

PROPOSED ABERDEENSHIRE LOCAL DEVELOPMENT PLAN 2020

This document sets out Scottish Renewables' response to the Proposed Aberdeenshire Local Development Plan (LDP) 2020 consultation.

We would encourage the council to consider our comments alongside Scottish Renewables' Position Statement on National Planning Framework 4 (NPF4)¹, as well as our Supplementary Papers on Climate Change and Deployment Targets², Landscape Capacity v Sensitivity Studies³, Spatial Planning⁴ and Peat and Carbon Rich Soils⁵. These are relevant to the proposals in the LDP, specifically the policies relating to renewables.

General Observations

Legislative and Policy Context

The Proposed LDP does not mention the Scottish Government's declared 'climate emergency', nor is there any mention of the Scottish Government's target of net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2045 contained in the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009 as amended by the Climate Change (Emissions Reduction Targets) (Scotland) Act 2019. These are significant statements and legally binding commitments from the Scottish Government that must be central to planning policy and therefore must be reflected in the Proposed LDP.

In December 2015 the Paris Agreement was concluded, which commits signatories, including the UK, to restrict the increase in the global average temperature to below 2C above pre-industrial levels, and to pursue efforts to limit increases to 1.5C, as well as aspiring to achieve net-zero GHG emissions by 2050. The Scottish Government also adopted their Onshore Wind Policy Statement in 2017, which states: 'Achieving appropriate environmental protection means that the relevant planning and consenting processes must remain aligned with the policy context and desired outcomes.'

Section 3ZA (1) of the Planning (Scotland) Act 2019 (the '2019 Act') is in force and also of relevance to the Proposed LDP. This states that 'The purpose of planning is to manage the development and use of land in the long term public interest'. Section 3ZA (2) clarifies that 'anything which contributes to sustainable development... is to be considered as being in the long term public interest'. In setting out changes to the content of the new NPF4, Section 2(4) of the 2019 Act identifies 'outcomes' for NPF4, one of which (e) is 'meeting any targets relating to the reduction of emissions of greenhouse gases, within the meaning of the Climate Change (Scotland) Act 2009.'

The Scottish Renewables NPF4 Supplementary Paper on Climate Change and Deployment Targets sets out the challenges facing Scotland in meeting our national targets for emission reduction and to achieve net zero by 2045.

¹ <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/560-sr-position-statement-on-npf4>

² <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/623-sr-npf4-supplementary-position-statement-cc-and-deployment-targets>

³ <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/621-sr-npf4-supplementary-position-statement-lcs-v-lss>

⁴ <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/622-sr-npf4-supplementary-position-statement-spatial-planning-for-onshore-wind>

⁵ <https://www.scottishrenewables.com/publications/618-sr-npf4-supplementary-position-statement-peat-and-carbon-rich-soils>

The Scottish Government's Programme for Scotland 2019-2020 'Protecting Scotland's Future', which was published in September 2019, is of relevance to the Proposed LD, and reinforces the important role that the planning system has to play in delivering greenhouse gas targets. In the Ministerial Foreword, the First Minister references the climate emergency and notes that the Programme 'raises our ambition in light of the emergency we face. We are leading the world in setting challenging targets, but we must also redouble our efforts to meet them'.

Chapter 1 of the Programme 'Ending Scotland's Contribution to Climate Change' notes that 'adopting a net zero emissions target by 2045 underlines our ambition that Scotland will no longer contribute to global climate change'. The Scottish Government clearly sees the planning system as playing a crucial role in responding to the climate emergency and the Programme notes on page 38 that one of the major commitments in the response to the climate emergency will be the introduction of NPF4 which 'will help to radically accelerate reduction of emissions'. The Programme notes that the climate emergency necessitates a debate on 'more radical planning policy options' and that planning 'is a vital tool in leveraging the changes we need to make to achieve our goals'.

It is clear therefore that at the heart of the recent changes to the Scottish planning system is a recognition of the vital role the planning system must play in tackling climate change and reducing greenhouse gases.

Scottish Renewables and our members would like to see the Proposed LDP amended to acknowledge and give prominence to the climate emergency and net zero targets, including the important role that Aberdeenshire must play in delivering these targets. This view is supported by the very recent June 2020 Committee on Climate Change (CCC) Progress Report to Parliament, which notes that 'delivering net zero emissions by 2050 in the UK will require a strong policy framework at all levels of government'. It continues and notes that "the UK cannot achieve net zero in 2050 without strong policy from its devolved partners across key areas including planning, agriculture, land use, housing regulations and local government".

Aberdeenshire Council itself adopted a 'Climate Change Declaration' on 18 March 2020, which recognised that the Council's "...responsibility is to provide leadership in order to move to a more sustainable and low carbon future." The Declaration sets out a number of things which the Council will do in order to do this, including (emphasis added):

- ***"Update our relevant policies, to ensure they meet this declaration;***
- *We will all adopt a positive, genuine and collaborative spirit to working towards tackling the climate crisis."*

Overarching Point: LDP Policies

An Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Report submitted alongside a planning application may identify 'significant' environmental effects. A significant effect in EIA terms does not make a proposal unacceptable in land use policy terms.

A common theme throughout the Proposed LDP is that some policies are discussed in terms of the 'acceptability' of environmental effects, whereas others are not. This introduces inconsistency across policies and sets different 'bars' for different receptors. To ensure consistency throughout the Proposed LDP, the wording of policies should be amended to include reference to 'acceptability' which would allow the decision maker to exercise a degree of judgement in applying policy.

Policies should also be reviewed and amended to ensure consistency with SPP and to ensure that the correct policy test is applied to each topic.