

A19. RECREATION AND TOURISM

A19.1 INTRODUCTION

The design of the proposed Viking Wind Farm has changed since the Section 36 application, and its associated Environmental Statement, were submitted in May 2009. This chapter describes how these changes would affect recreation and tourism interests.

Before reading this chapter, please first read Addendum Chapter A1, the Introduction, and Chapter A4, the Development Description. Failure to read these two chapters carefully may lead to a misunderstanding of the assessment work described in this chapter. Furthermore, because this addendum chapter is not intended to provide a complete new assessment of the issues, but instead provides a discussion of the effects of the work which has taken place since the 2009 ES was submitted, it must be read in conjunction with the recreation and tourism character chapter of the 2009 Environmental Statement.

For full details of the proposed design changes please refer to Addendum Chapter A4.

A19.2 CONSULTATION RESPONSES

No formal objection to the proposed wind farm was based on the predicted impacts on recreation and tourism interests.

For a full list of all comments from consultees please refer to Appendix A1.1. In general, comments related to the need to provide appropriate access, signage and interpretation, to protect sensitive species and habitats and for health and safety reasons. Visit Scotland expressed doubts as to the findings of the 2009 ES that highly significant effects are unlikely. However, their comments are not supported by any data or research, and in fact contradict the findings of the most recent available research on this subject (Glasgow Caledonian University 2008).

A19.3 CHANGES IN THE POLICY CONTEXT

Since publication of the original ES a number of changes have occurred in the structure of national planning policy and the format of regional and local plans and full details are provided in Addendum Chapter 7. In summary, Scottish Planning Policy (SPP) 6, National Planning Policy Guideline (NPPG) 14, and SPP 15 have been revoked and superseded by the consolidated Scottish Planning Policy document. This process has not resulted in substantive change in policy and has no bearing on the outcome of this assessment.

A19.4 CHANGES IN METHODOLOGY

There have been no changes in the assessment methodology.

A19.5 CHANGES IN BASELINE CONDITIONS

There have been no changes in the baseline conditions since publication of the original ES.

A19.6 CHANGES IN THE PROPOSED WIND FARM

The removal of 23 turbines and associated infrastructure including tracks, anemometers and borrow pits, and consequential changes in the effects on landscape character, visual amenity, cultural heritage, ecology, ornithology and traffic volumes will help to lessen any potential impacts upon recreation and tourism.

A19.7 CHANGES IN AGREED MITIGATION

The 2009 ES set out proposed mitigations in regard of recreation and tourism for both the construction and operation phases. No changes to these mitigations are proposed. Additional mitigation is discussed hereafter

A19.7.1 Habitat management

The Habitat Management Plan (HMP) defines the way the proposed wind farm site and the wider area would be managed for nature conservation purposes before construction and throughout operation of the wind farm. The HMP has been revised, expanded and made more specific since the 2009 ES was produced. Please refer to addendum chapter A10, Non-avian Ecology; Appendix A10.9, Habitat Management Plan; and chapter A11, Ornithology.

Large areas of the blanket bog on the proposed wind farm site are currently heavily degraded due to processes unconnected with the development of the wind farm, for example heavy grazing by sheep. The 2010 HMP contains specific revised and expanded proposals regarding the management of peatland including compensatory payments to crofters for reduced grazing, and establishment of a number of peat restoration areas, notably in north Nesting.

A number of lochans used by breeding red-throated diver are under threat from peat erosion. Proposals are laid out in the HMP for the restoration and creation of diver lochans in carefully selected locations away from wind turbines.

Populations of some species of birds, notably whimbrel, are currently in unexplained decline across the site. Measures in the revised HMP include creation of new habitat for whimbrel and merlin.

Access management will take account of the HMP to prevent disturbance to breeding birds and damage to blanket bog habitats. It will also include guidance on appropriate destinations for school/interest group visits and provide instruction on the appropriate use of signage with reference to health and safety implications of access, in compliance with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code.

Red-throated divers are considered to be a key local species, and VEP proposes to promote the conservation of this species through the management measures in the HMP and through a programme of education and information. VEP aspires to providing a

public viewing facility for breeding divers in Central Mainland, although the details of this proposal depend on consultation with SNH and RSPB.

It should be noted that access to the whole of the proposed wind farm area is currently effectively uncontrolled.

A19.7.2 Visitor facilities

Viking Energy Partnership (VEP) commits to providing information and interpretation about the wind farm at appropriate locations near to or within the wind farm.

VEP sees mutual benefit in tying in with existing service providers, which could coordinate local information generally. For example, permanent or temporary exhibitions may be appropriate.

A19.8 CHANGES IN THE IMPACT ASSESSMENT

Changes in the proposals since publication of the 2009 ES, and especially deletion of turbines, will result in reduced direct and secondary impacts on recreation and tourism interests in accordance with assessment findings presented in other chapters of this Addendum. However, although a general reduction in impacts is acknowledged, reassessment of impacts against criteria established in Section 19.4.3 of the 2009 ES has not resulted in any modification to the original findings.

Consultee concern regarding the absence of highly significant adverse impacts has been considered. However, it is still our view that there will be no major adverse impacts on tourism, i.e. a noticeable change in the number of tourists visiting Shetland as a result of the project. This conclusion is founded on currently available research into the tourism/wind farm relationship, the distance of the development from major tourist attractions and accommodation areas, quality of established mitigation and enhancement measures and other issue-specific information as presented in Section 19.6 of the 2009 ES and in paragraph A19.7 above.

Concern regarding effects on ornithology and its knock-on effects on tourism is acknowledged but is not supported by the assessment. Please see addendum chapter A11, which concludes that there will be no likely significant adverse effects on any bird species and that with the enactment of the Habitat Management Plan there could be overall positive impacts on bird species.

Visual, environmental and economic impacts with potential adverse impacts on recreation and tourism have undergone rigorous assessment throughout the EIA and project design processes from an early stage. Findings have been incorporated in design iterations as described in the appropriate chapters of the original ES and this Addendum.

A19.9 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Changes to the proposed wind farm, and reassessment of impacts on recreation and tourism, have not resulted in any change to assessment findings presented in the 2009 ES. The Viking Wind Farm development would not have an overall significant impact on tourism in Shetland. The Wind Farm would not be located within a designated area or close to any of the most popular tourist attractions in Shetland. The turbines are located

away from key tourist attractions and, based on experience from elsewhere, visitors should not be put off from coming to Shetland. However, it is difficult to quantify these impacts. Additionally, the wind farm would provide opportunities to promote Shetland as a green tourist location. The provision of new access tracks and information and interpretive material will increase and enhance recreation facilities. The potential positive environmental impacts of the project arising from the HMP provide confidence to support these conclusions.

A19.10 REFERENCES

Glasgow Caledonian University (2008) The Economic Impacts of Wind Farms on Scottish Tourism. <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/03/07113554/0>, accessed July 2010.