



FINE ENERGY LTD

**Land South of Backies Farm, Deskford,
Morayshire**

Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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January 2013



Local Planning Authority

Moray Council

Site Centred at:

349800E, 858601N

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Report Status: **Final**

Issue Date: **07/01/2013**

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January 2013

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Site Location and Site Description

The subject lands set within the 'Upland Farmland' character area which comprises of broad gently undulating slopes of open farmed land, punctuated by distinct conical hills and localised ridgelines are immediately south of Backies Farm. The site sits east of the classified 'B' 9018 road. The larger settlements of Keith and Cullen are approximately 10.3 km south west and 8.5 km north respectively. Coniferous plantations namely Lurghill and Factors Park to the east and Aultmorehill Wood to the west, coupled with smaller woodland blocks (Backies Plantation) and broadleaf shelterbelts provide a degree of enclosure.

The site, of approximately 0.091 ha, within a land ownership totalling 121.65 hectares, lies within a field given over to rough grazing. The southern boundary is defined by the access road that leads to Backies Farm, with the immediate southern field boundary delineated by post and wire fencing. The other site boundaries are defined by low scrubby hedgerow, with gaps in parts which is supplemented by post and wire fencing. The site benefits from enclosure afforded by a mature shelterbelt to the west and plantation woodland to the east, as well as a degree of enclosure by individual mature trees and scrub vegetation which lines the waterbody to the west.

The site will comprise of two wind turbines, type E-3120 Endurance, each up to 35m to blade tip and on a concrete base and foundation with associated sub-station building and access track, from an existing land holding entrance, which originates in accessing Backies Farm from the B9018.

Planning, Landscape, Scottish Natural Heritage and Historical Features

Planning

The site itself does not fall within any designations within the MLP, although it will have relations and be in close proximity to others, whereby the development may have a perceived affect.

In light of the economic climate and the difficulties facing farming businesses, many have looked at renewable energy in order to supplement and enhance their business. With regards to Policy ED8: Rural Business Proposals, the council's stance is that economic activities in the countryside will be permitted if certain criterion is met.

Within the MLP renewable energy proposals will be considered favourably where the development proposed can be seen to meet the criteria as set out within policy ER1: Renewable Energy.

Landscape

The overall sensitivity of the landscape character has been deemed as being **low - medium** with a summary of how this has been concluded:

(Medium) - Scale: The landform comprises of broad, gently undulating slopes punctuated by distinctive conical hills such as the Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill. It is fairly enclosed in parts,

primarily by smaller scaled young coniferous plantations forming an edge on the improved pastures that are present on the rising slopes.

(Low – Medium) - Quality: There is a locally designated site in close vicinity of the proposed development to the northwest (SINS). The few areas of native broadleaf mixed woodland tend to be small isolated pockets associated with farmsteads, with shelterbelts also present. Field delineation is by gappy low scrub / hedgerow and post and wire fencing.

(Low) - Features of Cultural Heritage: The study area contains a number of cultural features, most of which are lower in merit within 1 km of the site. There are also a number of listed buildings and SAM's although they are not in close proximity and in most cases not within the ZTV or have a degree of mitigation with the prevailing vegetation that screens views towards the site.

(Low – Medium) - Level of Intrusion: Contains a number of discordant elements, roads, three phase electricity poles, telegraph poles and turbines (some already constructed, some pending planning)

The overall landscape magnitude has been deemed as **medium - high**. The development may result in a discernible change to features / elements of the basic conditions when viewed within 1 km radius to views afforded from the northwest, west and south west. Longer distance views from the northwest and north east observe the proposed development in varying degrees of exposure, from its entirety against a backcloth of agricultural land and mature woodland to the top of the rotors seen above existing woodland. The overall assessment of significance of effect the development is deemed to have is concluded as being **low – medium**, although this will increase when in closer proximity, for example along stretches of the B9018 and for primary visual receptors, e.g. those residing in 'Clochmacreigh', 'Langlanburn' and 'Wester Windyhills'.

Scottish Natural Heritage / Locally Designated Sites

There are a number of SNH sites within 10 km radius of the proposed development, but as they are not within the ZTV it is deemed that there will be no detrimental effect and therefore comply with policy E1 of the Moray Local Plan. Within a 5 km radius there are two Sites of Interest to Natural Science (SINS). One is located on the 5km radius edge and will not be affected by the proposals. The other sits directly northwest of the site, although it has been difficult to ascertain the reason for its designation. Policy E2 : Local Nature Conservation Sites and Biodiversity states that *“development sites which will adversely affect local sites including SINS will be refused unless it is demonstrated that a)local benefits clearly outweigh the nature conservation value of the site and b) there is no suitable alternative site for the development.”* It is argued that the large established mature shelterbelt between the proposed development site and SINS quantifies suitable mitigation. If further mitigation measures are required then this would be agreed prior to commencement of development, in order to satisfy the council and furthermore, a survey would be completed if required. With the existing proactive mitigation and possible further proposed mitigation and investigative measures that may take place, it is argued therefore that the development proposal would conform to the local plan policy.

Historical Features

Features within the 5 km study area include higher and medium rated listed buildings, including the 'A' listed building Old Church of St. John and burial ground and a number of 'B' listed buildings, as well as scheduled ancient monuments. While acknowledging that some of these higher merited historical features are within the ZTV, many of their views towards the development are limited due to the prevailing vegetation structure, topography and built form. It is recognised that from the lesser merited Scottish monument sites to the south west of the site (which are also residential properties) the views towards the development are clear. Cullen House designed landscape, a site of national importance sits on the edge of the ZTV, but the distance coupled with the prevailing topography and vegetation structure deems that the proposed development is not seen. Therefore with regards to cultural policy within the Moray Local Plan, all the sites of interest conform, in that in there is no "detrimental effect" or there would be no "adverse effect" to the sites or their associated settings.

Visual Assessment

In general views from the south west are able to see the proposed turbines against rising agricultural land against a back drop of woodland or in closer proximity, partly against open sky. Due to the prevailing layers of landscape resource there is a degree of screening afforded between many viewpoint locations and the site, with varying degrees of views afforded of the two structures.

From the north west from a distance of 1 km or more, the views are partially obscured by vegetation. From some locations filtered views of the structures are seen through the existing broad leaf trees, while other locations can only see the top of the rotors above existing coniferous plantation.

From the north east views generally are screened by the large blocks of woodland and established mature shelterbelts, although narrow gaps allow for long distance views where the proposed development, although not in its entirety, is seen above the horizon line within a larger landscape context.

From the south and east views are curtailed by the prevailing topography coupled with the large coniferous woodland blocks such as Lurghill and Factors Park Plantations.

Transitory & Visual Receptors

The transitory network within ZTV of the site has a single classified road, the B9018, which while is a lesser classified road it is an important local route between Cullen and Keith, and as such will accommodate a number of local transitory receptors. It is acknowledged that transitory receptors on the B9018 will have a medium – high degree of impact within 0.5 km north east and south west of the site, although the receptor is travelling at speed and views while present will not be overly prolonged. Within the ZTV there are a larger number of unclassified roads, access roads and tracks which service the scattering of individual dwellings and farmsteads. Where views can be obtained the magnitude of impact is deemed as high, as the speed of travel reduces and the views are lengthened and sometimes stationary in nature.

Identified walking routes, although some within 2 km radius of the site, are not within the ZTV or are encapsulated within mature woodland, which would effectively screen the development. It is deemed that the magnitude of impact from roads, access roads, private

drives and footpaths, in general, within the study area is minimal and therefore low, although the magnitude of impact from the B9018 and unclassified roads to the north west and south west are higher.

There are a number of individual dwellings and farmsteads that are within 1 km of the proposed site and who will experience views and impact on their experiential characteristics. To the south, south west and north west individual properties within a radius of 2 km will experience a high overall significance of perceived impact, where the location of the property is not impinged by woodland. Some properties, although within close proximity will have views curtailed by the prevailing vegetation structure. Some individual dwellings also have the benefit of mature trees within the grounds which also provide a degree of screening, as is the case of 'Langlanburn' and 'Clochmacreich', which in theory may only afford views towards the structures in their entirety from upper floors.

Cumulative Assessment

Within the SPPG Moray Onshore Wind Energy Draft Paper (July 2012) the site falls under 'stage 2' which is described as an area with potential constraints. There is scope for accommodating a 'limited' amount of windfarm development which due to the simple character of the landscape elements such as landform, vegetation pattern and settlement which would reduce any feeling of 'clutter'. The typology for the proposed scale of development is classed as small – medium (35 – 50m to blade tip) (Map 10, Moray Onshore Wind Energy), and while there is scope, potential cumulative impacts do limit opportunities.

The cumulative impact is deemed to be higher from views from the northwest within 2.5km, for two main reasons. Firstly the cumulative site is a far larger scaled constructed development with the rotating blades seen above the contrasting dark green of the woodland block and against open sky. This is in close field of view to the proposed smaller scale turbines at Backies Farm, whereby the tower, nacelle and blades are seen, contrasting against the earthy backcloth of the agricultural farmland. Not only is the magnitude of impact higher with regards to the contrasting scales of development, primarily due to the lack of vegetation and the more 'open feel' to the landscape context but also the speed of rotating blades which may appear out of sync with one another. While promoting the proposed development at Backies Farm, it cannot be ignored the potential higher cumulative effect, with the constructed turbines at Netherton of Windyhills. However, *this cumulative effect is only seen from one direction and within a limited radius*, with all other directions and distances showing a much reduced or in fact negligible cumulative impact.

With regards to the views from the north east, they also vary as there is a larger contingent of prevailing landscape resource in the form of established wide shelterbelts and woodland blocks that effectively mitigate views. Where views are obtained, the scales of the turbines coupled with the mitigating factors present greatly reduce the cumulative effect.

From the north only the proposed development at Backies is viewed.

Within the landscape context, although there are a number of sites, some of which have either been constructed or approved for construction, due to the localised rise and fall in elevation and screening factor provided by the prevalent landscape resource, it is deemed that cumulatively the area can absorb not only the constructed and granted sites aforementioned but also the proposed small scale turbines proposed at Backies Farm.

Conclusion

From the above assessments of visual effects it has been found that the Backies Farm small scale wind turbine proposal may have a medium - high visual impact on a few nearby views, especially to the north west and south west, within a 2 km radius. There are a number of residential, i.e. primary receptors that would experience these views, as well as transitory receptors using the B9018 and unclassified roads and tracks which access the individual properties which are in close proximity. The renewable energy development, each turbine up to a maximum height of 35 metres, sits within upland farmland with a hierarchy of landscape resource, primarily in the form of shelterbelts and coniferous plantation and the occasional small tree groups associated with built form. From further away viewpoints, the visual impact of the project is significantly reduced due to the distance to the project and the interplay between the existing topography and landscape structure, but only to the east, north east and south east. The visibility of the development from the north west and south west in particular is more acute. On balance, then, the visual impact on the study area is considered to be of medium significance in the local 2 km radius context (dependant on location) and negligible in the wider context, where primarily the undulating agricultural land and woodland found along the localised ridgelines provide a degree of mitigation and 'setting' for which the development can be placed.

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References

CUMULATIVE LANDSCAPE AND VISUAL IMPACT ASSESSMENT

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 A Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CLVIA), has been undertaken for this project in line with the screening and consultation process with Moray Council. This section reports on the potential landscape and visual effects of the proposed Backies Farm application, which will comprise of two wind turbines, type E-3120 Endurance, each up to 35m to blade tip, and associated infrastructure on the Land south of Backies Farm, Deskford, Morayshire, site centred at 349800E, 858601N.
- 1.2 The aims of the assessment process are to promote the best 'environmental fit' for the development through consideration of the existing landscape resource, the potential landscape and visual effects and any mitigation that might be possible. The assessment process refers to landscape value and, in particular, landscape designations and related planning policy, as well as landscape character and capacity for wind turbine development at this site.
- 1.3 This Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment has been carried out for Fine Energy in relation to a planning application for two turbines at Backies Farm, approximately 8.5 km south of Cullen and 10.3 km north east of Keith which are the largest nearest settlements. The smaller settlement of Berryhillock is approximately 2.3 km to the north east.
- 1.4 The approach to this appraisal has been to consider the impacts on the physical structure and aesthetic character of the landscape and, the impacts on the visual amenity of those experiencing views of the site.

Landscape and Visual Impact

- 1.5 Landscape impacts and visual impacts are separate but related. Broadly *landscape impacts* are changes in the fabric, character and quality of the landscape as a result of development. Hence landscape impact assessment is concerned with:
- direct impacts upon specific landscape elements;
 - more subtle effects upon the overall pattern of elements that gives rise to landscape character and local distinctiveness; and,
 - impacts upon acknowledged special interests or values such as designated landscapes, conservation sites and cultural associations.
- Visual Impacts* are a subset of landscape impacts – they relate solely to changes in the appearance of the landscape and the effects of those changes on people. Hence visual impact assessment is concerned with:
- the direct impacts of a development upon the views of the landscape through intrusion or obstruction;
 - the reaction of viewers who may be affected; and,
 - the overall impact on visual amenity, which can range from degradation through to enhancement.

- 1.6 As acknowledged by PAN 45 wind turbines cannot be sited within a landscape without some degree of effect on the character of the landscape and on views “*there are no landscapes into which a windfarm will not introduce a new and distinctive feature.*” PAN45 however, has now been revoked and replaced by on-line advice for “On- Shore Wind Turbines”, last updated October 24th, 2012.
- 1.7 Turbines are prominent, large scale, man-made features and there are few precedents in terms of scale, height and appearance for modern turbines in a rural landscape. Topography aside, they are much taller than any natural features such as trees, most buildings and other structures. Of similar built structures in rural landscapes, electricity pylons are usually smaller. Furthermore, most landscape features are static whereas wind turbines rotate.

Cumulative Impact

- 1.8 Cumulative impact can be where one or more is visible from a particular location or where travellers encounter two or more in quick succession are of key concern (sequential impact). Although there may be specific visual impacts, it may be that development can be accommodated as a feature without altering significantly the intrinsic character of the landscape in question. The characteristics of wind turbines that lead to cumulative impacts include:
- the scale and striking visual appearance of wind turbines; and,
 - the great extent of their visibility and the potential for inter-visibility between the developments and from receptors.

Landscape Sensitivity

- 1.9 Definitions of capacity that apply generally refer to the ability to accept a development without a ‘significant’ or ‘unacceptable’ level of change to the landscape. Implication of the criteria has to be identified and thresholds determined to give meaning to the words ‘significant’ and ‘unacceptable’.
- 1.10 The sensitivity of the landscape is a measure of its inherent ability to accept change without significant or unacceptable effects on its character. This can be considered in two ways:
- an inherent part of the landscape characteristics, regardless of possible types or scales of change; or,
 - in relation to a specific proposed type and scale of change.
- 1.11 In determining capacity, not only the sensitivity of the landscape to the particular type of development is considered but also the *landscape value* of the area concerned. Value may be determined in a number of ways, including by landscape designations (national, regional or local), cultural and historical associations and in terms of how it is valued by those who live in it or use it in some way.
- 1.12 The principals involved in determining impact significance are the same whether on single or multiple developments. This involves assessing:
- the sensitivity of the receptor to the type of change proposed; and,
 - the magnitude of change that would result from the proposals.

Policies relating to sites of interest within the study area

- 1.13 In the planning supporting statement a description of the planning policy context for the area is provided.
- 1.14 General Landscape and Natural Heritage issues are broadly specified within Scottish Planning Policies (February 2010) and states that *'planning authorities should take a broader approach to landscape and natural heritage'* while the landscape in *'both the countryside and urban areas is constantly changing and the aim is to facilitate change'* while different landscapes will have *'a different capacity to accommodate new development.'* A number of Planning Advice Notes (PAN's) and guides are also readily available online.
- 1.15 With respect to the Moray Local Plan (MLP), adopted November 2008, the site has a number of planning designations within the study area, which are detailed below. Policies within the Moray Structure Plan, adopted April 2007 were also studied.
- 1.16 The site itself does not fall within any designations within the MLP, although it will have relations and be in close proximity to others, whereby the development may have a perceived affect.
- 1.17 Within the ZTV study area there are national and locally designated sites as provided by Scottish Natural Heritage and within the MLP. The SSSI Cullen to Stake Ness Coast, just north of the Cullen settlement is out with the ZTV and therefore will require no compliance with policy E1 of the MLP.
- 1.18 On the edge of the detailed 5 km study area, but within the wider ZTV is the Bin of Cullen which has been designated a Site of Interest to Natural Science (SINS) and Scottish Wildlife Trust (SWT) Wildlife Site, both locally labelled. Although at the highest point of approximately 320 m Above Ordnance Datum (AOD) it is deemed to be within the ZTV, the distance coupled with existing mitigating woodland could arguably conclude that the proposed development will not adversely affect this site and accord with policy E2 of the MLP. There is a small SINS site, less than 500 metres, immediately to the north west of the proposed turbines. Due to the close proximity it is argued there could be a degree of impact, although it is difficult to ascertain the degree. Both the proposed development site and the SINS site benefit from the mature and well established shelterbelt which separate the two and the prevailing topography which descends towards the SINS site. It is argued that the existing positive mitigating factors and *"that there is no suitable alternative site for the development"*, the development conforms with policy E2: Local Nature Conservation Sites and Biodiversity. However where there is evidence to suggest a habitat or species of importance does exist, then a survey will be carried out to satisfy the councils requirements and where development is permitted suitable mitigation measures will proactively be pursued.
- 1.19 Berryhillock, approximately 2.3 km to the north east, is a conservation area, with policy BE3 detailing development and guidance *within* the conservation area itself. As the proposed development is out with the settlement area of Berryhillock, it is not affected by policy BE3.
- 1.20 It is acknowledged that there are a number of historical cultural features in proximity (5km radius) and within the land ownership boundary to the proposed renewable energy development at Backies Farm, and with regard to this reference is made to Policies BE1: Scheduled Ancient Monuments and National Designations, BE2: Listed Buildings and BE4: Gardens and Designed Landscapes. While there are a small number of scheduled ancient

monuments within the 5km radius study area they are not deemed to be within the ZTV and therefore will not be affected by guidance within policy BE1. A number of listed buildings including higher merited A and B class are within the ZTV, but with existing prevailing factors such as topography, vegetation structure including larger woodland blocks and mature shelterbelt planting, it is concluded that the perceived sensitivity of the settings and buildings themselves and the magnitude of impact from the proposed development will be negligible and therefore accord with policy BE2 in that *“there will be no detrimental effect on the character, integrity or setting of the listed building(s).”* Part of Cullen House designed landscape sits within the ZTV, although it sits just out with the detailed 5km study area. Cullen House is 1 of 7 sites in Moray currently recorded as being of national importance. It is argued that the development does conform with policy BE4 in that the proposal will not *“adversely affect the setting”* and that the *“overall character and reason for the designation will not be compromised.”* This is due to the distance from the proposed development coupled with the layers of vegetative structure in between the recorded setting and proposed site.

- 1.21 Moray Council in accordance with the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003, had to develop a core path plan (Moray Core Path Adopted Plan 2011), covering the council area, which identifies routes for promoting outdoor access. The approach advocated in selecting routes to qualify is to meet the majority of the criteria which is as follows:
- links communities and places together;
 - multiple uses and multiple benefits;
 - community demand;
 - supports the wider path networks;
 - moray outdoor local access forum;
 - environmental impacts; and
 - added value.

Although there are a number of recreational routes as identified within the statutory Moray Core Paths Plan and the wider ‘Moray Local Access Development Plan’ within the study area and which have been presented on the Landscape Natural Assets Plan, Drawing number NAT.LAN-01, they are not within the ZTV and therefore the development will conform with policies T7: Cycling, Walking and Equestrian Networks and CF3: Countryside Recreation: Access and Trails.

- 1.22 In light of the economic climate and the difficulties facing farming businesses, many have looked at renewable energy in order to supplement and enhance their business. With regards to Policy ED8: Rural Business Proposals, the councils stance is that economic activities in the countryside will be permitted if certain criteria is met including *“careful control over siting, design, landscape and visual impact...locational justification...the capacity of the local infrastructure to accommodate the proposals and the environmental consideration including the impact upon the natural and built heritage.”* Through assessment it will be shown that the proposed development at Backies Farm conforms to this policy guidance.
- 1.23 Within the MLP renewable energy proposals will be considered favourably where the development proposed can be seen to meet the following criteria as set out within policy ER1: Renewable Energy:
- they are compatible with policies to safeguard and enhance the built and natural environment;
 - they do not lead to permanent loss or damage to prime agricultural land;
 - compatible with tourism / recreational interest and facilities;

- do not result in unacceptable impact in terms of visual appearance, landscape character...damage to local ecology; and
- do not result in an unacceptable cumulative impact.

1.24 It is deemed that through assessment it will be shown that the two turbines proposed at Backies Farm will satisfy the policy requirements and the criteria as set out within policy ER1.

Assessment of Impact on Visual Amenity

1.25 The degree of visual impact varies with the position from which the site is viewed. In assessing the visual impact of the proposed development on the landscape, the following is looked at:

- full consideration has been given to all viewpoints;
- their location and the distance from the site;
- the quality of each view; and,
- the impact that the development has on its setting.

The visual assessment is based upon the photomontage viewpoints illustrated in the Appendices and summarised in the table 1.1.

1.26 An outline viewpoint assessment has been conducted from particular viewpoints and visual receptors within the study area. The viewpoints were chosen based on the following criteria:

- Viewpoints should be representative of the likely impacts;
- Viewpoints should show a range of different types of views;
- Viewpoints should be representative of a range of different receptor groups;
- If recognised to fall within the ZTV and to have visibility towards the site, viewpoints from areas and / or built forms which have cultural and / or landscape significance;
- Viewpoints should be representative of a range of distances;
- Viewpoints should be representative of the varying image of the wind project in the landscape.

Sensitivity, Magnitude and Significance

1.27 These three concepts are fundamental to an impact assessment. Sensitivity for landscape receptors may be shown by the distinctiveness of landscape character, inability to accommodate specific change without loss of landscape integrity and presence or absence of landscape designations. For visual receptors, different sensitivity factors apply, such as the character and quality of the existing views, the types of viewer affected and the general popularity or visual amenity of the area. Magnitude of change varies and relates back to sensitivity. Hence for landscape receptors, the degree of change to, or loss of distinctive landscape characteristics or features are considered. For visual receptors, the extent of visibility, numbers and types of affected viewers, degree of visual intrusion and distance of view are all relevant.

1.28 As with landscape impacts, the impact on visual amenity is a function of the *magnitude* of change and *sensitivity*. *Sensitivity* refers to viewer sensitivity and depends on the following:

- The length of viewing time e.g. a local resident with prolonged viewing opportunity will be more sensitive than a passer – by;
- Context of view, e.g. a viewer with an existing view of industrial structures will be less sensitive than a viewer with rural views, and
- Distance from the source.

1.29 The *magnitude* on the impact depends on the following:

- Obstruction or extent to which existing views are blocked;
- Intrusion or the extent to which existing views are impinged upon;
- Qualitative change to the landscape; and
- Number of people / viewers who are affected.

1.30 Impacts are described according to their severity and are termed as either *high*, *medium* or *low*. A high impact on visual amenity would generally arise where an impact of high magnitude affects viewers of predicted high sensitivity.

1.31 There are a number of different types of visual receptors which are summarised as:

- **Primary Transitory** – those who travel along a main route or footpath / bridleway and have prolonged and clear or filtered views towards the site and / or are in close proximity;
- **Secondary Transitory** – those using a less used route and who have filtered or limited views towards the site and / or may be in close proximity;
- **Tertiary** – those travelling along a route that is a further distance from the site but have filtered views towards the site which is seen in the wider context or those in closer proximity who have no view but experience impact on experiential characteristics;
- **Primary Visual** – have clear or filtered views to the whole or part of the turbine and / or of close proximity and / or will have an impact on experiential characteristics; and
- **Secondary Visual** – have filtered views towards part or the whole of the turbine or no views towards the site but may have an impact on experiential characteristics.

Table 1.1 Viewpoint Photomontage Locations (Refer to Montage Views and 5 km ZTV Plan, Drawing No. PMV01-ZTV for Viewpoint Locations)

No.	Viewpoint	Receptors	~ Distance / Direction of view from the Site
1	Looking NE from Myreside & Wester Windyhills	Primary Visual, Secondary Transitory	~1.71km / South West
2	Looking NE from Langlanburn & Clochmacreich	Primary Visual, Primary Transitory	~0.56 km / South West
3	Looking SE from Blackhillock & Aultmore Lodge	Secondary Visual, Secondary Transitory	~ 1.43 km / North west
4	Looking SSE from Swailend / Raemore	Primary Visual, Secondary Transitory	~ 1.64 km / North North West
5	Looking SSE from Todholes / Weston / Faichyhill	Secondary Transitory, Secondary Visual	~ 3.41 km / North North West

6	Looking S from Lower Caribstone Cottage & Upper Skeith	Secondary Transitory, Secondary Visual	~0.75 km / North
7	Looking SSW from Nether Blairock	Tertiary	~ 4.78 km / North North East
8	Looking S from Berryhillock	No Visibility / Tertiary	~ 2.28 km / North North East
9	Looking SW from Old Church of St. John (on road adjacent to burial ground) 'A' listed	No Visibility	~ 3.29 km / North East
10	Looking SW from Ordens & Croftgloy	Tertiary	~ 2.36 km / North East
11	Looking SW from Oathillock / The Knowe	No Visibility / Tertiary	~ 3.2 km / North East
12	Looking S from Deskford Community Hall / Squaredoch	Tertiary / Secondary Visual	~ 2.86 km / North North East

- 1.32 The following general criteria in tables 1.2 and 1.3 have been used in the assessment of significance and magnitude of any direct or indirect impact on landscape components.

Table 1.2 Sensitivity of Existing Landscape Components

Sensitivity	Landscape Component	Definition
HIGH	Scale	Enclosed or small scale diverse landscape.
	Quality	Where the landscape is largely intact, coherent and balanced.
	Value	Valued landscape character with important components of a particular character that are susceptible to small changes, or is in good condition, valued and / or distinguishing features, and / or considered attractive and valued nationally and locally.
	Cultural Heritage	Landscape contains category 'A' listed buildings, scheduled ancient monuments, historic gardens and designed landscapes.
	Level of Intrusion	Landscape contains no or very few intrusive or discordant features.
MEDIUM	Scale	Fairly enclosed with an element of landscape structure, although in parts, may be in decline.
	Quality	Where the landscape is no longer intact and coherent and / or may have evidence of alteration, degradation or erosion.
	Value	Landscape of moderately valued characteristics, reasonably tolerant of change, area in good condition with some distinguishing or valued features and / or of local importance.
	Cultural Heritage	Landscape contains 'B' or 'C' category listed buildings and / or sites listed on the Scottish sites and Monuments Records and National Monuments Record of Scotland or regional / local importance.

	Level of Intrusion	Landscape contains a number of confusing, discordant or intrusive features.
LOW	Scale	Open and expansive with little landscape hierarchy and structure
	Quality	Where landscape is of low quality and may be degraded.
	Value	Landscape is relatively unimportant and not valued locally. The nature to potential change is tolerant. Weak landscape structure and few valued or distinguishing features, large scale intervention, i.e tree felling, mineral extraction
	Cultural Heritage	Landscape contains archaeological sites of lesser importance and / or non-inventory gardens and designed landscapes.
	Level of Intrusion	Landscape contains many confusing, intrusive or discordant elements

Table 1.3 Magnitude of Impact

Magnitude	Definition
HIGH	When the development may result in a major change which is easily discernible to key features / elements of the baseline conditions such that there is a noticeable change to the landscape.
MEDIUM	Where the development may result in a moderate but still discernible change, loss or alteration to one or more of the key features / elements of base conditions such that the underlying landscape is partially changed.
LOW	Where the development may result in a minor loss / alteration to some of the key features / elements of the basic condition. The landscape components would remain largely intact and similar to pre-development circumstances.
NEGLIGIBLE	Where the development may result in a very slight loss / alteration to the baseline conditions.

- 1.33 The level of an effect is determined by a combination of sensitivity and magnitude of change which is demonstrated in the table 1.4 below.
- 1.34 Within SNH guidance in the table 1.5 shown below, demonstrates the height comparisons of common elements in the Scottish landscape. PAN 45 (now revoked) recognised that *‘the visual effect of turbines will be dependent on the distance which they may be viewed.’* Table 1.6 provides a general guide to the effect which distance has a perception of the development in the open landscape.

Table 1.4 Magnitude and Sensitivity Matrix for assessing overall effects

Magnitude	Sensitivity			
		High	Medium	Low
	High	High	Medium	Low
	Medium	Medium	Low	Negligible
Low/ Negligible	Low	Negligible	Negligible	

Table 1.5 Height comparisons of common elements within the landscape

Landscape Element	Height in metres
Single storey house	5
1.5 – 2 storey house	6 - 10
Farmyard grain silo	10
Telegraph Pole	10.5
Mature Forest Trees	20
Pylon	30 - 35

Table 1.6 General perception of a wind turbine in an open landscape

Distance	Perception
Up to 2km	Likely to be a prominent feature
2 – 5km	Relatively prominent feature
5 – 15km	Only prominent in clear visibility – seen as part of the wider landscape
15 – 39km	Only seen in very clear visibility – a minor element in the landscape

Defining the Study Area

- 1.35 The area of study corresponds broadly to the wider Zone of Theoretical View (ZTV) of the proposed development has been defined at 15km radius from the site centre. Landscape and visual amenity outside this zone will remain largely unaffected by the proposals and when viewed in the wider context of the landscape will be seen as negligible as presented in the 15km Radius ZTV Plan, Drawing No. ZTV 01.
- 1.36 The study area was further defined for each part of the assessment process as follows:
- **Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (LVIA)** – the study area was restricted to the application site, access routes, and the potential Zone of Theoretical Visibility (ZTV) from where there may be a view of the development at up to 5km distance from the site centre.
 - **Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment (CLVIA)** – a number of developments (constructed, consented and pending) were assessed cumulatively with the proposed development through a series of photomontages, although a Cumulative Turbine Plan, drawing No. CTP01 has been prepared showing the location of all turbine developments within a 15 km radius of the proposed development at Backies Farm. The assessment has been accompanied by analysis of a computer model of the proposed wind turbine and existing landform (DTM) to produce ZTV graphics and photomontages of the proposed development. Methodology on the production of the visuals has been presented in the Planning Supporting Statement. These graphics provide an indication of the proposed wind

turbine as it would appear in the landscape once constructed. A number of Cumulative ZTV's have also been prepared. Please refer to section 5.0 Cumulative Assessment for more detail.

- 1.37 The scope of the assessment has been established on the basis of consultation process and professional judgement and is summarised below.

Table 1.7 Scope of the Landscape and Visual Assessment

Landscape Issues	Description
Landscape Character	The effects of the proposed development on the landscape character and quality of the site area, as defined by the Moray and Nairn Landscape Character Assessment and site survey .
Landscape Elements	Direct physical effects on landscape elements.
Visual Issues	Description
Local Community	Views from the local rural community , particularly from sensitive receptors near the site and from local settlements, which lie within the ZTV. Views from roads and higher ground will also be taken into consideration.
Landscape Designations	Views from areas of notable importance as well as views from other areas of landscape character. The SINS in close proximity to the north west will have to be addressed, although it benefits from established mature trees between the SINS and proposed development.
Major transport routes, Recreational Paths & Historical Features	Sequential views from the local 'B9018' road in close proximity and popular recreational routes including access roads , cycle and footpaths where appropriate. Views taken from historical features and views towards the development that may include features or their settings.
Cumulative Assessment	The cumulative assessment includes viewpoint assessment within the study area where simultaneous and / or successive views of more than one wind turbine may be achieved, and sequential cumulative assessment where more than one turbine may be viewed along transport routes (simultaneous or successive)

2.0 Existing Environment

- 2.1 This part of the LVIA refers to the existing landscape character, quality or condition and value of the landscape and landscape elements on the site and within the surrounding area, as well as general trends in the landscape change across the study area. A brief description of the existing land use of the area including reference to settlements, routes, vegetation cover, as well as landscape planning designations and local landmarks follow.

Site Location

- 2.2 The subject lands are immediately south of Backies Farm with the classified B9018 to the west. The larger settlements of Cullen and Keith are approximately 8.5 km north and 10.3 km south west respectively. Coniferous plantations namely Lurghill and Factors Park plantations to the east and Aultmorehill Wood to the west coupled with smaller woodland blocks (Backies Plantation) and broadleaf shelterbelts provide a degree of enclosure to the proposed turbines which are each to a height of up to 35 metres to blade tip, type E-3120 Endurance, providing energy using a method that is renewable and does not involve atmospheric carbon pollution. This accords with current policy and is considered positive and beneficial.

Land Use and Land Cover

- 2.3 The site, of approximately 0.091 ha, within a land ownership totalling 121.65 hectares, lies within a field given over to rough grazing. Running generally from north to south there is a localised ridgeline. The southern boundary is defined by the access road that leads to Backies Farm, with the immediate southern field boundary delineated by post and wire fencing. The other site boundaries are defined by low scrubby hedgerow, with gaps in parts which is supplemented by post and wire fencing. The site benefits from enclosure afforded by a mature shelterbelt to the west and plantation woodland to the east, as well as a degree of enclosure by individual mature trees and scrub vegetation which lines the waterbody to the west. An assessment from different directions is detailed in section 4.0.
- 2.4 The proposed development consists of two turbines, with the second turbine sitting at a slightly higher elevation, approximately 155m Above Ordnance datum (AOD). The land within the ownership in broad terms falls towards the B9018 and the watercourse before gently rising towards the coniferous plantation to the east and rising land beyond.
- 2.5 In a broad sense and as described within the landscape character type 'Upland Farmland' (see below) the land comprises of broad gently undulating slopes of open farmed land, punctuated by distinct conical hills and localised ridgelines formed.

Roads / Settlements / Dwellings

- 2.6 There are a number of roads (in the majority unclassified and access roads) which traverse the 'Upland Farmland' character area and the immediate surrounding character areas from which there may be views towards the site and which accommodate a number of receptors. As mentioned above the prevailing topography and landscape vegetation structure does mitigate views to an extent, albeit not entirely. The roads identified are the **A98** (~ 7.5km NE) and the **B9018**, approximately 0.3 km to the west of the site. There are many unclassified roads which are also important secondary transitory routes between settlements and individual dwellings and farm steadings, as well as the access roads to these properties which litter the landscape setting. It is acknowledged therefore that potentially there a number of transitory receptors who would have views towards the proposed development. However the majority of the views afforded would not be of a static nature by the receptor.
- 2.7 Tables 2.1 and Table 2.2 recognise that there are a number of primary and secondary visual receptors who not only may have views towards the site but also may have effect on their experiential characteristics. This will be assessed in greater detail in section 4.0.

Table 2.1 Settlements within the 10 km study area

Settlement Name	~ Distance to the site	Direction in relation to the site
Cullen	~ 8.57 km	North
Keith	~ 10.3 km	South West
Berryhillock	~ 2.3 km	North North East
Kirkton of Deskford	~ 3.5 km	North East
Lintmill	~ 6.9 km	North
Cornhill	~ 8.6 km	East

Table 2.2 Individual Dwellings / Farmsteads within approximately 1 km of the proposed Backies Farm site (information taken from noise report)

Individual Dwelling / Farmstead	~ Distance to the turbine in metres	Direction from the site
Backies Farm	259.1 m	North
Clochmacreigh	577.3 m	South West
Langlanburn	611.1 m	South West
Upper Skeith	482.6 m	North East
Mid Skeith	814.8 m	North East
Lower Craibstone Cottage	712.5 m	North
Craibstone Cottages (nearest)	651.4 m	North West
Craibstone Farm	774.4 m	North West

Surrounding Landscape Character

- 2.8 To assist in the understanding and interpretation of this landholding and its wider setting, the appraisal draws on the findings of the SPPG Moray Onshore Wind Energy Draft July 2012 which supports the Moray and Nairn Landscape Assessment review no 101 prepared by Turnbull Jeffrey Partnership in 1998 for Scottish Natural Heritage (SNH) as part of the nationwide programme of landscape assessments. Both documents classify the land and its immediate setting as falling within the ‘**Upland Farmland**’ character area.
- 2.9 Upland farmland is a large area of land to the east of the Spey, between the coastal farmland and open uplands. It extends into the “Knock Hill / Aberchirder” character area. The landform of the landscape character area comprises broad, gently undulating slopes rising in close proximity to the coast, cut by gently graded valleys to the higher lands of the open uplands and punctuated by distinctive conical hills such as the Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill. Although woodland exist these cover a smaller proportion of land and are less integrated with the farmland, forming large scale coniferous plantations of uniform colour and height to the western edge of the character area. Smaller scale geometrically shaped young coniferous plantations are prominent on higher slopes, forming an abrupt edge to semi improved pastures and moorland. The few areas of native woodland that exist tend to be small isolated pockets associated with individual farmsteads. Pasture interspersed with some arable land is the dominant land use within the broad valleys and this is where the dispersed settlement pattern of small farms is concentrated.
- 2.10 Within the SPPG Moray Onshore Wind Energy Draft Paper (July 2012) the site falls under ‘stage 2’ which is described as an area with potential constraints. There is scope for accommodating a ‘limited’ amount of windfarm development which due to the simple character of the landscape elements such as landform, vegetation pattern and settlement which would reduce any feeling of ‘clutter’. Impact on landmark hill such as Bin of Cullen should be avoided and sited away from smaller hills and ridges. The typology for the proposed scale of development is classed as small – medium (35 – 50m to blade tip) (Map 10, Moray Onshore Wind Energy), and while there is scope, potential cumulative impacts do limit opportunities.

2.11 Due to the location of the site within the Landscape Character area and the characteristics that are evident, the landscape experience is varied, from curtailed views where the development is screened primarily by landform, to open clear views where the turbines are set against the rising land and with the blades seen against the open sky. It is recognised that the visibility zone extends north east beyond the 5 km radius, with further small pockets of perceived visibility to the north west and south west on high ground, although the visibility will be reduced in reality due to the prevailing landscape structure in the form of woodland blocks and shelterbelt planting primarily, with additional localised mitigation provide by individual built forms present.

Cultural Historical Features

2.12 A number historically recorded sites fall within the blade ZTV, as well as within the land holding. With regards to assessing those features that would possibly be affected the most, the study area for scottish sites and monuments and national monuments of recorded sites has been limited to 1 km of the site. These sites with respect to their sensitivity rating are given a medium value. Assessment of the proposed development of its perceived magnitude of impact is detailed in section 4.0. Higher merited listed buildings and Scheduled Ancient Monuments have a study area of 5 km radius. The cultural heritage features are listed in table 2.3 below and locations are graphically represented in the Historic Assets Plan, Drawing No.HAP01-ZTV.

Table 2.3 Cultural Heritage – (1) Refers to presented feature on Historic Assets Plan

BACKIES FARM – CULTURAL HERITAGE		
SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS – within 5 km radius		
Name	Category	Sensitivity Rating
Deskford, Church and Sacrement House & Tower of Deskford		High
Inaltry	Castle	High
Ha’Hillock	Motte	High
Davie’s Castle (not in ZTV)	Fort	High
LISTED BUILDINGS – within 5 km radius NOTE: ALL LISTED SHOWN ON PLAN		
Name	Category	Sensitivity Rating
2 Berryhillock	C (Group B)	Low (Medium)
11 Berryhillock	C (Group B)	Low (Medium)
St. Johns Church, Deskford	B	Medium
4 Berryhillock	C (Group B)	Low (Medium)
Kirkton of Deskford, The Muckle Hoose	B	Medium
Edingight House & Screen Wall	B	Medium
Kirkton of Deskford, Old Church of St.John & Burial Ground	A	High
Kirkton of Deskford, Dominie	B	Medium
7 Berryhillock	C (Group B)	Low (Medium)
10 Berryhillock	C (Group B)	Low (Medium)
Mill, Berryhillock	C	Low
Post Office & 6 Berryhillock	C (Group B)	Low (Medium)
NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORDS OF SCOTLAND - @ 1km radius of the site		

Name	Category	Sensitivity Rating
Grey Cairn	Cairn	Medium
Grey Cairn, Aultmorehill	Cairn(s)	Medium
Chapel Hill (1)	Chapel (no remains)	Medium
Craibstone, Upper Skeith, Backie (3)	Lade, Lime kiln(s), limestone quarry	Medium
Bossy Hillocks	Natural Feature	Medium
Lurgbrae, Burn of Croft	Lime Kiln	Medium
Lurghill Plantation (2)	Enclosure	Medium
Little Skeith	Farmstead x 2	Medium
SCOTTISH SITES & MONUMENT RECORDS - @ 1km radius of the site		
Name	Category	Sensitivity Rating
Bogetra	Document Record Only (DRO) Destroyed	Medium
Longlandburn (5)	Standing Structure Complete	Medium
Clochmacreich (4)	Standing Structure Complete	Medium
Craibstone, Deskford	Standing Structure Incomplete	Medium
Upper Craibstone	DRO Unknown	Medium
Little Skeith	DRO Destroyed	Medium
Mid Skeith (7)	DRO Destroyed	Medium
Lurghill Plantation	DRO Destroyed	Medium
Tillybreadless	DRO Unknown	Medium
Little Skeith	DRO Destroyed	Medium
Bossy Hillocks	Earthwork Unknown	Medium
Grey Cairn	DRO Unlocated	Medium
Myreside	DRO Unlocated	Medium
Chapel Hill	DRO Unlocated	Medium
Myreside	Standing Structure Incomplete	Medium
Blackhillock	DRO Destroyed	Medium
Mid Skeith (6)	DRO Destroyed	Medium

3.0 Landscape Resources & Mitigation

3.1 The proposed development will result in the loss of area of rough grazing land. However, when viewed in the wider context, rough grazing cover remains an abundant resource across the landscape. Once constructed the grazing resource can be reinstated and used as before up to the base of the turbines proposed.

3.2 Having defined the effect of the proposed wind turbines on the character of the landscape, considerations of the factors in the design and location can mitigate the potential impacts. The number of visual elements over the twenty year operational phase has been kept to a minimum. Furthermore, the location, size, style and appearance of the proposal has been designed and sited to minimise its impact on the landscape and visual amenity. This can be achieved by adopting the following mitigating measures:

- selecting the smallest design possible for the sub-station;
- locating the sub-station as near as possible to the turbine to reduce the overall footprint;
- use underground cabling as far as practical;
- minimising the track length and width;
- utilising an existing site access; and
- connecting to the existing electricity line passing in close proximity to the site.

- 3.3 The site benefits from an existing landscape structure, although not delineating the immediate site boundaries but within the local context, with a coniferous plantation backcloth to the east and a mixed broadleaf shelterbelt to the north west. Vegetation associated with the small tributary watercourse to the south west and mature tree copses affiliated with farmsteads which are scattered in the local context to the site will also provide a degree of partial screening. Steps would be taken to prevent any degradation of the resource that is present. In terms of mitigation, little is required in additional landscaping. However, the measure that would be provided would be:
- Re-instating any landscape resource with native based species including low scrub understorey and gorse coupled with tree planting lost through the construction (not including the entrance). Any existing landscape resource lost at the entrance will be replaced with compensatory planting elsewhere on the land holding.
 - The reinstatement of a rough grazing grass mix similar to the one existing at present to the edge of the concrete turbine bases and within the geotextile membrane used for the access track, which will allow the grass mix to grow through.
- 3.4 With the application of a reinstating strategy, it is considered that a renewable energy development proposal could be successfully assimilated into the existing landscape with as minimal landscape impacts as possible. Any existing landscape resource that is lost at the entrance or along the access road whilst constructing will be replaced with compensatory planting elsewhere within the land ownership or reinstated where lost, for example, along the existing access road, off the B9018 to the west of the site. This will strengthen the existing resource and the interface between the development and the primary receptors in close proximity to the site.

4.0 Appraisal of Likely Landscape & Visual Effects

- 4.1 Landscape Effects are defined by the Landscape Institute as “*changes to landscape elements, characteristics, character, and qualities of the landscape as a result of development*”. The potential landscape effects, occurring during the construction and operation period, may therefore include, but are not restricted to, the following:
- Changes to landscape elements: the addition of new elements or the removal of trees, vegetation, and buildings and other characteristic elements of the landscape character type;
 - Changes to landscape quality: degradation or erosion of landscape elements and patterns, particularly those that form characteristic elements of landscape character types;
 - Changes to landscape character: landscape character may be affected through the incremental effect on characteristic elements, landscape patterns and qualities and the cumulative addition of new features, the magnitude of which is sufficient to alter the overall landscape character type of a particular area; and
 - Cumulative landscape effects: where more than one wind turbine may lead to a potential landscape effect. Development may have a direct (physical) effect on the landscape as well as an indirect effect or effect perceived from out with the landscape character area.

Visual Receptors

4.2 There are a number of different types of visual receptors which are summarised as below and have been described in greater detail in paragraph 1.31:

- **Primary Transitory**
- **Secondary Transitory**
- **Tertiary**
- **Primary Visual**
- **Secondary Visual**

Visual Impact Assessment

4.3 In broad terms the proposed renewable energy development at Backies Farm as deemed by the ZTV is within a 2 – 2.5 km radius to the south west and north west. The immediate ZTV is limited to 0.5 km to the east and 1.0 km to the west, primarily due to the mature coniferous plantations that exist, although it should be recognised that like other crops the plantations are rotational and may not last the lifetime of the proposed turbines. The ZTV extends out to 4 km to the north and north east, although on closer inspection from the site visit and desk top studies of OS data, existing mature shelterbelts, although in some areas, not necessarily that wide, provide mitigating screening, so it is argued that the actual perceived visibility towards the site is lesser than the ZTV presented in Figure ZTV-01. This will be demonstrated in the detailed analysis and supporting photomontages.

Visual Impact – South West

4.4 Views from the south west towards the site are clear and unfiltered, if the locations are within a 2 – 2.5 km radius. Longer distance views show the turbines against the rising agricultural and wooded land, as presented in Photomontage 1. Although not seen against the open sky the view afforded of the entire structures are set against the earthy tones of field and trees. In closer proximity the view opens entirely with the proposed turbines viewed against the open sky, as clearly illustrated by Photomontage 2. Other than the localised ridgeline on the subject lands there is little in the way of mitigating factors to screen views from this location. Although not supported by photographic evidence it is concluded that clear views towards the turbines will be afforded from ‘Clochmacriech’ which is approximately 577 metres to the south west. Primary Visual receptors at ‘Longlandburn’ (approximately 611 metres south west) will also have direct clear views towards the proposed development. While there are mature trees to the front of this property which may mitigate views from the ground floors, it is deemed that from the upper dormers views will be attained.

4.5 While there are a number of locations to the south west that will have clear unfiltered views this is contained within a comparatively narrow field of view. The existing landscape resource is limited to small sporadic tree groups and edges of large woodland blocks which will dictate the views afforded. There is little else in the way of landscape hierarchy to the south west, which would screen views. Screening is primarily provided through the prevailing topography. To the south west the immediate landscape character is fairly enclosed provided by the existing landform which forms small hills and localised ridges. The scale of the existing landscape to the south west is medium in that there is a degree of enclosure provided by landform, and the large woodland blocks, rather than more localised and intimate field delineation and roadside vegetation, although there are sporadic small tree groups present.

- 4.6 There are a small number of cultural historical features in close proximity to the site to the south west. The feature in immediate vicinity is the site of what once may have been a chapel. No remains exist, although it may be advisable to commence a watching brief during the construction phase if required by the council. The situation at present would deem that the proposed development will have no detrimental effect on this recorded site. Although recognised, but of lesser merit, the two properties previously mentioned are also recorded sites within the Scottish sites and monument records. It is argued that there will be views towards the development from both of these completed standing residential structures and as such there may be a perceived impact. However with respect to the MLP these sites are not currently covered under any policy. While national sites are covered under local plan policy, locally recorded ones are not.
- 4.7 To the south west, as well as a stretch of the B9018 there are a small number of access roads to individual properties and farmsteads that will have a view towards the proposed development. The B9018, while a lesser categorised road, is the only direct route that connects the settlements of Cullen and Keith, so it arguably will accommodate a number of local transitory receptors. While this has not been supported by photomontage images, the perceived impact from the development on limited stretches of the road will be high, due to the elevated position of the turbines and the lack of roadside vegetation that may mitigate the views. Due to the prevailing topography, it is argued that a small number of individual properties at 'Clochmacreigh', 'Langlanburn' and 'Wester Windyhills' will have views towards the development, as presented in Photomontages 1 and 2 and will have a medium – high degree of impact in that there will be a discernible change to base conditions and that the nature of the views will be prolonged and therefore have a higher sensitivity. It is argued that the properties 'Marchbank' and 'Myreside' will have a lesser degree of impact due to Aultmorehill Wood effectively screening views. 'Bossy Hillocks' due to its reduced elevation will also have a lesser degree of impact.
- 4.8 Broadly views from the south west, within a 2 km narrow radius have clear unfiltered views towards the proposed development site, and for those residing within this area, the views are prolonged and static. It is also acknowledged that transitory receptors on stretched of the B9018 will also have clear views of the site. Overall the sensitivity of the existing landscape scale has been rated at medium – high, while the existing components are merited at medium. The magnitude of impact is high for a small number of properties, in that although there are a limited number of primary visual receptors, all can obtain a clear view with little in the way to mitigate the view through the existing landscape resource. Therefore the overall assessment of sensitivity and magnitude of impact is deemed as high on those receptors to the south west.

Visual Impact – North West / North

- 4.9 The degree of visibility from the north and north west extends to approximately 3.5 km radius, where varying degrees of the extent of the structures can be seen. Depending on the location of the viewer a degree of mitigation is provided by the prevailing landscape structure, although from all photomontage viewpoints, the top of the rotors at least can be seen. Long distance views afforded are towards the top of rotors seen above the existing coniferous woodland block, whereby visibility although not to the entire structure, is seen due to the contrasting colours of the white of the rotors and the dark green of the plantation. This is presented in Photomontage 5.

- 4.10 Views within a 1.5 km radius from the north west are also clear towards the development site, although in some locations, views will be mitigated to an extent by the existing mature vegetation present, as illustrated by Photomontage 3. In the spring and summer months' views towards the turbines will be screened. The extents of views afforded are determined by existing landscape resource and where this is limited the views are clear as presented in Photomontage 4, although the proposed development sits against a backcloth of agricultural land, as opposed to open sky. From the northwest the views also encompass a number of existing discordant elements which add a degree of clutter and disproportionate scale; although to the sites advantage this only occurs in limited locations.
- 4.11 Within 1 km radius directly north of the site, views towards the site while obtainable are filtered towards both turbines, due to the existing mature trees that are present and in the 'leafy' seasons views will be further reduced. When seen the turbines are seen on the localised ridgeline and against open sky, although with no other discordant elements. The type of view afforded is presented in Photomontage 6.
- 4.12 There is a historical feature immediately north of the site, within 1 km, but it is located within an established mature shelterbelt, which arguably screens views towards the site and therefore will be no perceived detrimental impact from the development on this site.
- 4.13 There are a number of individual properties and farmsteads to the north and north west of the site, with some of them almost certainly having a degree of view towards the site. Where existing woodland has been harvested, for example 'The Pots' this has enabled views to open up towards the site. Larger coniferous plantations provide a screening buffer, and in general have been planted along the higher ridgelines of the prevailing topography, although it should be recognised that this may not last the lifespan of the proposed development. Properties within a 2.5 km radius to the north west will have a perceived medium degree of impact, as where views are afforded, the development is seen within an undulating agricultural context with mature trees either as a backcloth or screening views of the structures in their entirety.
- 4.14 Immediately to the north west of the site is a SINS, although between the designated site and the proposed development lies a mature shelterbelt of over 100 metre width, which effectively encloses the Site of Interest to Natural Science. However, it is recognised that further inspection of this site may be required to understand fully its reason for designation and to fully attain any perceived impact the development may have. It is argued however that the degree of mitigation that exists in conjunction with proactive mitigation measures that would be adopted, the impact would be negligible and would therefore still conform to policy E2 of the MLP in that "*the development proposals will not adversely affect this local site*" and that there is "*no suitable alternative site for the development.*"
- 4.15 In summary it is acknowledged that the residential dwellings to the northwest and north to approximately 2 km radius have a perceived degree of impact with regards to visual experience. The same is applied to the receptors using the B9018, unclassified roads and access tracks in the same direction. As presented the proposed development, while not seen in its fullest from all locations, will result in a discernible change to the landscape context and as such the magnitude of impact on the character of the area to the northwest and north of the site will be medium - high. While the quality of the existing landscape components have been given a rating of high, the existing landscape does not hold particular sites of national importance both from natural or historical cultural value, nor has it an especially redeemed value in exiting landscape resources, which is the reason for an overall **medium sensitivity**. The *magnitude of impact* is **medium**, in that where views are clear, they tend to see the

proposed site in a landscape context and against undulating agricultural land. Closer proximity views are more screened due to prevailing vegetation and existing rises and falls in the topography. Overall therefore within 2 km radius to the north and northwest the significance of effect from the proposed development is deemed as **low**.

Visual Impact – North East

- 4.16 Views from the north east in closer proximity and from longer distances are dictated by the prevailing vegetation structure and the amount of mitigation this provides. In limited locations it is possible to view the development up to approximately 4 km away, albeit, generally to the top of the rotors only, above an existing mature coniferous belt, as presented in Photomontage 7. The larger constructed two turbines to the south of the proposed site are visibly clearer above the existing woodland, although it is recognised that this screening aid for the proposed development at Backies Farm may be harvested before the decommissioning of the turbines. The prevailing topography coupled with the vegetation structure combines to screen views of the proposed development from closer viewpoint locations, as demonstrated by Photomontages 8 and 9, although again from similar distance locations, views are seen of the rotors above the horizon line, as illustrated by Photomontage 10.
- 4.17 To the north east of the site is Berryhillock, which has been designated a conservation area and has a number of listed properties. Due primarily to the prevailing vegetation structure there are in reality very limited to no views of the proposed development, although it is deemed to be within the ZTV.
- 4.18 There are a number of individual properties and a couple of settlements to the north east which are within the ZTV. On completion of a site visit and desk study of ordnance datum and other material, there is mature woodland and established shelterbelts that generally run in a north west to south east direction that effectively provide layers of a hierarchical vegetation structure which effectively screens the development from many viewpoint locations. In this regard the magnitude of impact varies, although when there are views towards the development, it is seen within a landscape context, therefore it is deemed that the magnitude of impact is generally **low** from the north east. The sensitivity of the landscape components are **medium – high** in that enclosure is generated in areas and there is a reasonable high degree of landscape resource and features that contribute, although it is this very landscape resource that reduced the impact of the development. Overall the assessment of combined significance of effect on receptors to the north east is concluded as **low – negligible**.

Summary of Visual Assessment

- 4.19 It is acknowledged that views will be obtained toward the site to a greater or lesser degree from viewpoint locations in proximity to the site along the transitory B9018 route, where gaps in the woodland blocks allow. To the south west and from the B9018 views are clear to approximately 2km radius, where the viewer is to the east of Aultmorehill Wood, which effectively blocks any views towards the site further from the west. In general views from the south west are able to see the proposed turbines against rising agricultural land against a back drop of woodland or in closer proximity, partly against open sky. Due to the prevailing layers of landscape resource there is a degree of screening afforded between many viewpoint locations and the site, with varying degrees of views afforded of the two structures.
- 4.20 The ZTV extends to the north west and in particular to the north east, with varying degrees of afforded views of the proposed development. However views from the north east towards the

site are curtailed by established bands of shelterbelt planting and woodland. Views from the north west are in general afforded, but not always towards the development in its entirety. It is recognised in the locations where the development can be seen (in the majority to the south west), it is of the structures in their entirety, although some of the clear views are within a wider landscape setting, due to the distance, and accommodate a few other discordant elements found within the character area. From the north west from a distance of 1 km or more, the views are partially obscured by vegetation. From some locations filtered views of the structures are seen through the existing broad leaf trees, while other locations can only see the top of the rotors above existing coniferous plantation. From the north east views generally are screened by the large blocks of woodland and established mature shelterbelts, although narrow gaps allow for long distance views where the proposed development, although not in its entirety, is seen above the horizon line within a larger landscape context. From the south and east views are curtailed by the prevailing topography coupled with the large coniferous woodland blocks such as Lurghill Plantation and Factors Park Plantation.

Visual Impact on the Landscape Character Area

- 4.21 The proposed development will add two turbines to the undulating farmland landscape which forms part of the 'Upland Farmland' character type.
- 4.22 Using the GLVIA criteria for evaluating sensitivity (Table 1.2) the following is deemed to apply to the local area surrounding Backies Farm.

Table 4.1 Sensitivity of the Local Landscape Character

Landscape Element	Sensitivity Rating
Scale: The landform comprises of broad, gently undulating slopes punctuated by distinctive conical hills such as the Bin of Cullen and Knock Hill. It is fairly enclosed in parts, primarily by smaller scaled young coniferous plantations forming an edge on the improved pastures that are present on the rising slopes.	Medium
Quality: There is a locally designated site in close vicinity of the proposed development. The few areas of native broadleaf mixed woodland tend to be small isolated pockets associated with farmsteads. Field delineation is by gappy low scrub / hedgerow and post and wire fencing. Shelterbelts are also present.	Low - Medium
Features of Cultural Heritage: Contains a number of cultural features, most of which are lower in merit within 1 km of the site. There are also a number of listed buildings and SAM's although they are not in close proximity and in most cases not within the ZTV or have a degree of mitigation with the prevailing vegetation that screens views towards the site.	Low
Level of Intrusion: Contains a number of discordant elements, roads, three phase	Low - Medium

electricity poles, telegraph poles and turbines (some already constructed, some pending planning)	
Overall Landscape Sensitivity	Low - Medium

4.23 The magnitude of effect on the local landscape character is assessed below using Table 1.3 criteria.

Table 4.2 Magnitude of effect on Local Landscape Character

Landscape Property	Magnitude of Effect
Change to Landscape Character: As a small scale turbine development in this upland farming landscape there will be a change especially to views afforded from the north west and south west in close proximity and from further distances. From other directions the views are reduced, with the prevailing landform limiting views to the structures in their entirety.	Low / Negligible from the east, north east and south east, although the magnitude increases to medium - high in the south west and north west and in immediate proximity to the site. Primary Visual receptors to the south west and north west and stretched of the transitory B9018 will have a high degree of magnitude, in closer proximity.
Change to Landscape Composition: While there may be some locally significant change, the overall effect on the landscape composition is less significant but only from the east and south east. From other directions this increases as views to a varying degree of impact and amount of structure seen differs.	Medium - High
Change to Landscape Quality: The development may result in a small but discernible change to features / elements of the basic conditions when viewed within 2 km radius to views afforded from the north west, west and south west. Longer distance views from the south west, north east and northwest view the proposed development in varying degrees and cumulatively, although in limited locations, the proposed development does not appear harmonious, with other existing renewable energy development.	Medium - High
Overall Landscape Magnitude	Medium - High

4.24 As the local landscape character is expected overall to be affected by the project to a low - medium sensitivity extent and medium - high magnitude, it is considered the significance of the effect overall on the character of the landscape is **low - medium**. It is recognised that within 1 km, and in particular to the southwest, west and north west the overall effect on the character of landscape features and cultural components is increased to **medium**, especially from the important primary transitory routes such as the B9018 and primary receptors to the south west and north west who will have filtered to clear views of the development.

Transitory Routes

4.25 The transitory network within ZTV of the site has a single classified road, the B9018, which will have a perceived degree of impact from a stretch within close proximity to the site. While this is a lesser classified road it is an important local route between Cullen and Keith, and as such will accommodate a number of local transitory receptors. It is acknowledged that transitory receptors on the B9018 will have a medium – high degree of impact within 0.5 km north east and south west of the site (Photomontage 2), although the receptor is travelling at speed and views while present will not be overly prolonged. Within the ZTV there are a larger number of unclassified roads, access roads and tracks which service the scattering of individual dwellings and farmsteads. Dependant on their location, views towards the site vary and therefore the perceived magnitude of impact varies. Where views can be obtained, as demonstrated by Photomontage 1, the magnitude of impact is deemed as high, as the speed of travel reduces and the views are lengthened and sometimes stationary in nature.

Identified walking routes, although some within 2 km radius of the site, are not within the ZTV or are encapsulated within mature woodland, which would effectively screen the development. It is deemed that the magnitude of impact from roads, access roads, private drives and footpaths, in general, within the study area is minimal and therefore low, although the magnitude of impact from the B9018 and unclassified roads to the north west and south west are higher.

Settlements

4.26 The appraisal of likely effects considers firstly landscape effects and secondly visual effects, in accordance with established best practice. The appraisal is informed by a number of supporting graphics, including a 15km Radius ZTV Plan, Drawing no. ZTV01. The ZTV provides an indication of the areas surrounding the site from which there may be visibility of the highest part of the wind turbine. This has been produced at a scale of 1:100,000 with the defined 15km study area, but takes no account of any built or natural feature which may mitigate views.

Table 4.3 Population centres, Hamlets, Dwellings within the study area ZTV where it is proposed that part or all of the turbine will be visible (not taken into account existing mitigating factors such as vegetation etc)

Population Centres	~Distance/ Direction	Overall significance of perceived impact (Visual)
Cullen	~ 8.57 km / N	Limited Visibility (possible views from higher ground but seen within a large landscape context)
Keith	~ 10.3 km / SW	No Visibility
Berryhillock	~ 2.3 km / NNE	Low - Negligible
Kirkton of Deskford	~ 3.5 km / NE	Low - Negligible
Lintmill	~ 6.9 km / N	No Visibility
Cornhill	~ 8.6 km / E	No Visibility
Dwellings (taken from noise report)	~ Distance (m's) / Direction	Overall significance of perceived impact (visual)
Backies Farm	259.1 m / N	High
Clochmacreigh	577.3 m / SW	High
Langlanburn	611.1 m / SW	High
Upper Skeith	482.6 m / NE	Low - Medium
Mid Skeith	814.8 m / NE	Low

Lower Craibstone Cottage	712.5 m / N	Low
Craibstone Cottages (nearest)	651.4 m / NW	Low - Medium
Craibstone Farm	774.4 m / NW	Low

- 4.27 The project is located ~ 2.3 km from the nearest settlement (Berryhillock) which is predicted to have a low - negligible overall significance of impact and visibility towards the project, primarily due to the presence of mature woodland blocks and established shelterbelts that are between the site and the edge of the settlement. It should however be recognised that the woodland block may be harvested during the lifespan of the turbine which would significantly reduce the screening which is there at present. There are a number of individual dwellings and farmsteads that are within 1 km of the proposed site and who will experience views and impact on their experiential characteristics. While the table summarises the overall significance of impact on their visual sensory, there are other impacts which will occur, including noise. (Please refer to noise report).
- 4.28 Although thirteen numbers of receptors (settlements and individual dwellings and farmsteads)) have been identified within ~ 10 km radius and 1.0 km radius respectively of the site, the settlements generally have no or severely limited views towards the development. Thirteen individual dwellings / farmsteads are predicted to experience limited to clear views to the project. Approximately three are deemed as having a high overall significance of perceived impact, primarily due to the proximity to the proposed development site, while the other properties whilst affording a view will not be towards the structures in their entirety.
- 4.29 It has to be noted that in practice, the visibility is likely to be significantly reduced due to local screening (i.e. trees, building, landform etc.)

Site Tracks and Sub-Station Building

- 4.30 In addition to the turbines there will be a small visual impact from the site tracks and the sub-station / control building. The small size of the building coupled to the likely location suggests that it is only likely to be visible from a few stretches on the unclassified roads and access tracks to farmsteads, especially to the north west and south west and the B9018 classified road within approximately 0.3 km west of the site. On this basis the significance of the effect would be negligible overall in the wider context, with proposed landscape mitigation measures to be introduced to replace any lost landscape resource through construction.

Visual Impact on Local Designations and Historical Elements

Local Designations

- 4.31 It is deemed that within the 15km ZTV area, a study area of 5 km radius has been used for locally designated sites. There are no sites that are designated at national or international level within this study area. Due to the prevailing topography it is argued that any sites out with 5 km will have no perceived impact. Within the 5 km study area there are 2 sites, the Bin of Cullen, approximately 5 km to the north west and a SINS site immediately north west of the proposed site. It is considered that the majority of the Bin of Cullen is not within the ZTV and the small part that may have possible views from the highest point at 320 m AOD, is deemed

to have a negligible impact on the site itself and the qualities for which it has been designated. The site immediately north west may have a perceived degree of impact due to the proximity, although it will be mitigated to an extent by the mature shelterbelt between the site and the proposed turbine development and proposed proactive mitigation measures. The magnitude of impact of the proposed two turbines on the landscape designation is seen as low - *negligible*, as activity can be carried on as pre- construction after the turbines are erected and will have little perceived impact. The overall effect could be perceived as *negligible* and therefore will accord with policy E2 in that the local site will not adversely be affected.

Historical Designations

4.32 It is recognised that there are a number of historical features within the 5 km study area, 1 km detailed study area and within or in very close proximity to the site boundary. Higher merited scheduled ancient monuments which are listed in table 2.3 are located within the 3 – 5 km radius to the north east and with the distance coupled with the prevailing structural vegetation it is deemed that the impact on the recorded features will be negligible and therefore will accord with policy BE1 of the Moray Local Plan. Features within the 5 km study area include higher and medium rated listed buildings, including the ‘A’ listed building Old Church of St. John and associated burial ground at Kirkton of Deskford as well as a number of ‘B’ listed buildings. While acknowledging that some of the historical features are within the ZTV, many of their views towards the development are limited. Photomontage 9 demonstrates the view from the ‘A’ listed building illustrating the lack of view, with no perceived impact on the building or its setting. In contrast, Photomontage 12 presents the clearer view towards the turbines, albeit, within a landscape context, from Deskford Community Hall / Squaredoch, a ‘B’ listed building on the edge of the 3km radius of the ZTV. Overall, while some views can be afforded, it is argued that the vast majority of the higher merited sites cannot see the development and therefore the renewable energy proposal is in accordance with policy BE2 of the MLP.

The level of potential impact on the cultural heritage features are summarised in the table below.

Table 4.4 Potential Impact on Cultural Heritage Features

BACKIES FARM – CULTURAL HERITAGE			
SCHEDULED ANCIENT MONUMENTS – within 5km radius			
Name	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Overall Assessment
Deskford, Church and Sacrement House & Tower of Deskford	High	Negligible	Negligible
Inaltry – Castle	High	Negligible	Negligible
Ha’Hillock - Motte	High	Negligible	Negligible
Davie’s Castle (not in ZTV) - Fort	High	Negligible	Negligible
LISTED BUILDINGS – within 5 km radius			
Name (Listing Category)	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Overall Assessment
2 Berryhillock (C) (Group B)	Low (Medium)	Negligible	Negligible
11 Berryhillock (C) (Group B)	Low (Medium)	Negligible	Negligible
St. Johns Church, Deskford (B)	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
4 Berryhillock (C) (Group B)	Low	Negligible	Negligible

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	(Medium)		
Kirkton of Deskford, The Muckle Hoose (B)	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Edingight House & Screen Wall (B)	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Kirkton of Deskford, Old Church of St. John & Burial Ground (A)	High	Negligible	Negligible
Kirkton of Deskford, Dominie (B)	Medium	Low - Medium	Negligible
7 Berryhillock (C) (Group B)	Low (Medium)	Negligible	Negligible
10 Berryhillock (C) (Group B)	Low (Medium)	Negligible	Negligible
Mill, Berryhillock (C)	Low	Negligible	Negligible
Post Office & 6 Berryhillock (C) (Group B)	Low (Medium)	Negligible	Negligible
NATIONAL MONUMENTS RECORDS OF SCOTLAND - @ 1km radius of the site			
Name	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Overall Assessment
Grey Cairn	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Grey Cairn, Aultmorehill	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Chapel Hill (1)	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Craibstone, Upper Skeith, Backie (3)	Medium	Low	Negligible
Bossy Hillocks	Medium	Low	Negligible
Lurgbrae, Burn of Croft	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Lurghill Plantation (2)	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Little Skeith	Medium	Low - Negligible	Negligible
SCOTTISH SITES & MONUMENTS RECORDS - @ 1km radius of the site			
Name	Sensitivity	Magnitude	Overall Assessment
Bogetra	Medium	Low	Negligible
Longlandburn (5)	Medium	High	Medium
Clochmacreich (4)	Medium	High	Medium
Craibstone, Deskford	Medium	Medium - High	Medium
Upper Craibstone	Medium	Medium - High	Medium
Little Skeith	Medium	Low	Negligible
Mid Skeith (7)	Medium	Low	Negligible
Lurghill Plantation	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Tillybreadless	Medium	Low	Negligible
Little Skeith	Medium	Low – Medium	Negligible
Bossy Hillocks	Medium	Low	Negligible
Grey Cairn	Medium	Low	Negligible
Myreside	Medium	Negligible - Low	Negligible
Chapel Hill	Medium	Negligible	Negligible
Myreside	Medium	Negligible - Low	Negligible
Blackhillock	Medium	Low	Negligible
Mid Skeith (6)	Medium	Low – Medium	Negligible

4.33 The Backies Farm Renewable Energy Proposal will not have a significant visual impact on or from features of cultural importance. It is recognised that there are sites within a 5 km radius of local and national significance, with their individual overall assessment tabled above. However it should be acknowledged that many of the sites of greater merit are not within any visibility zones. All the scheduled ancient monuments which have been recognised in tables

2.3 and 4.4 and whose locations have been shown on Drawing No. HAP.ZTV 01 are not deemed to be within a visual zone, so in this regard they accord with policy BE1 of the MLP in that the development will have no adverse impact on the setting or structure. Within 5 km in all directions are listed buildings, whereby most are deemed that the building and its setting is not adversely affected. Where it is perceived that the base conditions do change and that there is a degree of impact, as shown in Photomontage 12, it could be argued that the economic benefits and the diversification of rural activities, as in accordance with policies ER1: Renewable Energy and ED8: Rural Business Proposals countermeasure this.

- 4.34 Broadly the overall assessments for sites designated under the National Monuments Records of Scotland and Scottish Sites and Monuments are negligible. There are a very small number of sites that have a medium overall assessment, located to the south and north west of the site that primarily due to proximity and lack of large vegetative blocks that would provide mitigation, have views of the proposed development. While it is recognised that not only are these sites recorded cultural features, they are also residential properties accommodating primary receptors.
- 4.35 In the instances that the proposal would be visible from sites at a distance, it would be a relatively minor impact on the skyline and indeed, would be temporary given the 20 year operational lifetime of the scheme. Consequently the scheme will not detract from the appreciation or understanding of archaeological sites and monuments and other features of historical and cultural interest.
- 4.36 The proposed development would not significantly alter the character of the landscape. In fact the landscape can successfully absorb this new development without eroding its key characteristics.

5.0 Cumulative Assessment Impact

- 5.1 The cumulative impact has been assessed on a number of known wind projects within a 15 km ZTV of the site (refer to list in Appendices). Cumulative ZTV's were produced indicating where a simultaneous or successive visibility may theoretically occur between the Backies Farm development and other projects (operational, consented and in planning).
- Cumulative Impact with projects in planning, operational and consented projects (Cumulative ZTV Plans 1 - 7, Drawing No's CIS.ZTV 01 – 07). The plans show areas where the Backies Farm application site is in view only and where both the cumulative and proposed site at Backies Farm can both be seen and where only the cumulative site is visible.
- 5.2 For the purpose of the cumulative assessment with photomontages the following projects have been identified.

Table 5.1 Cumulative Sites in association with the proposed development at Backies Farm

Location	No.	Size to blade tip	Application Ref.	Status
Netherton of Windyhills	2	92.5m	09/00763/FUL	Constructed
Myreton Crossroads	1	80m	07/01102/FUL	Granted
Sheilmuir, Drybridge	1	20.4m	10/01514/APP	Granted

Aultmore Forest Windfarm	13	110m	07/02375/EIA	Pending
Eastbrae, Grange, Keith	2	27.1m	11/00338/APP	Granted
Berryhillock Farm, Keith	1	12.5m	09/02249/PPP	Granted
Balnamoon, Keith	1	70m	04/02472/FUL	Granted

The assessment has considered the following photomontages and wireframes and cumulative ZTV's:

- CIS.ZTV 01 – Netherton of Windyhills;
- CIS.ZTV 02 – Myreton Crossroads;
- CIS.ZTV 03 – Sheilmuir, Drybridge;
- CIS.ZTV 04 – Aultmore Forest Windfarm;
- CIS.ZTV 05 – Eastbrae, Grange, Keith;
- CIS.ZTV 06 – Berryhillock Farm, Grange, Keith;
- CIS.ZTV 07 – Balnamoon, Keith;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 3 – Blackhillock & Aultmore Lodge;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 4 – Swailend, Raemore;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 5 – Todholes, Weston, Faichyhill;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 6 – Lower Caribstone Cottage, Upper Skeith;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 7 – Nether Blairrock;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 10 – Ordens / Croftgloy;
- Wireframe / Photomontage 12 – Oathillock / The Knowe; and
- CTP01 – Cumulative Turbine Plan (15 km radius).

Evaluation of cumulative landscape and visual effects

- 5.3 The level and significance of cumulative landscape and visual effects is determined in the same way as the main LVIA. The additional criteria required to evaluate cumulative effects relate to the certainty of effects of currently built projects, the likely effects of approved but not built projects, and the uncertain effects of known proposed projects currently within the planning system.
- 5.4 With respect to viewpoint locations from the north west and north, wireframe / photomontage 3 shows both the proposed development at Backies Farm and the constructed 2 x 92.5m turbines at Netherton of Windyhills. The view afforded to both developments is partial due to the prevailing structural vegetation, and as this photomontage shows a 'worst case' scenario, the cumulative view of both developments will reduce when trees are in leaf. From other viewpoint locations where the views are clearer the cumulative effect is recognised to be more 'cluttered.' From this limited location to the north west and where views are afforded, there is a conflict between the scales of the existing and proposed elements including the electricity pylon line that runs close to the site. Photomontage 4 presents the 'worst case cumulative impact' scenario. This is primarily due to the lack of vegetation and the more 'open feel' to the landscape context coupled with the contrasting colour between the proposed turbines at Backies Farm and the earthy tones of the rising agricultural land which is its backdrop, from this viewpoint location. Photomontage 5, also taken from the north west demonstrates how the view can alter within 1 km of distance. The cumulative rotors can be seen against the open sky of the two developments that have been granted and constructed and while it is acknowledged that the rotors of the proposed development at Backies Farm can be seen above the top of the coniferous woodland block, it is a small part of the structure

that it is deemed to negligibly add to the cumulative effect. From the north only the proposed development at Backies is viewed.

- 5.5 With regards to the views from the north east, they also vary as there is a larger contingent of prevailing landscape resource in the form of established wide shelterbelts and woodland blocks that effectively mitigate views. Where views are obtained, the scales of the turbines coupled with the mitigating factors present greatly reduce the cumulative effect, which is documented in Photomontage 7. Many of the views are of a longer distance, which shows the proposed turbines with other cumulative sites, where it may be perceived that the different scales of the turbines and the different rotation speeds all combine to a negative cumulative effect. However, many of the views also have a degree of mitigation, whereby not all of the constructed, granted and proposed developments are seen in their entirety together. Photomontages 10 and 12 show the type of cumulative views that can be afforded.
- 5.6 It should be acknowledged that the cumulative photomontages mentioned above (especially to the north west) also coincide with locations of individual properties or are in the direction of view, with little in the way of an established vegetation structure to mitigate views, although the further to the north west the mitigation does increase. The cumulative impact is deemed to be higher, for two main reasons from views from the north west within 2.5km. Firstly the cumulative site is a far larger scaled proposal (2 x 92.5 metres) with the rotating blades seen above the contrasting dark green of the woodland block and against open sky. This is in close field of view to the proposed smaller scale turbines at Backies Farm, whereby the tower, nacelle and blades are seen, contrasting against the earthy backcloth of the agricultural farmland. Not only is the magnitude of impact higher with regards to the contrasting scales of development, but also the speed of rotating blades may appear out of sync with one another. While promoting the proposed development at Backies Farm, it cannot be ignored the potential higher cumulative effect, with the constructed turbines at Netherton of Windyhills. However, this cumulative effect is only seen from one direction and within a limited radius, with all other directions and distances showing a much reduced or in fact negligible cumulative impact.
- 5.7 It should be taken into account however, that like the ZTV, the cumulative ZTV does not take into account mitigating factors such as built form and the existing prevailing landscape resource, which in some locations will prevent views towards developments. The capacity to absorb cumulative elements is primarily due to the prevailing topography and landscape structure. These elements visually reduces any perceived cumulative impact that may occur between not only the proposed development at Backies Farm with other intrusive features in the landscape, but also the two larger scale turbines constructed at Netherton of Windyhills and the single granted large scale turbine at Myreton Crossroads, as well as developments that are pending a decision. Within the landscape context, although there are a number of sites, some of which have either been constructed or approved for construction, due to the localised rise and fall in elevation and screening factor provided by the prevalent landscape resource, it is deemed that cumulatively the area can absorb not only the constructed and granted sites aforementioned but also the proposed small scale turbines proposed at Backies Farm.

6.0 Conclusions

- 6.1 In general the characteristics of the site and its immediate setting offer a positive opportunity to provide renewable energy within the 'Upland Farmland' character area. Although the proposal will result in a change in the landscape character and experiential experience of the

site and the surrounding context, in particular to the north west and south west where it is deemed that the magnitude of impact from the development will be higher. Views in general from these directions are able to afford views of varying degrees. It is considered that the impacts on the landscape character will be minimised and mitigated in a positive manner and, the limited loss of rough grazing land, and possible small tracts of low hedgerow and possible individual trees will have a negligible impact on the wider landscape resource. Any lost landscape resource through the construction of the proposed development will be reinstated, other than at the entrance, which will be compensated elsewhere on the field landholding in which the site is located.

- 6.2 In general the proposed renewable energy development at Backies Farm as deemed by the ZTV, is limited to a width of approximately 1 km which runs in a south west to north easterly direction. The ZTV slightly widens to the north west within 2.5 km radius. Directly east and west large woodland blocks enclose the larger scale landscape context and curtail further extension of the ZTV. Although the ZTV extends more so in the north east, there is also the existing presence of large established shelterbelts coupled with mature woodland blocks which in reality greatly reduce the perceived ZTV. Through viewpoint analysis, it is shown that the views are severely restricted due to prevailing vegetation structure and landform. Potentially to the south west clear views are predicted to extend to 2.5 km from the site, within a narrow band which includes a number of primary receptors – those travelling along the B9018 and those residing in properties to the south west. In general views that are afforded are due to landform and there is little in the way of vegetation structure within the field boundary delineation or roadside that provides a degree of mitigation or over time potential screening. However the large coniferous block of Aultmorehill Wood provides effective screening and it is this that reduces the band width to the south west. Some properties however do have a small degree of tree cover associated with their own private grounds and landholding surrounding them which may provide a small degree of mitigation from the ground levels, although it is recognised from upper floors views may still be afforded. In a broad sense the local landscape character is expected to be affected by the project to a low - medium sensitivity extent and a medium - high overall magnitude, it is considered the significance of the effect overall on the character of the landscape is **low**, increasing to **medium** for those residing within 2 km in the north west and south west. It is also recognised that the primary transitory B9018 route, while a lesser classification is the only local route between Cullen and Keith and along part of its stretch will also have a perceived medium significance of overall effect from the proposed development.
- 6.3 The surrounding context to the site while accommodating a larger number of unclassified roads and tracks, only has one classified road within the ZTV. The B9018, which is in close proximity to the site, while a lesser classification, is an important local route connecting the settlements of Cullen and Keith. It is recognised that stretches of this road will not only be able to view the proposed development at Backies Farm, but also the constructed cumulative sites at Netheron of Windyhills and Myreton Crossroads, although it should also be acknowledged that these views are from limited locations. It is acknowledged that transitory receptors on the B9018 will have a medium – high degree of impact within 0.5 km north east and south west of the site. It is also acknowledged that from the unclassified roads and tracks to the north west and south west in particular, there will be views towards the proposed turbines. Overall, taking into consideration, the small stretch of the B9018 and the small number of unclassified roads that, which will have a perceived higher magnitude of impact, the impact from the transitory network within the study area is deemed as being low to negligible.

- 6.5 There are a number of residential properties and farmsteads that will afford views towards the development, although the larger settlements within the study area, are deemed will have a negligible overall significance of effect from the proposed turbines. The individual properties deemed as having a high overall significance of perceived impact, primarily due to the proximity to the proposed development site and prevailing topography may benefit from mature trees to their setting which may mitigate views to an extent. Clearer views towards the development are available from the north west and south west, with little in the way of mitigating vegetation structure in this landscape context, so it is recognised and acknowledged that those residing in this area in relation to the site will have a high magnitude of impact. In assessing the overall significance of impact, in a local context and within 2 km of the site it would be deemed that from the west, north west and south west the impact would be *medium - high* and from all other directions the impact is deemed as *low - negligible*. As such, careful consideration will be given to the scale, siting and form of the proposed elements within the development, for example, the footprint size, turbine design, colour and access. This coupled with further mitigation measures, such as the reinstatement of low native species based understorey coupled with broom and gorse and individual trees and applying a suitable grass mix to the base of the turbines after construction, will be used to ensure local impacts minimised.
- 6.6 There are a number of cultural historical features within the study of the site which are detailed in table 2.3 and a summary of the perceived significance of effect from the development listed in table 4.4. Within 1 km radius of the site, the recorded sites while recognised are of lesser importance than the higher rated features such as listed buildings (A and B class) or scheduled ancient monuments. With around 40 cultural historic features listed, most are assessed as having a negligible significance of effect from the proposed development and will accord with the MLP policies BE1, BE2 and BE4. Where it is assessed that for a limited number of features the overall significance is medium and may be seen as contravening council policy then Local Plan policies on Rural Business Proposals (Policy ED8) and ER1 Renewable Energy Proposals, it is argued that overall the benefit of the renewable energy proposal outweighs the low perceived impact.
- 6.7 There are a small number of locally designated SINS sites within the 5 km radius of the site, one of which is on the edge of the 5 km radius and it is perceived will have no detrimental impact. The other SINS is admittedly just north west of the proposed development site, but there is a mature established wide shelterbelt between the two, which it is argued will provide substantial mitigation. It is also will be proactively ensured that if the council feels further mitigation measures should be provided, then this will be contributed as part of the mitigation strategy.
- 6.8 Cumulatively the site will be seen with other turbine developments in the character area, from different viewpoint locations, but the extent that other cumulative sites are seen with the proposed development at Backies Farm vary. It is concluded that while from limited locations within the north west and where views are afforded, there is a conflict between the scales of the existing and proposed elements including the electricity pylon line that runs close to the site. This is primarily due to the lack of vegetation and the more 'open feel' to the landscape context coupled with the contrasting colour between the proposed turbines at Backies Farm and the earthy tones of the rising agricultural land which is its backdrop. However within a relatively short distance, in other locational spots in the north west the view alters in that only the cumulative rotors can be seen against the open sky of the two constructed developments and only the rotors of the proposed development at Backies Farm can be seen above the top

of the coniferous woodland block. The view afforded of a small part of the structure concludes that it is deemed to negligibly add to the cumulative effect. From the north only the proposed development at Backies is viewed.

- 6.9 Views and the resulting cumulative effect are mitigated are thereby reduced by a large degree from the existing shelterbelt pattern across the landscape context for possible views from the north east towards the site. Many of the views are of a longer distance, which shows the proposed turbines with other cumulative sites, where it may be perceived that the different scales of the turbines and the different rotation speeds all combine to a negative cumulative effect. However, many of the views also have a degree of mitigation, whereby not all of the constructed, granted and proposed developments are seen in their entirety together.
- 6.10 From the above assessments of visual effects it has been found that the Backies Farm small scale wind turbine proposal may have a medium - high visual impact on a few nearby views, especially to the north west and south west, within a 2 km radius. There are a number of residential, i.e. primary receptors that would experience these views, as well as transitory receptors using the B9018 and unclassified roads and tracks which access the individual properties which are in close proximity. The renewable energy development, each turbine up to a maximum height of 35 metres, sits within upland farmland with a hierarchy of landscape resource, primarily in the form of shelterbelts and coniferous plantation and the occasional small tree groups associated with built form. From further away viewpoints, the visual impact of the project is significantly reduced due to the distance to the project and the interplay between the existing topography and landscape structure, but only to the east, north east and south east. The visibility of the development from the north west and south west in particular is more acute. On balance, then, the visual impact on the study area is considered to be of medium significance in the local 2 km radius context (dependant on location) and negligible in the wider context, where primarily the undulating agricultural land and woodland found along the localised ridgelines provide a degree of mitigation and 'setting' for which the development can be placed.

References

The methodology for the landscape and visual impact assessment (LVIA) and the Cumulative Landscape and Visual Assessment (CLVIA) has been undertaken in accordance with the methodology set out below and conforms with The Guidelines for Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment, Second Edition (Landscape Institute and IEMA, 2002).

The methodology comprised an initial desktop study of Ordnance Survey (OS) maps, Scottish Natural Heritage and planning documents followed by a site survey in **November 2012**. The assessment and evaluation of the landscaping and visual features has been concluded alongside the prevailing planning policy guidance and policies in respect of these issues. Information on landscape planning policy and the existing historical landscape elements has been collated by reference to the following:

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Cumulative Landscape and Visual Impact Assessment

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January 2013

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