

GLASGOW AND THE CLYDE VALLEY 2006 STRUCTURE PLAN ALTERATION

THE TWENTY YEAR DEVELOPMENT VISION

TECHNICAL REPORT

TR 8/06

Renewable Wind Energy in Glasgow and the Clyde Valley

April 2006

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1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This report has several functions which are as follows:
- It outlines the reasons why the review of renewables policy has been undertaken;
 - It describes the methodology that has been used for the review;
 - It outlines the progress and issues at each stage of developing the revised policy; and
 - It expands on the revised renewables policy in the 2006 Alteration and gives guidance on how the Structure Plan Policy should be used.

The Technical Report does not add new issues beyond those identified in the 2006 Structure Plan Alteration. As such it should be seen as a document that sets the background context for the Structure Plan Renewables Policy and gives more detailed information on the content and implementation of the policy.

Reason for Review

The updating of existing wind energy policy was needed due to changing assumptions in the technical information that guided windfarm location and the increased pressure that the landscape was coming under from an increasing number of applications.

- 1.2 The purpose of the exercise was to review the assumptions that had been made when drawing up the Preferred Areas in the 2002 Structure Plan and identify any changes in circumstance of policy that would alter the assumptions made when identifying search areas.
- 1.3 The study was also aimed at assessing the level of winfarm development should be encouraged and whether there was an obligation on the area to take a certain amount of windfarm development, based on a need to meet National Renewable energy targets.
- 1.4 The exercise mainly has the aim of identifying favourable potential areas for large scale windfarms. The siting of smaller windfarms is left to the individual local authorities to determine, although a small degree of guidance on this issue is provided in this report. This report also investigates what should be seen to constitute a large scale windfarm, based on the scale of developments that are currently being proposed across the country.

2.0 Other Renewable Technologies

- 2.1 This report purely concerns itself with the siting of large scale windfarm developments. It is recognised that there are other sources of renewable energy and that many of them will have a future role in helping to achieve the governments renewable targets.
- 2.2 However, there is little scope in the Glasgow and Clyde Valley (GCV) area for tidal power and offshore windfarms due to the lack of coastline. Likewise opportunities for hydro electric schemes are limited due to a lack of locations that could meet the necessary requirements. Biomass could have a potential role in the area and an action plan is included in the Forestry and Woodland Framework which has been developed to add detail to the Indicative Forestry Strategy of the Structure Plan.

- 2.3 Although the scope for other technologies is limited the Joint Committee will continue to evaluate the situation and review this part of the plan if viable strategic opportunities for other renewable technologies come forward.
- 2.4 There is also a commitment in the 2006 Alteration to assess the opportunities for energy efficiency in new development and how green communities can link in with renewable production techniques.

3.0 National Context for Windfarm Development

- 3.1. NPPG 6 requires Structure Plans to develop renewable energy policy that is based on the principle that renewable energy developments should be accommodated throughout Scotland where the technology can operate efficiently and environmental impacts can be addressed satisfactorily. In addition, the Scottish Ministers decision on the 2000 Structure Plan also stated that there could be significant opportunities for wind power generation developments in the Structure Plan Area and the Joint Committee should hold this in regard when developing a framework for the sustainable development of natural resources.
- 3.2. In Scotland there is a 40% target for renewable energy production by 2020 which provides a basis for defining a level of demand that the Structure Plan provides for. However there is no guidance from the Scottish Executive as to what contribution provision each structure plan area should make towards achieving this figure or what proportion of it should be delivered through onshore wind energy supplies.

4.0 Strategic Context

At a regional level strategic renewables is dealt with in Strategic Policy 8 in the Glasgow and Clyde Valley Joint Structure Plan. As well as Strategic Policy 8, windfarm applications (as with all other application types) have to be assessed against Strategic Policies 9 and 10.

- 4.1 Strategic Policies 9 and 10 identify a series of issues that are relevant to all built development. For a development to be acceptable in relation to the Policies of the Structure Plan it has to be in conformity with Strategic Policy 9.
- 4.2 Strategic Policy 10 brings added flexibility to the Structure Plan by giving a development that has been deemed to be in conflict with the Structure Plan the opportunity to be justified where it does not fall within the realms of previously identified need or it will bring particular social, environmental or economic benefits. Development proposals assessed under this criteria will have to have the same regard for environmental protection and respect for the settings of communities as is expected through the assesment under Strategic Policy 9.
- 4.3 One issue especially pertinent to renewables is that of cumulative impacts. However, this issue is important to all development and as such is identified in paragraph 14.2 and 14.3 of the 2000 Structure Plan as an overarching themes that needs to be addressed when assessing all applications under Strategic Policies 9 or 10.

Local Context

- 4.4. With the lack of national guidance on the subject it is left to the Joint Committee to consider what level of demand might have to be met if it is to provide a plan-led approach to development and reduce conflicts, delays and costs. Demand can be

calculated on several bases: that of the area, wind resource or the scale of population of the Structure Plan area.

- 4.5 There is not only a national policy commitment to deliver a more sustainable energy policy but also to accord with the broad thrust of the other policies in the Structure Plan. It is therefore appropriate to assess the opportunities for the area to accommodate windfarms without compromising other strategic planning objectives for economic development, the quality of life of local communities and the environment and taking account of cumulative impact.
- 4.6 An important objective of the Structure Plan is to help implement national policies at a strategic level to promote a significant shift in energy production to renewable sources. Therefore it is appropriate that the Structure Plan policies should only relate to guiding major wind farm developments to suitable locations, and not seek to define all opportunities that might be supported through the planning system. Therefore it was required to develop a threshold over which windfarms would be seen as being of strategic significance.
- 4.7 Currently the determination of all applications over 50MW (about 25 turbines) becomes the responsibility of the Scottish Executive. This is under the terms of the 1989 Electricity Act. By implications these have already been defined as being central to/focus of the government's energy policy and of a significant scale.
- 4.8 However, this act was not designed to be used for the assessment of windfarms and the 50MW threshold relates to the importance of the application in terms of its impact on the national generating capacity and the impacts on issues like grid connections. The threshold does not relate to any of the issues that are pertinent to windfarms from a land use perspective, like impact on communities, landscape and environmental resources.
- 4.9 This threshold roughly equates to 25 turbines and developments of turbines groups below this level could have a strategic impact, thus making it a threshold inappropriate for use in the Structure Plan.
- 4.10 To identify a more suitable threshold an assessment was made of the scale of applications currently being submitted across the country. This assessment showed that the majority of significant applications were above the 20MW scale (10-12 turbines) in terms of the impact of windfarms on the landscape and communities.
- 4.11 Therefore, a threshold of 20MW was adopted over which windfarm application should be seen as having strategic significance.
- 4.12 Clearly smaller applications can still have significant impacts on the environment and there would still be a requirement for them to accord with the policies of the Structure Plan but the main focus for assessing these proposals should be individual Local Plans.

5.0 Methodology

Strategic Capacity for Windfarm Development

- 5.1 There are a variety of strategic constraints limiting the suitability of locations for windfarm development. These can be divided into two categories. The constraints which are generally supported through the consultations to date or have an established policy context and should be adopted as Common Assumptions in all the scenarios that are to be tested. In addition there other constraints which require further clarification on

the extent to which they should constrain the definition of Potential Areas for Windfarm development, and referred to in the following paragraphs as Additional Constraints.

Common Assumptions - Baseline Information for Study

- 5.2 There are several set assumptions that were made when carrying out this exercise as to the capacity of different areas to accommodate large scale windfarms. These relate to windspeed, urban areas, minimum buffers, round settlements and certain environmental resources.
- 5.3 Large windfarms are excluded from these areas because they are either not physically viable for this type of development or it would be in direct conflict with other strategic priorities set out in the Structure Plan and the functioning of the area in question.

Windspeed

- 5.4 In areas with windspeeds of more than 6.5m/s it can be reasonably assumed that in such areas they will be economically viable. Some structure plans have used 6m/s but the recommended 6.5m/s is based on information given by industry representatives in the two workshops held by the Joint Committee.

Urban Areas

- 5.5 Large scale windfarms will not be suitable for urban areas because of the lack of opportunities and the priority that should be attached to urban renewal and community regeneration, although there may be urban locations suitable for a limited number of turbines. Similarly, due to issues related to potential noise disturbance from the turbines and generators and immediate impact on residential amenity, it is recommended that search areas should be excluded from areas up to 1km around settlements.

National and Regional Landscape Designations

- 5.6 It is also considered that major windfarm developments in National and Regional Parks would potentially be in conflict with their primary strategic function as the 'lungs' of the conurbation, which provide a natural, undeveloped and tranquil environment within which people can recreate. As such they should be recognised as Sensitive Areas, and therefore excluded from the search. This does not include Regional Scenic Areas (RSA). The principle of accommodating windfarms in these areas is not in direct conflict with the reasons for their designation. Unlike National Parks, etc. which have a recreational status and well as a scenic one, RSAs have been identified based on purely scenic grounds. Therefore there is a possibility that windfarms could be accommodated in these areas but this will require further detailed assessment. See later in the technical report for details of the assessment of the Southern Upands RSA.

National and Regional Environmental Designations

- 5.7 Internationally and nationally recognised environmental resources also need to be fully protected and windfarm development steered away from or adjoining sites that may have an impact on them. Some of these have a limited safeguarding zone of influence (e.g. World Heritage Site and NNR). Others are more extensive (e.g. NSAs, SSSIs, SPAs and SACs) and could be critically affected by windfarm developments. It should be noted that SPAs and SACs are underpinned by designations of SSSIs. The approach to these issues of excluding them from the areas of search takes account of the sensitivity of these resources to windfarm development. Section 11 provides further advice on how issues relating to designated sites should be handled.

Green Belt

- 5.8 Development on this scale would not be appropriate in the Green Belt and would conflict with its aims. It would mean windfarms being developed too close to urban areas and would lead to conflict with the policies in the rest of the plan which aim to enhance the Green Belt as a recreational resource for the urban population. In many areas the Green Belt also falls within the 1km buffer that has already been removed from consideration earlier in this methodology.

Airport Impacts

- 5.9 There are areas close to Glasgow International Airport that would be unsuitable for most type of tall structures, especially those which move in the way turbines do and would disrupt radar signals. These areas are therefore removed from the search area. Issues remain regarding the relationship between windfarms and radar signals. However the impacts of this issue are too difficult to generalise through this type of mapping process. The impacts often relate to issues of line of sight from the radar and these impacts can only really be assessed on a case by case basis and cumulatively when proposals come forward.

6.0 Additional Constraints

- 6.1 There are other issues relevant to the siting of large windfarms.

Regional Scenic Areas

- 6.2 Although these areas have been recognised as having a high quality of landscape it is not possible to determine the exact impacts and ability for them to accommodate windfarms without further more detailed capacity assessment.

Community Buffers

- 6.3 The visual impacts on rural communities is one of the main concerns often raised against windfarms. It therefore seems appropriate to have a buffer around settlements to ensure that they are not impinged upon and their setting is not compromised. From the responses to the Structure Plan Renewables Issues Report and other research on visual impacts it seemed that over 3km away turbines become part of a landscape, rather than dominate it. Therefore, it was decided to test a 3km buffer around all settlements. To exclude all windfarms from all these areas would be too arbitrary as there are issues relating to topography, forestry and the existing built environment that will influence the true impact on settlements. Therefore, there was a need for more detailed study to identify the actual visual impacts that windfarm development would have in these 3km buffers.

7.0 Other Constraints

- 7.1 Through consultation with the GCV Local Authorities there were a number of areas highlighted where it is seen that large scale windfarms would not be appropriate. These are as follows.

Tinto Hill & Kilpatrick Hills

- 7.2 This includes the highest upland area in the Glasgow and Clyde Valley and as such is a very prominent sight across a large area. It is also recognised as having high landscape value and an important recreational resource. Large windfarms would significantly detract from the attributes that the area currently possesses and as a result it seems appropriate to identify the area as requiring safeguarding. The areas chosen for identification is the Landscape Character Area that covers the Tinto area. The Kilpatrick Hills are also designated as an RSA but were not excluded at the initial stage of sieving.

However the potential of this area was subject to further assessment and consultation and as a result of this exercise they were removed from further consideration (see paragraph 8.12 for more information).

Major Road Network and Tourist Routes

- 7.3 One of the key aims of the Structure Plan is to improve the image of the area. Key to this is the first impression that people get when entering the GCV area. Although studies have shown that there is a general public acceptance of windfarms, there is a limit to this especially if the main tourist areas and routes were to be dominated by turbines.
- 7.4 Also many of the entry points are through the wilder scenery of the Southern Uplands; a landscape which is particularly susceptible to overbearing from tall industrial structures.
- 7.5 Therefore a 1km buffer was placed round the following roads to protect their scenery from large scale windfarm development:
 - M74
 - Clyde Valley Tourist Route
- 7.6 Other locations including Lochwinnoch and all country parks were identified by individual councils as being of strategic importance. The development of a large number of turbines close to these locations would damage their character and reason for their designation and therefore these sites were also removed from consideration.

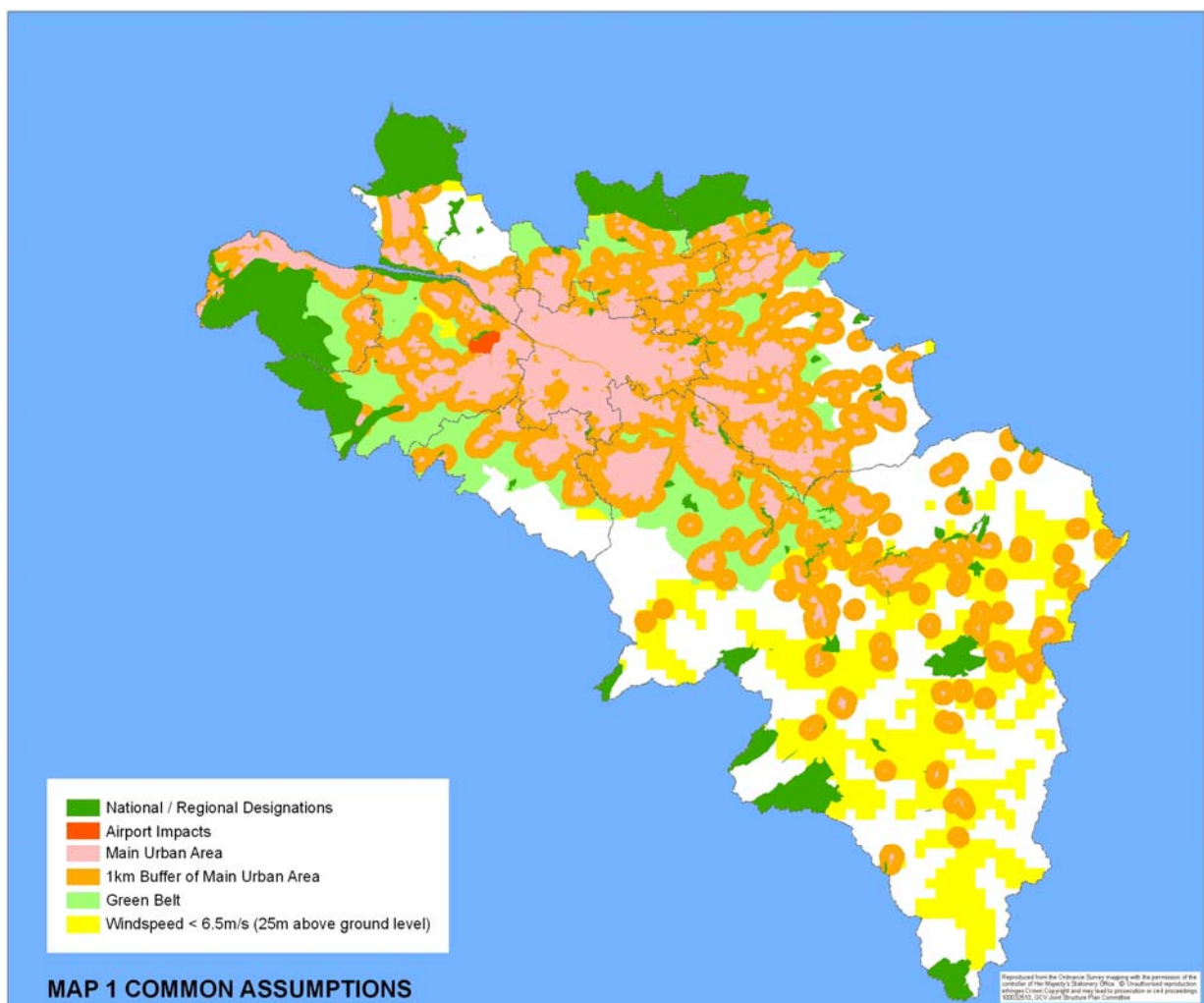
8.0 Stages in Developing the Windfarm Potential Map

8.1 For the development of a map to guide strategic windfarms each of the layers mentioned above was added in turn. The following section highlights each of these layers spatially. This analysis follows.

Common Assumptions

8.2 As a base the issues raised in paragraph 5.4 – 5.9 were mapped and removed from further consideration for strategic windfarms. Map 1 below shows the location of these areas. For all further analysis these different areas will be show together as a grey base.

8.3 The removal of these areas from further consideration helps to promote the environmental policies of the Structure Plan and ensure a sustainable approach to the identification of renewable sites.



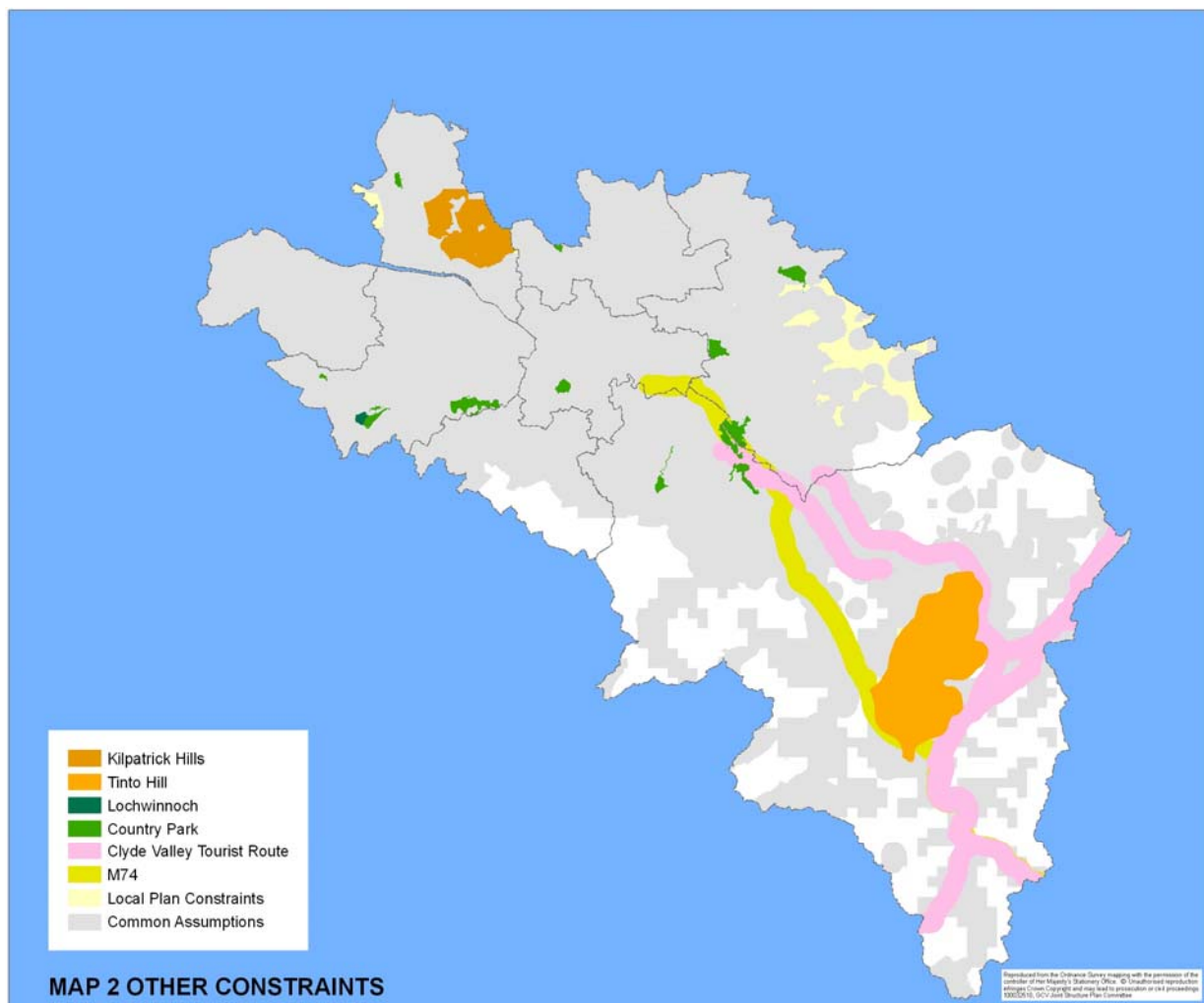
Map 1 – Common Assumptions

Other Constraints

8.4 As well as the Common Assumptions there were other areas identified through initial consultation with stakeholders and the local authorities that would be inappropriate for strategic large scale windfarms. In these areas larger concentrations of wind turbines would probably be inappropriate due to the overbearing impacts on either communities

or environmental resources. These areas are listed in paragraphs 7.1 – 7.6 and are shown on Map 2 below.

- 8.5 A combination of all the locations identified on Maps 1 and 2 represent the base map that was used for all further assessment. The possibility of strategic scale windfarms being acceptable in these areas is limited due to a conflict with the environmental and social policies of the Structure Plan.
- 8.6 The exclusion of these areas does not mean that all turbines would be inappropriate. Small groups of smaller turbines may be able to be accommodated without damaging the environment of these areas. See paragraphs 11 and 12 for more details on how this policy should be implemented.

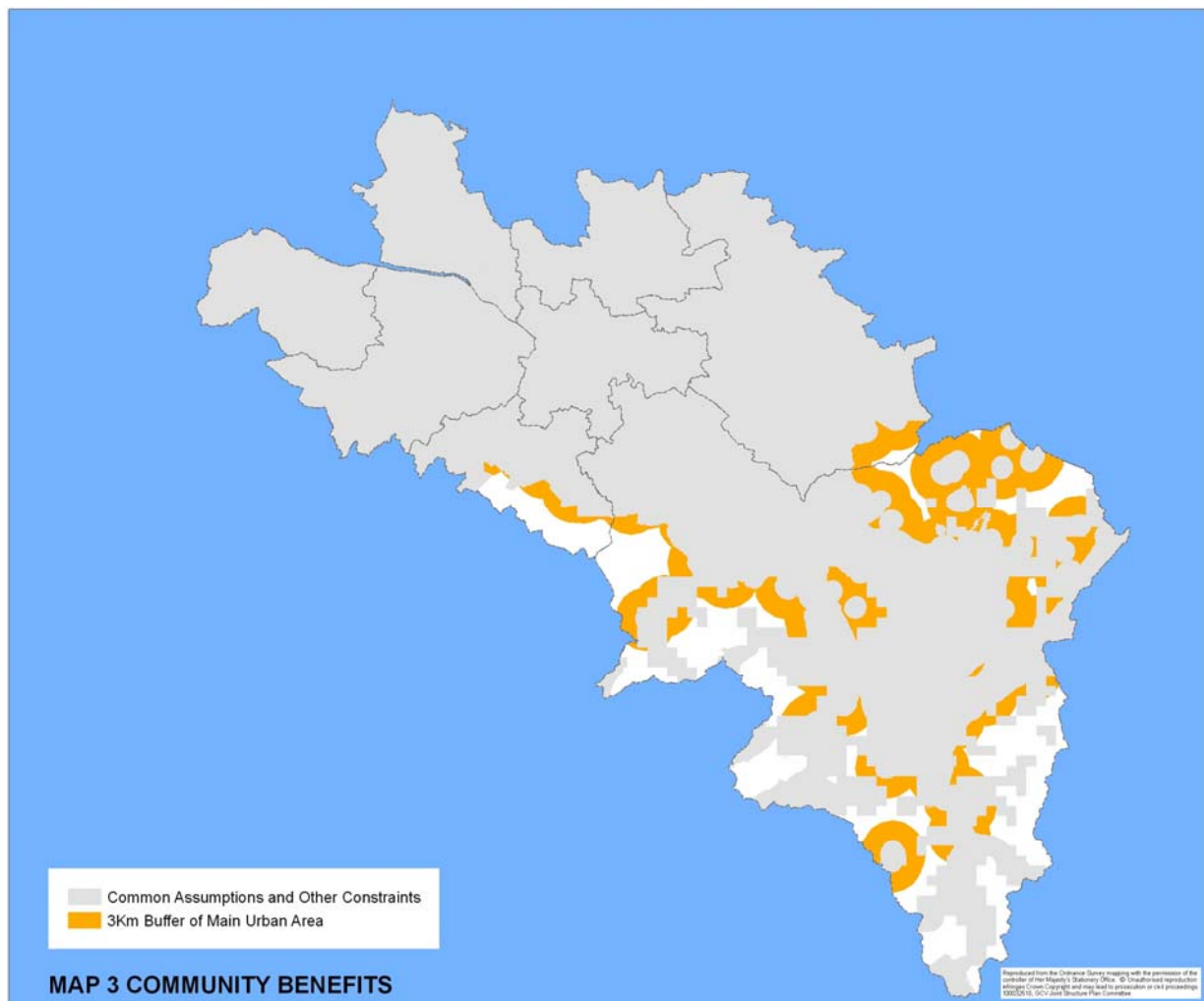


Map 2 – Other Constraints.

Protecting Communities

- 8.4 The 1km buffer removed round settlements as part of the Common Assumptions will act as protection from the noise of turbines and the overbearing effects that these tall structures can produce. However, turbines positioned in close proximity to settlements will still have a large degree of visual impact on those living in these communities. This will be especially evident in more rural areas where there is currently little or no development. It is clear that the impacts of large windfarms on the quality of life and setting of settlements needs to be kept to a minimum while not being overly restrictive on the options available for windfarm development.

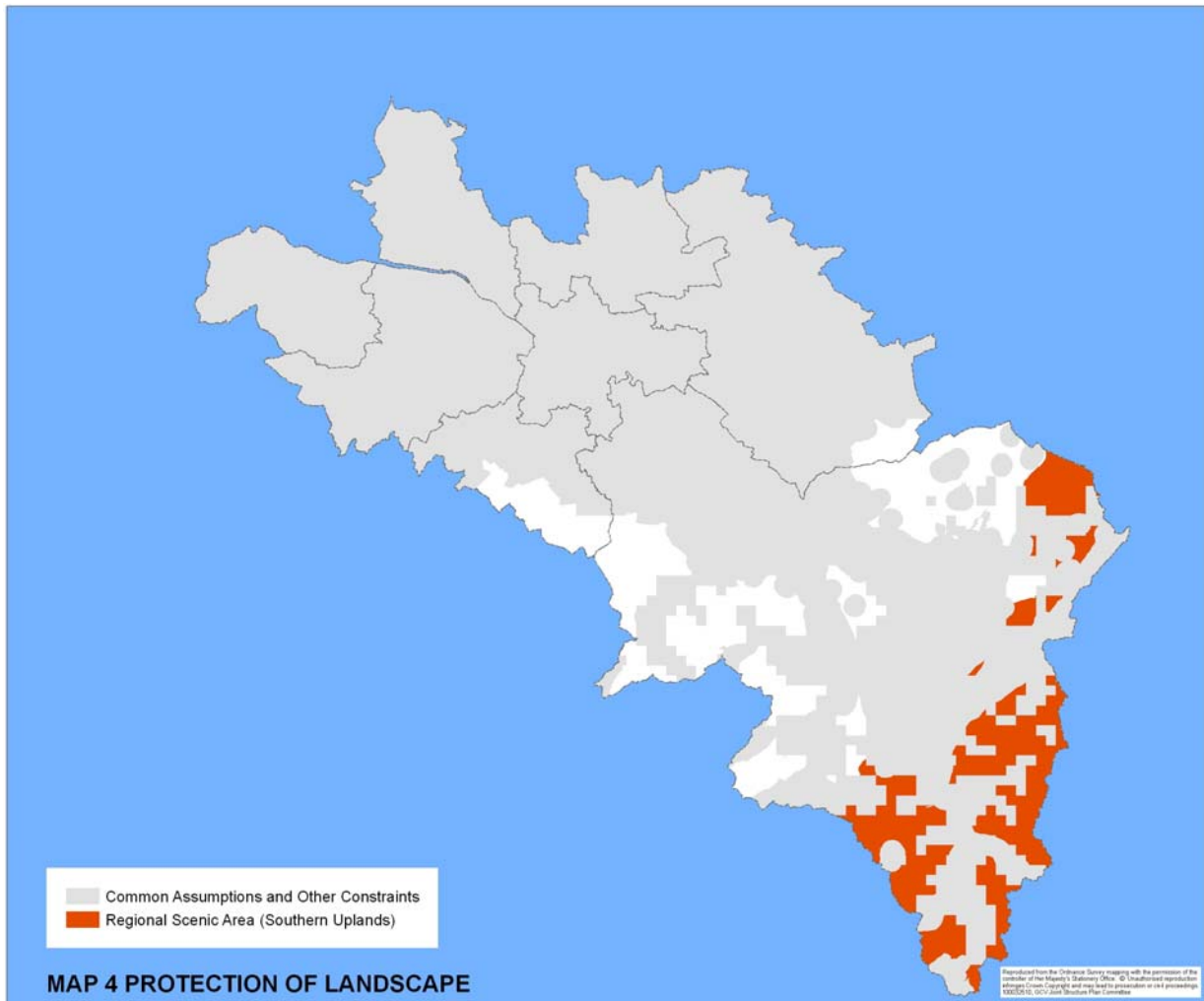
8.5 To tackle this issue it was initially decided to add a buffer around all settlements, to such an extent that major windfarms would not be overbearing on settlements. Based on evidence from the Issues stage it was concluded by the Joint Committee that a buffer of 3km was appropriate to perform this function (3km buffer includes the 1km buffer identified under the Common Assumptions, see paragraph 5.5). Map 3 shows the extent of this extended buffer. If a 3km buffer is applied systematically throughout the Structure Plan area there is a significant reduction in the areas that would be considered for major windfarms and communities would be given a much greater degree of protection from visual intrusion. However this generalises the possible impact on communities. Issues like topography could have an impact on visual impacts on communities and there is a need for further study to determine the actual impacts on the ground within this 3km zone.



Map 3 – Protection of Communities – 3km buffer round communities.

Protection of Landscape

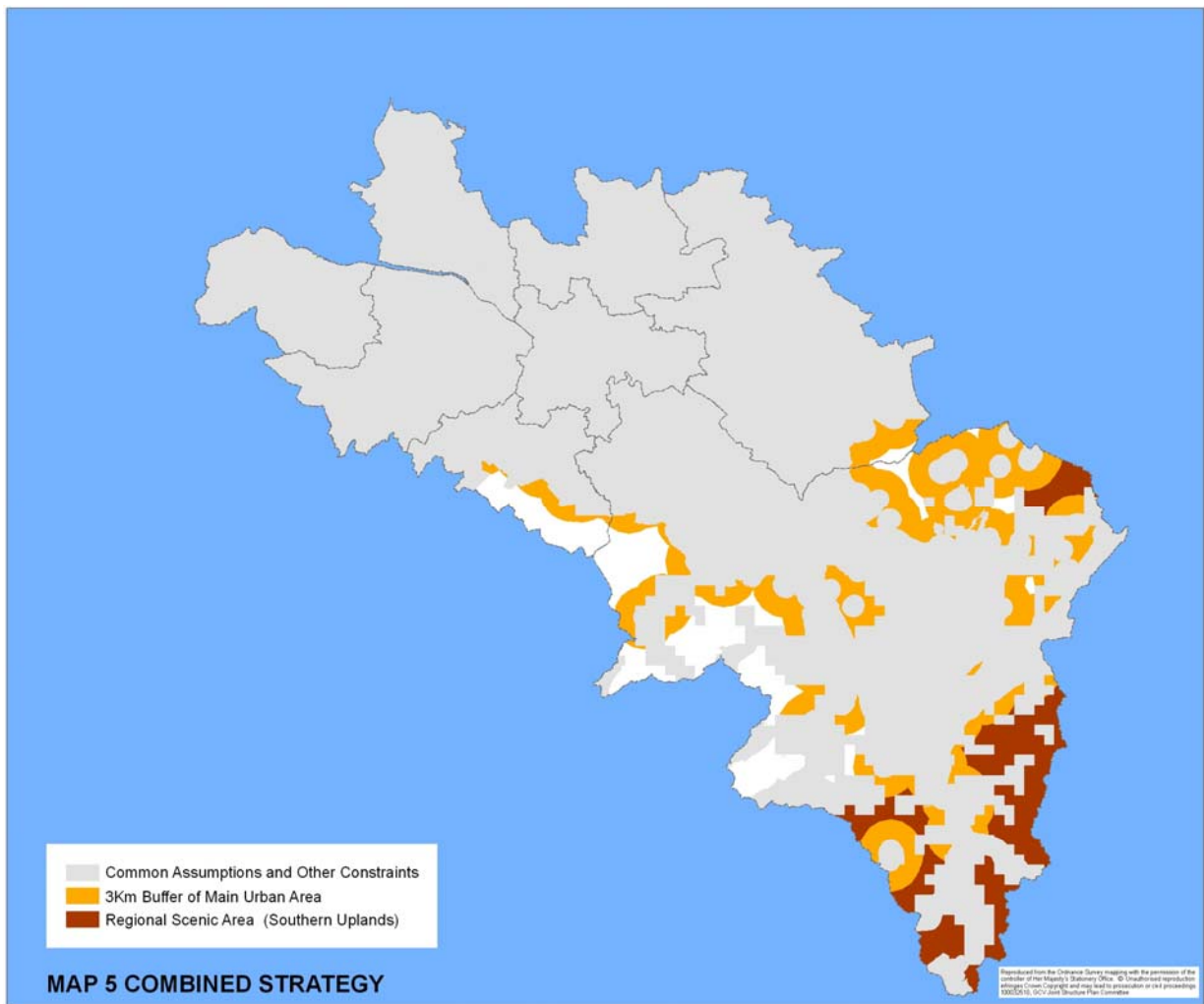
8.6 Windfarms can have huge impacts on the landscape of the area and although most of the major landscape designations have been removed from consideration there is still the issue of Regional Scenic Areas that needs to be addressed. These have not been removed from consideration as their capacity to accommodate windfarms is not clear from strategic assessment and is dependant on the characteristics of each area. (See paragraph 5.6 and 6.1 above for the justification of this approach). The degree to which they could accommodate windfarms cannot be determined from such a generalised sieving approach and there is a need for further more detailed analysis of the RSA's.



Map 4 – Protecting Designated Landscapes – Further Assessment of Southern Upland RSA's.

Combined Issues

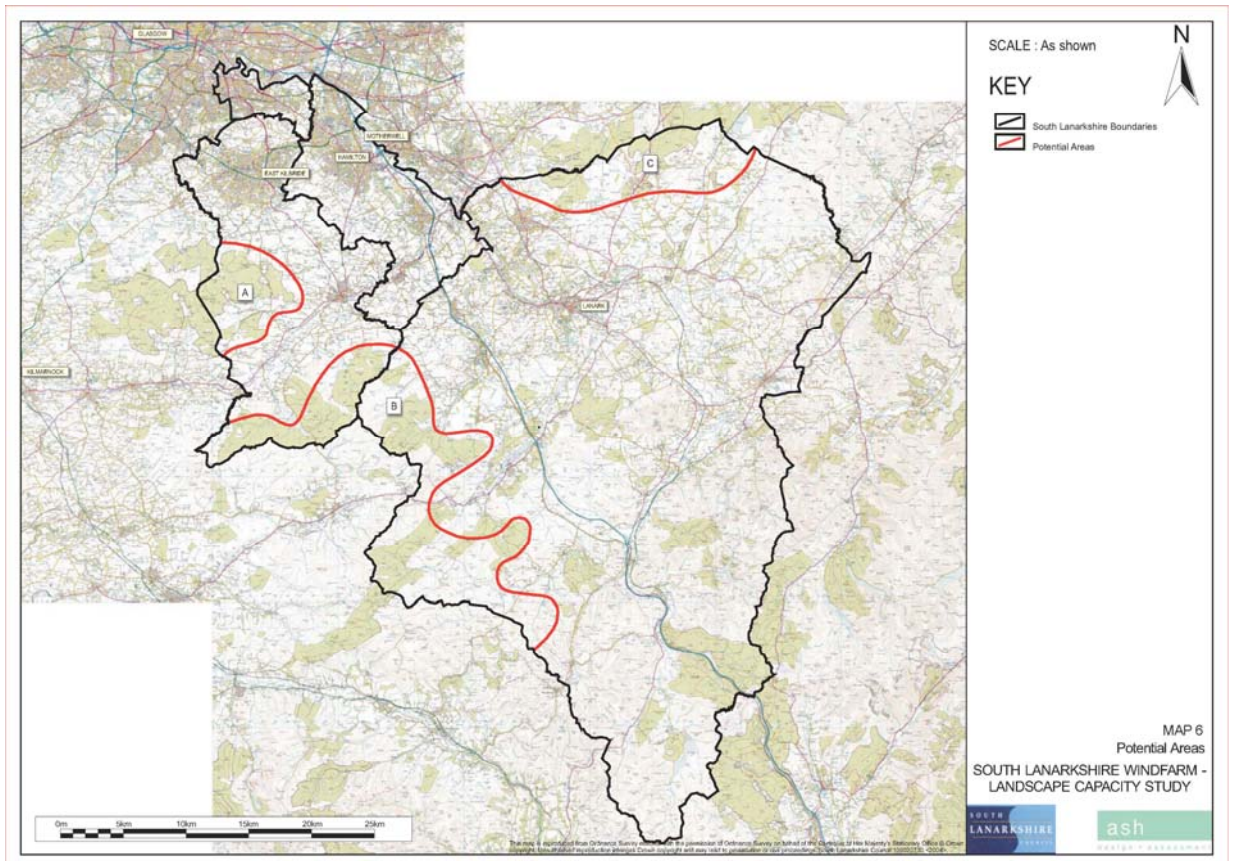
8.7 By combining the areas outlined in Maps 1-4, the areas that require further more detailed analysis become clearer. Map 5 shows these areas. The yellow areas are those areas that require further assessment due to possible community impacts. The red areas are those also requiring assessment but due to their possible impacts on the landscapes of the Regional Scenic Areas. There are also areas that remain white. These are areas that fall within neither category and from the perspective of this strategic sieving exercise do not conflict with issues of a strategic environmental nature. However this exercise is very broad brush and there may be strategic issues within these areas that have been overlooked by assessment at this level. To investigate in more detail, the capability of these areas to accommodate large groups of wind turbines the white areas were included in the assessment commissioned by South Lanarkshire Council (See paragraphs 8.8 – 8.11).



Map 5 – Combined Issues – 3km Community Buffers and Southern Upland RSA.

Assessment of Combined Strategy

- 8.8 The assessment of the combined information shown in Map 5 was the final and most detailed part of the windfarm search area methodology. Consultants were employed to carry out a more detailed assessment of the Regional Scenic Areas and the 3km buffers round the settlements and the white areas which remained un categorised. This main exercise was arranged by South Lanarkshire Council and focussed solely in their council area.
- 8.9 This exercise assessed these areas based on the ability of the landscape to accommodate the scale of developments that a large number of turbines would bring. The results of this assessment can be seen in the ASH consultants' report 'Landscape Sensitivity and Capacity for Windfarm Development in South Lanarkshire' which is available upon request from South Lanarkshire Council.
- 8.10 It identified three main areas where it believed there was potential for large scale windfarms development. These were along the western boundary with Ayrshire and to the east, close to the village of Forth.
- 8.11 The conclusions of the ASH landscape assessment were accepted as providing a comprehensive evaluation and the areas it identified were therefore adopted unaltered as potential areas for windfarm development. The areas identified through the ASH study as having potential for large scale windfarms are shown on Map 5. It should be noted that this study was only assessing the capability of the landscape to accommodate large groups of wind turbines. Therefore to obtain the final Potential Areas and ensure that all the other issues identified in this methodology were taken into account, the areas that had been excluded at the beginning of this exercise and shown in Maps 1 and 2 had to be overlaid onto of the ASH information.



Map 6 - Results of ASH Assessment

- 8.12 Assessment was also carried out on the Kipatrick Hills RSA. Due to concerns raised by the National Park Authority, Glasgow Airport and SNH, this area was deemed inappropriate for strategic windfarms and was removed from further consideration.
- 8.13 Assessment was also carried out by North Lanarkshire Council on their areas that were covered by the 3km Community Impact Buffer. As a result of this assessment parts of the area were found to have potential.
- 8.14 Also considered were the results of the SNH windfarm location study that was undertaken by Land Use Consultants (LUC) for the combined Glasgow and Clyde Valley and Ayrshire areas.

9.0 Policy Context of Potential area Map

9.1 The remainder of this technical report adds detail as to how the potential search areas should be interpreted and how they should be used when assessing actual development proposals. It outlines the issues that need to be addressed in each of the Potential Areas and gives guidance for Local Plans and how applications should be addressed that fall below the strategic threshold.

Status of Chosen Areas

9.2 In the 2000 Structure Plan there were two types of areas identified: potential and preferred. Since then the circumstances surrounding windfarm development has changed considerably.

9.3 There is a significant increase in the level of windfarm applications and thus more pressure on the landscape and more possibility of cumulative impacts arising. Also there are much more stringent levels of assessment required on the environmental impact of development proposals and generally a wider range of considerations that need to be taken account of when siting windfarms.

9.4 The use of the word preferred gives the impression that there are no constraints that need to be addressed in the areas in question. The assessment in the Structure Plan has been carried out at a strategic broad brush level and does not take into account a multitude of more local concerns that will need to be subject to more detailed assessment. Also, due to the strategic nature of the study, there may still be impacts on strategic environmental issues that would only become apparent through more detailed assessment ie impacts on protected bird species.

9.5 The purpose of this whole exercise is to identify areas where the Structure Plan would see as being more suitable than others for strategic windfarms and represent a balanced assessment of the need to protect the environmental resources and the communities in the area. As such these areas are only indicative and any application in them would require considerable further study. To reflect this point it seems more appropriate to refer to the areas shown in Map 8 as Potential Areas.

10.0 Demand Context

10.1 There is also a need to investigate how closely the areas identified in this map correlate with a the level of expected electricity demand for the GCV area. There are a variety of methods through which this level of demand could be calculated including population, energy consumption or size of GCV land area.

10.2 There are two main problems with attempting to develop any of these approaches:

- The proportion of renewable energy that needs to come from land based windfarm development to meet the 40% renewables target is not known;
- There is no national guidance as to the best method of working out a demand level ie area based, population based or wind resource based.

10.3 Conversely, the final windfarm potential map is based on the guidance from a wide range of National Planning Documents and a range of policies that have been developed with them in mind and agreed by Scottish Ministers. All types of development have to accord with the policies in the Structure Plan and Windfarms are no exception to this rule.

10.4 With the limitations of national guidance and uncertainty of how to even attempt to develop a demand context it would seem inappropriate to develop this principle further, especially as it may negatively impinge on the accepted policy context of the Structure Plan. Also the range of areas identified in the final windfarm potential map are seen as being of a scale that allow sufficient flexibility to the windfarm industry and do not constrain their ability to meet windfarm need. As a result no further changes were made to the final map to further accommodate any perceived demand levels.

11.0 Policy within and outside Potential Areas

11.1 Section 4, identifies a threshold of 20MW, over which windfarms will be regarded as being of strategic importance. Although the Potential Areas have been identified as having the most scope for strategic windfarms it is accepted that there is still the possibility of suitable locations being found elsewhere in the GCV area.

11.2 Therefore the 20MW threshold applies to windfarm proposals across the whole of the GCV area. All windfarm developments, and especially those over this scale will be expected to be assessed against the policies of the Structure Plan and in particular Strategic Policies 7, 8 and 9. Particular attention will have to be made when assessing strategic windfarm proposals to their impacts on the Strategic Environmental Resources of the area, local communities and the potential for cumulative impacts.

11.3 Although areas have been identified as having Potential for windfarm development this does not mean that they should be unconstrained in terms of windfarm development. The assessment of cumulative impacts will be equally if not more important in these areas and scales of development that are over burdening on the landscape should be avoided. In particular there is a need to have regard to the buffers required around the SPA areas.

12.0 Strategic Issues in Potential Areas

12.1 As mentioned above, the Potential Areas represent guides as to locations that may be more suitable for windfarm development on a strategic scale. They do not represent areas where windfarms will definitely be acceptable. There are still strategic issues that need to be addressed in each of the areas identified and these are shown in the table below.

12.2 The Table below identifies the each of the Potential areas and the strategic environmental issues that may need to be addressed when considering individual planning applications. This has been developed in correlation with SNH's locational guidance which addresses the potential impacts of windfarms on natural heritage.

Potential Area (clockwise from top left)	SNH's Strategic Locational Guidance Zoning	Reason for Zoning
1 (top middle)	Zone 1	No national natural heritage constraints. Could be local issues however
2 (top right)	Zone 1	No national natural heritage constraints. Could be local issues however
3 (bottom right)	Zone 2	Zone 2 - Kennox Water SSSI; sensitive bird species*
4 (bottom middle)	Zone 2 (solid); Zone 2 (hatching)	Zone 2 (solid) - Area of Great Landscape Value (AGLV); Dunside SSSI; Birkenhead Burn SSSI; Birk Knowes SSSI Zone 2 (hatching) - sensitive bird species*
5 (bottom left)	Zone 2 (solid); Zone 2 (hatching)	Small area of zone 2 - Brother & Little Lochs SSSI; Zone 2 hatching - sensitive bird species*

*Sensitive bird species are defined in SNH's Policy Statement (02/02) Strategic Locational Guidance for Onshore Wind farms in respect of the natural Heritage as including Birds Directive Annex 1 breeding bird species (black-throated diver, red-throated diver, golden eagle, hen harrier, peregrine, merlin, short-eared owl and dotterel).

12.3 The areas that have been identified by SNH as Zone 2 represent buffer areas around designated sites. They often relate to areas where protected bird species may be found but not in the numbers, or as frequently as in actual designations such as SPA's. Due to this possibility it is important to carry out more detailed assessment of the potential impacts that windfarm developments may have on these areas when individual applications are submitted. The presence of these Zone 2 areas in the areas of search identified through this methodology is one of the key reasons why these areas are labelled Potential rather than Preferred (See Paragraphs 9.2 – 9.5 for further information).

13.0 Smaller Scale Windfarm Developments

13.1 Opportunities will also exist for smaller scale windfarms that fall below the 20MW threshold. These applications should still accord with the policies in the Structure Plan. However due to their scale they would not be seen as developments with a strategic impact and therefore should be assessed against the locally focussed part of the development plan, namely a local authority's Local Plan.

13.2 Local Plans will be required to adopt the Structure Plan policy for large scale windfarms and develop appropriate policies for windfarms that fall beneath the 20MW threshold.

13.3 Smaller scale windfarms will be more easily accommodated into the landscape and as a result some of the areas excluded from the assessment for strategic scale locations may be suitable. Developments of this scale should also conform to the issues raised in Strategic Policy 9.

13.4 It will still be important to protect communities and the environmental resources of the area from poorly sited and designed windfarm development but even in the most highly protected areas like Regional Parks and National Parks there may be opportunities for windfarms of these smaller scales.

13.5 Opportunities may also arise for individual or small groups of turbines close to urban areas, assuming their size and noise impacts do not overburden on local communities.

14.0 Conclusions

14.1 In an effort to contribute to meeting the Scottish Executives renewable energy targets by reviewing the preferred areas for windfarms in the Structure Plan, a methodology was devised that balanced this need to provide renewables opportunities with the policy framework of the Structure Plan.

14.2 The final areas that were identified through this approach were ones which most suitably protect the agreed environmental resources identified in the Structure Plan while identifying a suitable range of sites that allows sufficient scope and flexibility to the windfarm industry to identify potential development locations.

14.3 The aim of the exercise was to identify sites appropriate for strategic windfarm sites. Strategic significance was decided to be anything over 20MW in size.

14.4 The methodology chosen has led to the identification of 5 main search areas that could provide Potential for Windfarm Development. These have been labelled as being Potential areas for strategic windfarm development to recognise the fact that although they are suitable from a strategic viewpoint there is still a need for more detailed assessment to address any local concerns.

14.5 Due to the lack national guidance of the subject of land based windfarms no attempt was made to estimate a demand level for the GCV area.

14.6 There will be opportunities in the GCV area for smaller scale windfarms (under 20MW). The identification of these locations and the assessment of proposals at this scale is the responsibility of Local Plans. Local Plan policies should be devised to allow for smaller scale windfarm development, while protecting the environment and preventing negative impacts on communities and the natural heritage. These should be in line with the Strategic Windfarm policies set out in the Structure Plan and other criteria in Strategic Policy 9 and 10.

