantine
Lead Officer Conservation and Environment